



Early Years Leaders Programme

Evaluation of the Early Years Leaders
Programme (January 2019 - December 2020)
for the Greater London Authority

Lisa O'Donnell
March 2021

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
1. INTRODUCTION	4
1.1 BACKGROUND	4
1.2 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH.....	6
1.3 METHODOLOGY	6
1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT.....	8
2. SELECTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF COACHES AND THE RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS	9
2.1 RECRUITMENT OF COACHES.....	9
2.2 RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS	12
2.3 PROGRAMME ATTRITION	16
2.4 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	18
3. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAMME DESIGN AND DELIVERY	20
3.1 MATCHING COACHES AND PARTICIPANTS	20
3.2 ELEMENTS OF THE PROGRAMME.....	21
3.3 EXIT STRATEGY	30
3.4 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	30
4. IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC	32
4.1 IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE PROGRAMME.....	32
4.2 IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME DURING THE PANDEMIC.....	35
4.3 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	35
5. OUTCOMES OF THE PROGRAMME FOR PARTICIPANTS, COACHES AND EARLY YEARS SETTINGS	37
5.1 OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS	38
5.2 OUTCOMES FOR EARLY YEARS SETTINGS	42
5.3 OUTCOMES FOR COACHES	45
5.4 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	47
6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	49
APPENDIX A THEORY OF CHANGE	53
APPENDIX B TIMELINE OF THE EARLY YEARS LEADERS PROGRAMME	55
APPENDIX C COACH AND PARTICIPANT APPLICATION FORMS	56
APPENDIX D CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS	67
APPENDIX E RESPONSES TO END-OF-PROGRAMME SURVEY	70

Acknowledgements

The independent researcher, Lisa O'Donnell, would like to thank the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) for commissioning this evaluation on behalf of the Greater London Authority (GLA). Special thanks go to the programme team at NDNA for their ongoing insight into the programme's delivery and the provision of monitoring data, and to the team at the GLA for their guidance on the evaluation. Most of all, the author would like to thank the participants and coaches involved for their time and interest in providing invaluable feedback on the programme.

Lisa O'Donnell (lisa@lodonnell.co.uk) is a freelance researcher and project manager with experience in managing research and evaluation projects across all sectors of education for a range of clients, including Department for Education, Welsh Government, the Education Endowment Foundation, the Social Care Institute of Excellence, and the Local Government Association.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Early childhood is widely recognised as the most crucial period of human development. The childcare and early years education that children receive during this critical stage play a vital role in their lifelong development and life outcomes, especially for the less advantaged or those with additional needs. Therefore, the quality of early years education is of paramount importance, and developing a high-quality workforce is central to this. There is considerable evidence that skilled, well-trained and better qualified early years practitioners, particularly leaders, improve the quality of early years education and make a difference to children’s learning and development. The recent Early Years Workforce Review (2020)¹, for example, stated that *‘workforce quality is key to addressing gaps both in terms of attainment and emotional wellbeing as early as possible, and in improving a child’s long-term life chances and social mobility.’* Furthermore, Ofsted (2013)² have highlighted the importance of strong leadership in underpinning excellent early education and care, reporting that *‘this is what counts most and makes the greatest difference’*.

In London, early years provision plays a vital role in closing the inequality gap in children’s attainment and enabling parents to pursue training and employment opportunities. Consequently, the availability and affordability of childcare and early years provision is a crucial factor in determining whether parents are in paid employment. However, research (for example, NDNA Workforce Survey 2018/19³) shows that the early years sector nationally faces substantial ongoing challenges with recruitment, retention, and workforce turnover, and there are limited development opportunities for leaders and aspiring leaders. All of these factors are putting the availability and quality of early years provision at significant risk.

In response to these challenges, the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, in his 2016 manifesto, pledged to *‘make childcare more affordable and accessible with a strategy that delivers for business and workers’*. His Early Years in London baseline and consultation document in March 2018⁴ (updated in March 2019 as the newly published Early Years in London report⁵) set out the activities which the Mayor was planning, or already undertaking, to support the early years sector. The Greater London Authority

¹ Pascal, C., Bertram, T. & Cole-Alback, A. (2020). *Early Years Workforce Review*. London: Sutton Trust.

² Ofsted (2013). *Getting it right first time*. Available at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/418840/Getting_it_right_first_time.pdf

³ NDNA (2019). Workforce Survey England 2018/19. Available at:

https://www.ndna.org.uk/NDNA/News/Reports_and_surveys/Workforce_survey/nursery_workforce_survey_2019.aspx

⁴ Greater London Authority (2018). *Early Years in London – Baseline and consultation*. Available at:

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/early_years_in_london_mar18_0.pdf

⁵ Greater London Authority (2019). *Early Years in London*. Available at:

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/early_years_in_london_2019_a4_fa_digital.pdf

(GLA) is working with partners across London to help deliver the Mayor's ambitions and developing a range of initiatives to achieve their objectives.

The Early Years Leaders Programme

One such initiative was the Early Years Leaders Programme - an innovative development programme that aimed to support the development of early years leaders across Greater London. For this programme, early years leaders were defined as existing early years practitioners, qualified to at least Level 3, who were either currently in, or aspiring to a leadership position. The key objectives of the Early Years Leaders Programme, as outlined in the programme's Theory of Change (see Appendix A), were to:

- Improve the management, leadership and business skills of early years practitioners
- Improve the quality of early years provision for children, particularly the most disadvantaged 2-year-olds
- Better equip early years practitioners to progress in their careers
- Improve joint working between schools, Private Voluntary Independent (PVI) nurseries, childminders, local authorities and sector experts.

By developing leaders, and upskilling staff, the programme sought to contribute to the Mayor of London's ambitions of improving the quality and accessibility of early years provision across London, and ultimately improve outcomes for children and ensure that childcare is not a barrier to work for parents.

Based on a coaching model, the Early Years Leaders Programme aimed to recruit 30 coaches from the early years sector to work with 90 early years practitioners (referred to as 'participants'). The programme comprised five main elements:

- One-to-one coaching sessions with an early years coach (x2 per term)
- Triad meetings with a small group of participants (x1 per term)
- Network meetings for all participants and coaches (x1 per term)
- Reflection and planning sessions for coaches (x1 per term)
- Access to resources via an NDNA online learning platform (known as the Early Years Development Zone).

Delivered by the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), the GLA's total funding grant for the Early Years Leaders Programme was £250,000. Following contract initiation in January 2019 and a recruitment phase between March and May, the coaching sessions were delivered between June 2019 and December 2020. A full timeline for the delivery of the Early Years Leaders Programme is presented in Appendix B.

It is important to note that the implementation of the Early Years Leaders Programme was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent closure of

early years settings across England in March 2020. This affected the practitioners' ability to work as normal and their engagement in the programme and meant that the way the programme was delivered needed to be adapted. In order to continue to support early years settings and the participants on the programme, all face-to-face contact was moved to remote delivery. In addition to the programme's main elements, NDNA delivered a series of business recovery webinars over summer 2020 to support settings with the pandemic. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the programme is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

1.2 Aims of the research

This report provides an independent evaluation of the effectiveness of the Early Years Leaders Programme and its impact on improving the leadership and management skills of participating early years practitioners in London. It follows on from an interim report of emerging findings from the programme up to March 2020.

In order to determine the quality of the Early Years Leaders Programme and the success of the programme in meeting its aims and objectives, the evaluation sought to answer the following research questions:

- How well has the programme identified eligible early years leaders with the potential and aspirations for development?
- How effective is the programme delivery?
- What is the impact of the programme on participants?
- What is the impact of the programme on the participating early years settings?

1.3 Methodology

This independent evaluation was commissioned by NDNA, the organisation contracted by the GLA to deliver the programme. All aspects of the evaluation design, data collection, analysis and reporting were undertaken by Lisa O'Donnell, a freelance educational researcher contracted by NDNA for this evaluation. The mixed-methods research approach comprised the following three main strands, which are detailed further below:

- Analysis of monitoring data collected by NDNA
- Telephone interviews with a random sample of participants and coaches
- A survey of participants and coaches

The evaluation was also supplemented with face-to-face and telephone discussions with the NDNA programme manager at key points during the programme's implementation.

Analysis of monitoring data

NDNA collected a range of progress and outcome monitoring data as part of the delivery of the programme. As well as providing valuable formative evidence for NDNA about the ongoing progress of programme participants, secondary analysis of this data formed a central part of the independent summative evaluation. The data sources included:

- Application forms submitted by participants and coaches
- Individual learning plans and action plans for each participant
- Triad action plans
- Coach summary notes from each one-to-one session (known as 'Notes of Visit')
- Participant and coach retention data and reasons for drop-out from the programme
- Log of the meetings completed by participants and attendance at network sessions
- Feedback forms from participant network meetings, coach training and planning and reflection sessions, and business recovery webinars.

In order to gather independent evidence on the quality and success of the programme and to gain a deeper insight into the experiences of the practitioners involved, two additional strands of primary research were undertaken:

Telephone interviews with participants and coaches

Semi-structured telephone interviews were carried out with a random sample of 15 practitioners who were still engaged in the programme in autumn 2020 – ten participants and five coaches. The participants interviewed were spread across nine of the London boroughs⁶ and came from a variety of early years settings, including nurseries, playgroups and home-based settings. They also included leaders of differing levels, from early years practitioners and room leaders to managers.

Carried out in October/November 2020, towards the end of the programme, the purpose of these interviews was to explore practitioners' views on the quality and effectiveness of the Early Years Leaders Programme and the extent to which it had impacted their skills and practice, and on the quality of early years provision in their setting. The interviews also asked practitioners to comment on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their participation in the programme.

Survey of participants and coaches

An end-of-programme questionnaire survey of participants and coaches was carried out in November 2020 to provide quantitative data on practitioners' views and experiences. A link to an online survey was sent to the 55 participants and 19 coaches

⁶ The 15 participants interviewed came from settings in Barnet, City of Westminster, Harrow, Hounslow, Kensington and Chelsea, Lambeth, Lewisham, Richmond-upon-Thames and Southwark.

who remained on the programme at this point. A total of 41 practitioners completed the survey – 28 participants and 11 coaches. An additional two respondents did not indicate their role in the programme and only responded to the survey's first three background questions. Their responses were excluded from the dataset.

A full set of responses from the survey is presented in Appendix E. It is important to note the small sample size in this survey, which may limit the generalisability of the survey findings. However, this report's overall findings and recommendations are based on triangulation and synthesis of data from multiple sources, including both primary and secondary data.

1.4 Structure of the report

Chapter 2 explores the promotion of the Early Years Leaders Programme and the recruitment process adopted for participants and coaches. It outlines the characteristics of participating settings, practitioners and coaches, and their reasons for joining the programme, and provides detail on the support and development of coaches. Finally, this chapter explores the reasons for participants' and coaches' withdrawal from the programme.

Chapter 3 examines the effectiveness of each element of the programme, and explores participants' and coaches' views of the delivery model and how it could be improved.

Chapter 4 discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of the programme and the settings and practitioners involved.

Chapter 5 explores the outcomes of the Early Years Leaders Programme – for participants and their settings and coaches.

Chapter 6 concludes the report by summarising the evidence from this research and considering the implications for the future development of leaders within the early years sector.

2. Selection and development of coaches and the recruitment of participants

The Early Years Leaders Programme's main objective was to identify early years leaders with the potential and aspirations for development and support them in improving their management and leadership skills. The programme's target was to recruit 90 early years leaders ('participants'), who would be supported by 30 experienced professionals within the early years sector ('coaches').

This chapter explores the recruitment processes for coaches and participants and the characteristics of those who joined the programme. It also examines attrition from the programme and the reasons for participants' and coaches' withdrawal.

2.1 Recruitment of coaches

Given the coaching model adopted, the team of coaches recruited to support the participants was central to the quality and effectiveness of the Early Years Leaders Programme. **A strong emphasis was placed on selecting coaches with the relevant skills, experience and sector knowledge** to be able to provide high-quality support, and they were required to be credible leaders within the early years sector. Coaches were offered a modest stipend (to cover costs in their settings if the coaching sessions were completed during work hours) and a travel allowance for their involvement in the programme.

Coach recruitment began in March 2019. The opportunity was promoted through communication with early years practitioners on the NDNA database, information on the GLA and NDNA websites, and local authorities. The selection criteria for coaches were that they needed to hold a minimum of a Level 3 early years' qualification and to have at least three years' experience as a practising senior-level practitioner, owner or manager in an early years or preschool setting/business. Other criteria assessed for the role included prior experience of coaching or mentoring colleagues, evidence of professional collaboration, and strong communication skills. A copy of the application form for coaches is included in Appendix C.

Between March and May 2019, a total of 63 applications were received for the role of coach, and a comprehensive selection process was employed. Following a review of the application forms, telephone interviews were conducted by the NDNA programme manager with 46 shortlisted applicants to assess their suitability for the coaching role. Thirty coaches were selected, with an additional two candidates in reserve, and they covered 17 of the 32 London boroughs, mainly in inner London and south London. Following the withdrawal of a small number of coaches during the recruitment phase of the programme, an additional two coaches were recruited. A total of 31 coaches were allocated participants.

The coaches selected had the **relevant skills and experience of leadership and management** at different levels within the early years sector to complement the coaching role. While many had experience of training and supporting staff, very few coaches had any formal experience of coaching or of being coached themselves or accreditation in coaching or mentoring. However, they seemed to be dedicated professionals who were not only seeking to develop their own skills, but were also committed to supporting their peers. It was clearly evident from analysis of coaches' application forms and the questionnaire survey and telephone interviews that coaches recognised the **pressing need for support for leaders within the early years sector**. They commented on the paucity of existing development opportunities, particularly for new leaders, and they were keen to share their knowledge and experience, and '*give back*' to their sector. Coaches also wanted to be involved in what they viewed as an '*innovative new programme*' that raised awareness of their sector, particularly one that was endorsed by the Mayor of London.

While efforts were made by the NDNA programme team to ensure that the recruitment of coaches was as rigorous as possible, the short timescale for the internal set-up for delivery of the programme and the recruitment and training of coaches (approximately five months) made this challenging. An **extended recruitment phase and a more comprehensive selection process would have been beneficial**. Face-to-face interviews, for example, ideally with a panel of interviewers, would have been a fairer and more effective approach for assessing applicants' suitability to the coaching role. This process could have been accompanied by observations of coaches in action, to ensure a consistently high standard of coaching across the team, and may have led to a smoother implementation of the programme in the initial stages.

Coaches made some suggestions for potential improvements to the marketing and recruitment process for the Early Years Leaders Programme. Comments were made during the telephone interviews with a sample of coaches that they were not fully aware of the time commitment involved in the programme when they applied, or the exact nature of their role, and acknowledged that the programme was a more significant commitment than they initially expected. One of the coaches interviewed, for example, reported that '*it was very challenging at the beginning I didn't know what coaching was*', highlighting the importance of mandatory training for coaches. Some also reported that the recruitment process felt too rushed, and they would have appreciated more time to reflect on the expectations of the role and whether they had the capacity and skills to make the substantial commitment required for the programme.

2.1.2 Development of Coaches

The coaches' skills and expertise are key to the quality and success of any coaching programme and, rightly so, NDNA placed **significant importance on coach training and development**. Coaches needed intensive initial training to prepare them for their

role and ongoing development, nurturing, and quality assurance to ensure effective delivery of the coaching process and recording of participants' progress.

The training commenced with a **mandatory two-day coach induction workshop** in May 2019, which aimed to give coaches a thorough understanding of the programme and their roles and responsibilities. Drawing on the expertise of both a trained coach and an early years specialist, the training, which NDNA delivered, attempted to establish a common definition of coaching within the context of the Early Years Leaders Programme. It did not advocate a particular coaching model but rather highlighted the key principles and practices of coaching and explored effective ways of building coaching relationships and structuring the one-to-one coaching sessions.

Coaches were informed that their purpose was *'to engage and embrace coaching as a methodology for creating effective conversations, for assessing and reformulating values, identifying and clarifying goals and reaching solution.'* The training recognised that, given coaches' knowledge and experience in the early years sector, they might well have advice and information to share that would be useful to their participants. However, coaches were encouraged to be *'a guide and resource provider'*, rather than an expert, and to nurture their participants' ability to learn and solve problems themselves.

Feedback from the initial coach induction training was overwhelmingly positive, and coaches felt more knowledgeable and confident to carry out their role as a result of the sessions. One coach, for example, described the training as *'invaluable'* and *'vital in giving me the confidence to know I could do the role'*, while another felt *'there has been an element of learning together...I feel more confident after day 2 and happy that we have a strong network of support around us'*. Coaches acknowledged, however, that the training only gave them a short and basic introduction to coaching and that they required further ongoing support to effectively carry out the role in practice. Some also indicated that they would have liked more time between the training and the start of the programme to enable them to digest the information.

In order to meet coaches' ongoing support needs, the **initial training was supplemented by termly reflection and planning sessions** for all coaches to attend. Bringing the coaches together for these sessions was particularly effective and well-received and added to coaches' motivation and development. The sessions were responsive to the needs of the coaches, and coaches reported that they had learnt a range of approaches and tools that they planned to incorporate into their coaching sessions as well as in their own provision.

Ongoing performance management of the coaches and quality assurance of the coaching process and outputs was rigorous throughout the programme. During the initial stages, the NDNA programme manager worked on a one-to-one basis with each coach, monitoring the coaching process, ensuring that it was effective, and that

progress and outcomes were accurately monitored and recorded. Regular informal discussions with the programme manager were also available where needed, which were much appreciated by coaches.

Overall, **feedback from coaches with regard to the support and training they had received throughout the programme was overwhelmingly positive**, and they praised the high-quality support and leadership that the NDNA programme team had provided. In some cases, they attributed this support to keeping them engaged in the programme despite the workload involved and the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the 11 coaches who responded to the end-of-programme survey, all but one stated that they felt well-supported and did not need any further support with their role (the remaining one coach was unsure).

2.2 Recruitment of participants

Promotion of the Early Years Leaders Programme to potential participants began in May 2019, in parallel with the training of coaches, and information was disseminated through the GLA and NDNA websites, press releases, local authorities, and email bulletins to practitioners on the NDNA database. The programme was aimed at existing early years leaders across Greater London who were seeking to develop and improve their leadership skills. It was clearly promoted as free for practitioners and settings to join, and was open to early years practitioners within the sector, as long as they met the following eligibility criteria:

- To be an employee of a London-based, Ofsted-registered childcare provider
- To have a sector-relevant level 3 qualification
- To be in a leadership position.

The GLA also set the target that at least 50 per cent of participants should be recruited from providers offering places to two-year-olds eligible for free early education and childcare, to best support disadvantaged families.

Potential participants were required to submit an application form which detailed how they met the eligibility criteria, including their current job role and setting, and qualification level. They were also required to complete a baseline assessment of their leadership skills and abilities, and to comment on what management and leadership skills they felt they needed to develop, and what they hoped to get out of the Early Years Leaders Programme. The participant application form also included an employer support agreement, which required a senior manager from the participants' setting to give permission for their employee's participation in the programme. The form required the senior manager's agreement that they would support the participants' involvement in the programme, for example, through allowing them time out of setting to attend network meetings. A copy of the participant application form is included in Appendix C.

Recruitment of participants to the programme proved to be more difficult than expected, and the initial deadline for application submission (June 2019) had to be extended by two months to allow time for additional marketing. Overall, NDNA received 110 applications for the participant role, and those who met the eligibility criteria were accepted onto the programme. Ten applicants did not meet the criteria and were not accepted – they were either not in a leadership position or were not qualified to at least Level 3; they were in settings outside of London, or there were multiple applications from the same setting⁷. A further ten applicants dropped out during the recruitment phase (May-June). The target of 90 participants was reached by summer 2019, although some further ‘top-up’ recruitment was needed in the autumn term due to participant withdrawal (see Section 2.3 for further details on programme attrition).

The challenges with recruitment, and feedback from participants and coaches regarding their initial expectations of the programme, suggest that there was **scope for improving the content and quality of the marketing and promotional information**. It was evident that not all of the practitioners involved had a full and accurate understanding of the programme when they applied, and there were a few instances of successful recruits having misconceptions about the programme, and what it entailed. During the telephone interviews, for example, participants commented that the marketing information ‘*was a bit vague*’, and that they only knew that the programme was ‘*something to do with leadership*’. Some were unsure, for instance, on the length of the programme, while others thought that it was a training course and that they would achieve a qualification at the end. They would have welcomed more detailed information about the programme and more time to reflect and make an informed decision about applying. Whilst some participants felt that the programme was not what they had initially expected at the outset, they commented that, in reality, the programme had exceeded their expectations, as the following comments illustrate:

‘It turned into what I wanted it to be...it fulfilled what I wanted to learn.’

‘It was very unique and individual and completely tailored to me...it was even better [than I expected], it was what I needed.’

2.2.1 Characteristics of participants

Across the three recruitment rounds, **a total of 92 participants were recruited** to the Early Years Leaders Programme between spring and autumn 2019. This section explores the characteristics of these 92 participants, and their reasons for joining the programme, although it is worth noting that a proportion of these practitioners

⁷ Initially, the programme did not accept multiple practitioners from the same setting; however, this was later revised in an effort to maintain the target number of participants.

subsequently withdrew from the programme (as discussed further in Section 2.3). Tables summarising the characteristics of the 92 participants are included in Appendix D.

The range of marketing strategies adopted by NDNA to promote the programme were successful in reaching a **diverse range of applicants with leadership potential** to the programme. There was a good geographical spread of participants across most of London (representing 26 of the 32 London boroughs), although the response across the boroughs was uneven. While there were no or very few participants in some boroughs, in others (for example, Redbridge, Barnet, Hounslow) there seems to have been greater success in reaching potential applicants (see Table D1 in Appendix D). The reasons for this were unclear, although it may be that information about the programme was spread more effectively via word-of-mouth or through communication from local authorities in these areas. Whilst some effort was made to contact each of the London boroughs to discuss which early years settings would benefit the most from joining the programme, this did not prove to be particularly fruitful.

The participants came from a **diverse range of early years settings**, in terms of type, size and ownership. While the majority (83 per cent) of participants were based in a PVI group setting, seven per cent were in a maintained group setting and 11 per cent worked in a home-based setting⁸.

Almost all of the participating settings were located in areas of deprivation (based on the English Indices of Deprivation 2019⁹), and eighty seven per cent offered the free early education entitlement of 15 hours for disadvantaged two-year olds. This exceeded the target for the programme of 50 per cent of settings to be offering funded two-year-old places. As would be expected given this, most of the participating settings were rated as 'good' (72 per cent) or 'outstanding' (18 per cent) by Ofsted. Only one setting was rated as 'requires improvement', while the remaining eight settings were awaiting inspection.

The participants who joined the programme had a **broad range of experience and qualifications in the early years sector**. On the whole, they held management or leadership positions within their setting, but at varying levels of responsibility. For example, five per cent of participants were the owner or director of their setting, and half were managers (29 per cent) or deputy managers (21 per cent). A fifth of participants were room leaders or team leaders, while 13 per cent described themselves as practitioners, and their level of management responsibility and potential was unknown. A total of 11 per cent of participants were childminders.

⁸ Due to rounding, percentages do not sum to 100.

⁹ Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019>

2.2.2 Participants' reasons for joining the programme

Participants' reasons for applying to join the programme demonstrated a **real need for support and professional development for leaders** within the early years sector. Analysis of their application forms show that they often had high expectations of what they wanted to achieve through the programme, including increased confidence as a leader, development of their leadership and team-building skills, development of their problem solving and communication skills, and their ability to deal with, and resolve difficult situations.

Analysis of the end-of-programme questionnaire survey and telephone interviews also illustrated that participants were seeking a programme that would help to increase their confidence (particularly for those who were new to a management role), and improve the quality of provision in their setting. Some indicated that they wanted to learn more about the practical business aspects of running an early years setting, as the following participant explained:

'I was opening a brand-new preschool and wanted support in running this type of setting. I particularly wanted support in recruitment, advertising, quality of provision, staff development and other aspects of launching a new early years business.'

Other participants focused on the personal and professional skills that they wanted to develop for themselves, and the opportunity that the programme would give them to network with other practitioners and share knowledge and ideas:

'The project happened to appear at the beginning of my role as the manager. My setting was also approaching the time of implementing lots of changes. When I read the information about this project I really liked the sound of it. I was hoping to get support, advice and build network with people who have been going through similar process.'

This networking opportunity was of particular importance to childminders who felt somewhat isolated in their role, and welcomed the opportunity to connect and share good practice with other early years professionals.

Overall, the findings indicate that the Early Years Leaders Programme **met its objective of identifying eligible early years leaders with the potential and aspirations for development**. However, the diversity of leaders within the participant cohort, particularly in terms of their roles and responsibilities, did create some challenges in the delivery of the programme. The extent to which participants were able to engage in each of the elements of the programme and enact changes within their settings, depended to a large degree on their role within the setting, and the level of responsibility and autonomy they had (as discussed in Chapter 3).

It is evident that **the programme would have benefited from a longer lead-in and recruitment phase**. Following the contract initiation in January 2019, there was a short timescale for NDNA’s internal set-up for the delivery of the programme, and for the recruitment and training of coaches (March to May) and participants (May to June). An extended set-up and recruitment phase of at least 6-8 months would have enabled more comprehensive promotion and marketing of the programme and more careful consideration and selection of the coaches and participants. It would also have allowed more time for applicants and their employers to reflect on the requirements of the programme, and to ensure that they fully understood the commitment involved.

2.3 Programme attrition

Although the Early Years Leaders Programme was successful at the outset in achieving its target number of participants and coaches, maintaining this target number proved to be a challenge, and the numbers fluctuated throughout the programme.

Over the course of the 18-month coaching period, **37 of the 92 participants (40 per cent) withdrew from the programme**. As shown in Table 1, around half (19) of these dropped out prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the national lockdown (late March 2020), while the remaining 18 participants withdrew between April and December 2020. A total of 12 of the 31 coaches who were allocated participants (39 per cent) also withdrew their involvement in the programme – eight before the pandemic, and four after.

Table 1. Timing of participants’ and coaches’ withdrawal from programme

Timing of withdrawal	Number of participants	Number of coaches
Summer 2019	2	0
Autumn 2019	6	3
Spring 2020 (up to March 2020 lockdown)	11	5
Summer 2020	5	2
Autumn 2020	13	2
N=	37	12

Source: NDNA monitoring data, Early Years Leaders Programme

On the whole, **the reasons for withdrawal from the Early Years Programme were unrelated to the design or quality of the programme**, but were instead due to external factors affecting the participation of participants and coaches. As Table 2 illustrates, 11 of the 37 participants who left the programme did so as a result of changes in their personal or work circumstances, such as a change of setting, or relocation out of London, or because they decided to leave the early years sector for an alternative career. It is worth noting that these employment changes are not unique to the participants on the programme, but are instead reflective of the high turnover of

staff within the early years sector as a whole, as the latest NDNA workforce survey (2018/19) revealed.

A further 13 participants withdrew from the Early Years Leaders Programme because they found it difficult to commit the time required. Seven of these left the programme after the national lockdown in March 2020, perhaps prompted by the substantial challenges that the pandemic brought about for the early years workforce. Only one participant withdrew because the programme did not meet their expectations, and another withdrew at the outset because she wanted to be allocated a particular coach who she was familiar with. It was not possible for the coach to manage this due to existing commitments and, although the participant was offered an alternative coach, they decided to withdraw from the programme instead.

Table 2. Reasons for participants withdrawal from programme

Reason for withdrawal	Number of participants June 2019-March 2020	Number of participants April 2020 - December 2020
Too busy/unable to commit time	6	7
Left setting/moved out of London	5	2
Left early years sector	1	3
Participant stopped engaging in programme/responding to contact from coach or NDNA	1	5
New role/responsibilities	2	0
Setting closed	0	1
Personal reasons	1	0
Not what expected	1	0
Participant considered too senior to benefit from the programme	1	0
Participant requested an alternative coach	1	0
N=	19	18

Source: NDNA monitoring data, Early Years Leaders Programme

There **did not seem to be any pattern to withdrawal or common characteristics among the participants who dropped out of the programme** in terms of the type of setting they worked in, their job role, or level of experience, and they were spread across 16 of the 33 London boroughs.

The reasons for coaches leaving the programme were similar to those attributed to participants, and again were largely unrelated to the design of the programme. As shown in Table 3, six of the 12 coaches who left the programme did so because of

personal or health reasons, while three found it too difficult to commit the time required. Two of the coaches had to be withdrawn by the NDNA programme manager for not meeting the requirements of the programme, and one had to leave because their setting received an ‘inadequate’ rating from Ofsted.

Table 3. Reasons for coaches’ withdrawal from programme

Reason for withdrawal	Number of coaches	
	June 2019-March 2020	April 2020 - December 2020
Personal/health reasons	4	2
Too busy/unable to commit time	3	0
Did not meet programme requirements	0	2
Inadequate Ofsted grading	1	0
N=	8	4

Source: NDNA monitoring data, Early Years Leaders Programme

The withdrawal of coaches from the programme was problematic for the delivery of the coaching sessions because participants had to be re-allocated to an alternative coach. As discussed further in Section 3.1, this created additional workload for the remaining coaches, and disrupted the continuity of participants’ experience on the programme.

While some attrition would be expected from any programme of this duration due to unforeseen changes in circumstances, the reasons for withdrawal given by participants and coaches highlight **the need for all stakeholders to have a clear and accurate understanding of the programme requirements** and the time commitment involved. As suggested in Sections 2.1 and 2.2, a longer recruitment phase, which would have allowed more time for detailed conversations with applicants and their employers, might potentially have minimised drop-out from the programme.

2.4 Key findings and recommendations

- The Early Years Leaders Programme achieved its target of recruiting 90 participants with the potential and aspirations for development, as well as 30 coaches to support them.
- A diverse cohort of participants were recruited in terms of their qualifications, experience in the early years sector, and the type of setting they were from. The majority of settings were located in areas of deprivation and were supporting disadvantaged families through the offer of funded places for two-year olds.

- Participants' reasons for applying to the programme demonstrated a clear need for support and professional development for leaders in the early years sector.
- Recruitment of participants proved to be more difficult than expected, and not all participants had a full understanding of the programme when they applied, suggesting that there was scope for improving the content and quality of the marketing and promotional material.
- Greater collaboration with local authorities would have been helpful to identify settings and leaders who would benefit most from programme, including settings working with disadvantaged children.
- A rigorous recruitment process was employed for coaches, and while very few applicants had experience of coaching, those recruited seemed to have the relevant skills, experience and sector knowledge to complement the coaching role. Significant emphasis was placed on the initial training and ongoing development of coaches to ensure quality and consistency, and this was well-received by coaches.
- The programme would have benefitted from a longer set-up and recruitment phase (at least six to eight months), more comprehensive marketing, and greater consideration given to the practitioners recruited to the programme. This would have allowed more time for applicants and their employers to reflect on the requirements of the programme, and to ensure that they fully understood the commitment involved.
- Maintaining the target number of coaches and participants was challenging and numbers fluctuated throughout the programme. Reasons for withdrawal were, on the whole, due to external factors rather than related to the design or quality of the programme.

3. Effectiveness of the programme design and delivery

A key focus for the evaluation of the Early Years Leaders Programme was the effectiveness of the programme delivery – the strengths of the delivery model, and potential areas for development. This chapter examines the effectiveness of each element of the programme, and includes participants' and coaches' views on the implementation of the programme.

3.1 Matching coaches and participants

Following the recruitment of the participants and coaches, a **rigorous matching process was undertaken to match participants with an appropriate coach**, taking account of the London borough where they were based, the type of setting they worked in, and the experience of the coach. Each coach was given an **average allocation of two to three participants** to support. The process of matching participants to coaches was a very laborious task and, although geographical proximity was a key factor in the process, having a limited number of coaches in certain boroughs of London meant that it was not always possible to match participants to a coach geographically close to them, resulting in some coaches needing to travel long distances for the coaching sessions.

As the programme progressed and individuals withdrew from the programme (as discussed in Section 2.3), participants and coaches required re-matching, and the rigorous process undertaken at the start was challenging to maintain. A more pragmatic approach to matching had to be adopted which relied mainly on the flexibility of the coaches to take on new participants, and the cooperation and adaptability of participants to manage the change. This inevitably increased the workload of the remaining coaches and meant that some were supporting up to five participants.

Due to coach withdrawal from the programme, a total of **21 of the 92 participants (23 per cent) experienced a change of coach at least once** over the course of the 18-month programme. Unfortunately, for a small number of participants, this occurred two or three times, as their new coach then subsequently left the programme. Reassuringly, none of the participants who withdrew from the programme cited a change of coach as their reason for leaving, and in fact 13 of those who experienced a change in coach completed the full 18 months of the Early Years Leaders Programme. However, feedback from both participants and coaches suggested that, for some, these changes impacted their engagement in the programme. One of the participants who took part in the telephone interviews, for instance, reported that after experiencing her second change of coach, she had questioned whether to continue with programme due to the disruption it caused; while another who responded to the questionnaire survey noted the additional time required to build a relationship with a new coach. Changes in coach also caused disruption to the triad groups and to the positive and productive relationships that had been established between participants.

A small number of participants were unable to establish a new triad group in the remaining time on the programme.

Nonetheless, in the main, the **changes in coach and triad group were well-managed** by coaches, and there was minimal impact on the participants' engagement in the programme. The remaining coaches demonstrated considerable goodwill and flexibility in supporting additional participants, and were committed to continuing to support the progress that participants had made. Although coaches noted the extra workload that this placed on them, on the whole, they found it '*a positive and refreshing experience*'. The positive feedback was echoed by participants, most of whom were committed to completing the programme and adapted well to their new coach. This was summed up by one participant who stated: '*I think I have learned different things from different coaches, so overall I look at the positive side.*'

3.2 Elements of the programme

As outlined in Section 1.1, in order to provide a comprehensive package of leadership support, the Early Years Leaders Programme comprised five main components for participants and coaches. The aim of these elements was to provide both an opportunity for individual support and development, tailored to the needs of each participant and setting, as well as opportunities for networking, peer support, and the sharing of knowledge, expertise and ideas across London's early years sector.

Table 4 presents the views of the participants who responded to the end-of-programme survey on the four elements of the programme that they were involved in. This shows that the **majority of respondents were positive about the programme**, and found each of the elements either 'very helpful' or 'quite helpful'. The one-to-one coaching sessions were seen to be particularly helpful. Each of the elements of the programme are discussed further in the following sections.

Table 4. Participants' views on elements of the programme

	Very helpful	Quite helpful	Not very helpful	Not at all helpful	Not attended /used	No response
1:1 sessions with your coach	21	5	1	0	0	1
Triad meetings with other participants	14	10	1	0	1	2
Termly network meetings run by NDNA	16	8	1	0	2	1
Resources on the Early Years Development Zone	14	9	1	0	3	1
N= 28						

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

3.2.1 One-to-one coaching sessions

The aim of the one-to-one coaching sessions was to nurture participants' ability to learn and solve problems, to help develop their leadership and management skills, and ultimately improve the quality of provision in their settings. Coaches were expected to assist participants in identifying development goals and targets, based on the needs and priorities in their setting and on their own personal development needs, and support them in meeting these goals.

These sessions were originally face-to-face and took place at an agreed time, either within the participants' setting or, in a minority of cases, in a mutually convenient location. However, all coaching sessions moved to online with the onset of the pandemic. Each coaching session involved a review of participants' progress towards their goals, discussion around any issues faced, and the setting of new goals, where appropriate. Coaches and participants utilised standardised documentation to record their goals and targets and measure participants' progress throughout the programme.

Participants' goals and areas for development covered a wide range of topics including:

- Staff recruitment/retention/development
- Communication with staff and parents
- Ofsted requirements
- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework
- Quality of provision and interactions with children
- Supporting children with special education needs
- Working with outside agencies
- Business expansion
- Learning environments
- Transition
- Financial management
- Time management and delegation.

In designing the Early Years Leaders Programme, the aspiration was for each participant to complete nine one-to-one coaching sessions across 18 months – one initial session in summer 2019, and two sessions per term between September 2019 and December 2020. However, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact that this had on early years settings, a more realistic goal of six to seven sessions was set.

As Table 5 shows, of the 55 participants who completed the programme in December 2020, 13 participants achieved the original target of nine sessions, and one exceeded this, completing ten sessions. More than three quarters (42 of the 55 participants)

managed to complete at least six sessions with their coach, which was a notable achievement given the challenges experienced by the early years sector as a result of the pandemic (see Chapter 4 for further discussion). For some participants, completing the coaching sessions proved challenging and they were unable to achieve the target number. In a few cases, this was because they joined the programme later, while others found it difficult to arrange and attending sessions due to factors within their workplace (see further discussion below). Of the 13 participants who completed less than six coaching sessions, five had experienced a change of coach at some point during the programme, while eight had not, which suggests that this was not a significant factor in determining the number of sessions completed.

Table 5. Number of coaching sessions completed by participants

Number of coaching sessions completed	Number of participants
10	1
9	13
8	8
7	16
6	4
5	8
4	3
3	2
N=	55

Source: NDNA monitoring data, Early Years Leaders Programme

Views on the quality of coaching

On the whole, relationships between participants and their coaches were reportedly very positive, and **coaching sessions were purposeful and productive**. Participants valued the one-to-one coaching model and welcomed the opportunity to reflect on and review their practice, with the support of an experienced early years professional who understood the issues and challenges they were facing. The majority of participants who took part in the telephone interviews and questionnaire survey spoke very highly of their coaches, and the quality of the support they had provided. For example, as shown in Table 4 above, of the 28 participants who responded to the end-of-programme survey, 26 participants (93 per cent) reported that they found the one-to-one coaching sessions either ‘very helpful’ (21 participants) or ‘quite helpful’ (five participants). Participants appreciated having a ‘*fresh pair of eyes*’ on their practice and someone who could act as ‘*a sounding board*’ to discuss their issues, and guide them to consider new ideas and approaches. Other comments about the coaching sessions included:

‘I found them very informative, helpful and useful meetings with my coach. She gave me lots of ideas, brilliant advice and made the meetings very interesting.’

'My coach was very experienced, knowledgeable and very approachable. She was always ready with relevant and helpful and insightful advice relating to any issues discussed.'

'I felt I was always heard and listened to. My goals always fully reflected my needs. I received amazing feedback and support which allowed me to achieve my goals.'

'If I was struggling with anything, I knew I could go to my coach and then we would talk about it during our meetings, and she would give me suggestions, and we would think about it...she was there to guide me to make the right decisions.'

A very small minority of participants, although appreciative of their coaches' support, questioned the effectiveness of their coaching sessions and how much they had gained from them. One, for example, stated that *'it would have been helpful for my coach to be more confident with 'coaching' techniques'*, while another reported, *'my coach has listened to what I have done myself, and then fed back, but nothing else really. I thought there may be some knowledge or experience that might have come from her.'* However, it may be that the expectations of these participants were not fully in line with the aims and objectives of the Early Years Leaders Programme (as discussed in Section 2.2), and expected to be given advice or training, rather than coaching.

Feedback from coaches via the telephone interviews and end-of-programme survey echoed this point, as they indicated that **participants' expectations of the programme were a key factor in determining the effectiveness of the coaching sessions**, particularly at the outset. Coaches reported that some participants joined the programme expecting to receive training, or to be advised on how they or their setting could be improved, rather than the onus being on them to identify areas for development, albeit with support from their coach. While some participants had clear goals of what they wanted to achieve, others needed encouragement to reflect on their potential areas for development, and greater support with completing their planned actions. This reinforces the **need for clear information about the programme to be conveyed to participants prior to application**. A more rigorous recruitment process would also help to ascertain participants' and coaches' expectations and 'readiness' for this type of development programme, and would help to ensure that all parties have a mutual understanding of the programme and what it is aiming to achieve. As one coach emphasised: *'participants need to understand that they are in charge of the process. They've got to think quite carefully about what they want to get out of it, and then they need to communicate that clearly with their coach.'*

Participants' engagement in coaching sessions

Coaches reported **mixed levels of engagement and participation among participants** throughout the Early Years Leaders Programme. While most were committed and engaged, a significant minority were reportedly either not very responsive to contact from the coach or showed little interest in carrying out planned actions. As the programme progressed, coaches found it increasingly difficult and time-consuming to arrange coaching sessions with some of their participants, and a small number of participants cancelled pre-arranged sessions at short notice, causing inconvenience and cost for coaches (for supply cover). These issues were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but even before March 2020, a **range of barriers to participants being able to engage fully in the programme** were evident. These caused challenges for the delivery of the coaching model and may well have hindered participants' progress. In no particular order, these mainly related to:

- **Lack of time** for participants to attend coaching sessions and fully engage in the programme due to pressures in an already busy and demanding workplace.
- **Lack of autonomy** - the ease with which participants could arrange their coaching sessions depended to a large extent on their role in their setting, and the level of autonomy they had over their work. While this seemed to be easier for managers and deputy managers, those in less senior leadership positions often required the agreement of their line manager.
- **Resistance or a lack of support** from setting manager or owner – the programme was not viewed by all settings as a priority in the daily running of their business, and some participants were either not permitted out of setting to attend meetings, or insufficient time was allowed for coaching sessions. Although the programme was free to participants, it did not include backfill for participants being out of the workplace. Subsequently, it became clear this was a real cost to the settings' involvement. It is possible that this acted as more of a barrier than was anticipated at the design and inception stage of the programme, and the pandemic may have exacerbated this issue as staffing became increasingly challenging.
- **Staffing issues** – some participants found it challenging to attend coaching sessions due to staff shortages within their settings, and the requirement to maintain appropriate staff to child ratios. This was a particular issue for childminders due to their childcare commitments, although in many cases, coaches and childminders found creative and flexible solutions for their coaching sessions (for example, conducting them in the evenings, or during children's sleep times).
- **Inability to enact change within their setting** – participants' ability to apply their learning and enact change within their workplace was key to their progress on the programme. However, participants were, to some extent, constrained by their level of responsibility within their settings, and the extent of support from senior staff. A room leader, for example, had less scope to make changes within

their setting than a manager, unless they had the full support of senior managers to help them implement any changes.

It is clear from these barriers that **senior leadership ‘buy-in’ and support for participants on the Early Years Leaders Programme was crucial**. In order to improve provision, individuals’ goals and priorities should have reflected the needs of their setting, and this required close collaboration with the manager or owner; however, coaches reported that this did not always happen, despite their best efforts. Although participating settings were required to sign an agreement for their member of staff to participate in the programme, there was no process to hold participants or settings to account if they did not comply with the requirements of the programme. The programme was also reliant on the coaches trying to develop a relationship with setting managers and owners and encourage their support. A review of the ‘contract’ with the settings might have been helpful to ensure that expectations and accountabilities were clear among all stakeholders, and would possibly have overcome many of the implementation challenges encountered.

3.2.2 Triad meetings

In addition to the individual coaching, participants allocated to the same coach were also able to take part in group coaching sessions known as ‘triad’ meetings. These termly meetings, which were led by the coach, took place at each of the participants’ settings in turn and their objective was to bring a range of perspectives to solving a problem and allow practitioners to develop their own coaching skills.

The intention was for participants to complete five triad sessions across the 18 months of the programme; however, as Table 6 shows, this proved to be challenging for the majority of participants, and **only 11 of the 55 participants who completed the Early Years Leaders Programme met this target of five sessions**. More than three quarters of the participants completed three or fewer triad sessions, and a total of 13 participants did not take part in any. This data revealed notable differences between the coaches – for some coaches, all or most of their allocated participants had completed five triad sessions, while for other coaches, their participants had not completed any triads at all.

Table 6. Number of triad sessions completed by participants

Number of triad sessions completed	Number of participants
5	11
4	4
3	12
2	6
1	10
0	12
N=	55

Source: NDNA monitoring data, Early Years Leaders Programme

The telephone interviews with coaches provided insight into the issues encountered in delivering the triad sessions. Coaches highlighted the **difficulties in organising a mutually agreeable time and location** for the sessions, particularly when participants were geographically spread, or when childminders, who had to remain in setting, were involved. In order to address this issue, the NDNA programme team offered triads the opportunity to meet after the existing termly network meetings. Five triad meetings took place in this way over the summer and autumn 2019 terms; however, participants were encouraged to maintain the original approach for the triads as far as possible. As the programme progressed, and some participants and coaches withdrew, the make-up of some triads needed to change, which added further complication and inevitably impacted on the coaching and networking opportunities within these groups.

A few coaches reported finding it **difficult to establish common ground among participants** who were often at different levels of management, or from different types of setting. This was echoed by a small number of participants who felt that they gained little from the triads due to the varied make-up of the group. One participant, for example, explained that *'the triad meeting wasn't really helpful as the other members of that meeting were at different places in their careers to me so we lacked common goals and experiences.'* However, it is worth noting that, for some triad groups, these differences were seen as a valuable asset as participants recognised the **benefits of learning from a range of practitioners**. The difficulties experienced by some triad groups appeared to correlate to some extent with coaches' attitudes towards the triads. It seems that the coaches who struggled to organise meetings were those who commented that they did not fully understand the rationale for them and *'did not buy into them'*, highlighting the need for comprehensive training for coaches on all elements of the programme.

Despite the challenges, some triad groups had managed to operate effectively and feedback from these coaches and participants was, on the whole, very positive. As shown in Table 4 in Section 3.2, 24 of the 28 participants (86 per cent) who responded to the end-of-programme survey indicated that the triad sessions had been 'very helpful' (14 respondents) or 'quite helpful' (ten respondents). Some triad groups demonstrated commitment from the outset to finding flexible solutions to enable them to meet, including meeting at a central location rather than at one of their settings to minimise travel time; or conducting all triad sessions at the childminders' setting to facilitate their participation.

Where they worked well, the **triads were seen as a valuable networking opportunity** for both participants and coaches. They had facilitated partnerships between early years practitioners across London that would, in some cases, continue beyond the end of the Early Years Leaders Programme. Participants appreciated the opportunities for peer-to-peer support and exchange of knowledge, *'new and innovative ideas'* and good practice, and felt that they particularly benefitted from the

rare opportunity of being able to visit their peers in other settings. This gave them an insight into the provision within different types of setting and helped them reflect on, and improve, their own practice. Comments from participants on the triads included:

'We relied on each other's experience and expertise to develop ourselves.'

'It was a free space to air what we were going through...being a manager is sometimes a lonely place, but if you find yourself among people who are also facing similar issues you can air what is going on.'

The sharing of knowledge and ideas proved to be particularly valuable following the closure and subsequent re-opening of early years settings in March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Where triads were able to continue to meet remotely, both participants and coaches agreed that they provided an **invaluable source of support during a challenging time**, and facilitated discussion of issues and the sharing of information and ideas that helped them through the crisis. Further discussion about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the programme is presented in Chapter 4.

3.2.3 Network meetings

In order to provide opportunities for networking and peer support among the participants and coaches, termly network meetings were held at a central location in London. These one-day sessions involved presentations from NDNA and guest speakers, as well as opportunities for group discussions among attendees. The NDNA programme team were diligent in collecting feedback from attendees on the aspects of the sessions that they found useful and any suggestions for improvement, which NDNA then used to inform the content and structure of future sessions.

Attendance at network meetings proved to be lower than expected – 60 per cent of participants attended the first network meeting in July 2019, and just under half (49 per cent) attended the second meeting in December 2019. Childminders in sole practice found it particularly challenging to attend these external meetings, as they were unable to leave their setting. Other barriers reported by those who did not attend the sessions included insufficient time to attend meetings; staff shortages within their settings; travel costs and the length of time to travel; and lack of support from senior managers to attend the meetings. Efforts were made by NDNA and coaches to support participants in overcoming these barriers through, for example, more advance notice of the session dates, and communication with senior managers within settings to encourage attendance.

Feedback from those who attended revealed that the **network meetings were very well-received**, with participants describing them as *'inspirational'*, *'rich and reflective'* and *'informative'*. Attendees praised the content and delivery of the sessions, which was relevant and responsive to their development needs, and they welcomed the opportunity to reflect on their practice and network with colleagues from other settings

across London. Participants appreciated the opportunity for time out of setting to reflect on their practice, as one participant explained: *'sometimes just changing your environment clears your head, and helps you see things from another perspective.'*

Participants reported learning new leadership and management skills at these sessions, and feeling more confident in their role as early years leaders as a result, and they noted a range of ways in which they planned to apply what they had learnt in their work setting. These included reviewing and updating their policies and procedures, meeting with staff to disseminate what they had learnt, and developing a shared 'vision' for their setting.

Suggestions for improving the network meetings included providing more interactive activities to further encourage networking among attendees; grouping attendees by borough, to facilitate local partnership working; and reviewing the timing of the sessions to make it easier for practitioners, particularly childminders, to attend.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to online delivery, the final two network sessions were held remotely and both day and evening sessions were offered to maximise attendance. Feedback from these sessions was equally positive, and for some participants, online delivery overcame some of the barriers to attendance that they had experienced. However, attendance rates remained low (for example 33 per cent of the remaining participants and 53 per cent of coaches attended the final network session in December 2020).

3.2.4 Early Years Development Zone

In order to provide extra resources to support the development of the leaders on the programme, an enclosed NDNA online platform was set up, known as the 'Early Years Development Zone' (EYDZ). All coaches and participants on the Early Years Leaders Programme were provided with login details when they joined the programme. Materials from the network meetings and further related learning resources were uploaded to the EYDZ in advance of each session, as well as recordings of the online network meetings and business recovery webinars that were conducted. Notifications were sent out via newsletters informing participants and coaches of new resources on the zone.

Despite ongoing promotion and encouragement from coaches and the NDNA programme team, there was **limited use of the EYDZ among participants**, with only 33 of the 92 participants who joined the programme registering on the zone. Of those who registered, engagement in the materials on the EYDZ was also mixed. Where participants and coaches did access the zone, feedback was positive, with the majority of respondents to the end-of-programme survey indicating that they found the resources either very helpful or quite helpful (82 per cent of participants and coaches). Only two respondents reported that they had not found them very helpful.

Participants appreciated having extra resources available to them (particularly childminders who were often unable to attend the network meetings) and reported accessing them on a small number of occasions. However, those who took part in the telephone interviews cited a lack of time as the main reason for not making more use of this resource, as well as the time taken to log into an online platform. Suggestions for improving engagement with the EYDZ included receiving email notifications when new information was added, emailing direct links to resources, and creating an application for the EYDZ for mobile devices that would enable easier login and access to materials. In order to support their ongoing learning and development, participants and coaches will be access the EYDZ until December 2022.

3.3 Exit strategy

Sustainability of the Early Years Leaders Programme was part of the planning from the outset, and strategies for exiting the programme, whilst supporting ongoing leadership development, were built into the process. Through the coaching sessions, network meetings and the EYDZ, **participants were empowered to take ownership of their own development** and were signposted to further resources and training opportunities relating to management and leadership. The triad groups and networking opportunities were also designed to create a sustainable model for partnership working and collaborative support across the sector, and it was clear that, for some, these partnerships would continue after the end of the programme.

A potential pitfall of coaching is that it can create dependency, and it was evident that many participants highly valued the support from their coach and wanted to maintain contact with them, albeit informally. It was important that participants' 'exit' from the programme was managed carefully and coaches received guidance on how to support their participants to exit successfully from their coaching relationship. Participants were encouraged to continue their leadership development and to use action plans and a coaching approach to support themselves and their colleagues going forward.

To further support participants' ongoing leadership development and the sustainability of the Early Years Leaders Programme, NDNA invited the 55 participants who completed the programme to take part in a short **coach skills training course**. Delivered online in four weekly sessions in January 2021, the course covered the basic principles of coaching and the skills required for the role and gave participants the opportunity for coaching role play and peer feedback. A total of 20 participants attended the course.

3.4 Key findings and recommendations

- Participants were, on the whole, positive about the main elements of the programme, particularly the one-to-one coaching sessions, and the termly network meetings. Relationships between participants and their coaches were

generally positive, and participants valued the intensive support and the opportunity to reflect on and review their practice.

- However, there were mixed levels of engagement among participants, and a range of barriers to their participation were evident, which were further impacted by the pandemic. These barriers may well have hindered the progress and outcomes of some participants. These included a lack of support from their setting owner or manager, staffing issues and a lack of autonomy and ability to enact change in their setting.
- Senior leadership 'buy-in' and support for participants was crucial, and where it was not evident, it caused difficulties with the implementation of the programme. Further consideration would need to be given to how best to engage the support of senior leadership, and ensure accountability.
- Participants' expectations were a key factor in determining the effectiveness of the coaching sessions, reinforcing the need for clear information about the programme to be conveyed to participants prior to application.
- Triad groups were more difficult to establish, and a significant minority of participants did not take part in any group coaching sessions. Coach engagement and buy-in is key to their effective delivery.
- Where they worked well, triads were a very valuable networking opportunity, and facilitated partnerships between early years practitioners and the sharing of good practice across London, which was particularly vital following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Many of the barriers to effective delivery of the programme encountered could have been mitigated by improved promotional materials, and an extended and more rigorous recruitment process to help ascertain participants' and coaches' expectations and 'readiness' for the programme. Gaining the ongoing support and commitment of senior managers within each participants setting was key. Although the existing recruitment materials required the agreement of each employer, there was no formal mechanism to make stakeholders accountable to this commitment.

4. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

At the end of March 2020 – the mid-point of the programme – the Early Years Leaders Programme was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent nationwide lockdown and mandatory closure of early years settings to most children¹⁰ from March to June 2020. As a result of diminished demand from parents and resulting loss of income, early years providers across London and the UK as a whole faced concerns over financial pressures and job stability. The early years workforce was inevitably affected, and a significant proportion of staff were either furloughed, made redundant, had their pay reduced, experienced significant changes to their role or voluntarily left their settings between March and December 2020 (EPI and NDNA, 2020)¹¹. Reopening of the sector was gradual from early June 2020; however, the continuing COVID-19 restrictions have exacerbated the existing issues within the early years sector relating to financial insecurity and staff recruitment and retention, and concerns about the medium and long-term sustainability of the sector are ongoing.

4.1 Impact of the pandemic on the programme

Inevitably, the settings and practitioners involved in the Early Years Leaders Programme faced the same issues and challenges as those in the sector as a whole, and **more than three quarters of the settings participating in the programme closed** at the time of the March 2020 lockdown. Only a minority of settings were open to children of key workers and vulnerable children, and many of the participants in these settings faced changes to their job role and responsibilities. A phased reopening of participating settings began in the summer term, however, others remained closed until autumn 2020 due to low attendance and/or staff shortages. Those that did open had to carry out risk assessments against the government guidance and introduce a range of mitigating measures prior to reopening, including personal protective equipment (PPE), new cleaning processes and the set-up of ‘bubbles’ for children and staff. This, understandably, had a **detrimental impact on both participants’ and coaches’ engagement** in the Early Years Leaders Programme, and on the extent to which they were able to meet the programme requirements, particularly during the spring and summer terms.

As a result of these challenges within the sector and the government restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the way in which the Early Years Leaders Programme was delivered was forced to adapt. The programme as it was originally designed was based on a face-to-face coaching model that was reliant on agreed actions being completed by participants within their settings. However, the closure of settings, and the knock-on effects on participants’ roles and responsibilities meant that

¹⁰ The government announced that early years settings should remain open where needed to provide childcare for the children of key workers, and for vulnerable children.

¹¹ Education Policy Institute & National Day Nurseries Association (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and the early years workforce: August - November 2020: Staffing decisions in an uncertain environment. EPI: London. Available at: <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/EPI-NDNA-Covid-workforce-Q2-V3.pdf>

this could no longer take place in the way it was intended. From the end of March 2020, all face-to-face activity ceased and, where settings were closed, contact between many coaches and their participants became increasingly challenging and fragmented. Although some participants found it easier to meet up via virtual methods during this period, some participants and coaches struggled to maintain their involvement in the programme whilst also managing the situation within their own settings.

The priorities and goals that participants had set themselves when joining the programme also inevitably changed, as their focus moved to dealing with the effects of the pandemic. As one coach expressed, the priority for early years practitioners became *'survival of jobs and survival of business'*. This shift in priorities was also emphasised in the comments of some of the participants who responded to the survey and telephone interviews:

'I cannot concentrate on progressing. I am just concentrating on the day-to-day duties...it is hard to keep everything running at the same time as my own development...COVID has stopped me in my tracks'.

'I think COVID has had a negative impact, in the sense that many of my priorities and longer-term goals have had to be put on the 'back burner' whilst dealing with all the procedural / staffing changes impacting the setting.'

Despite the ongoing challenges **the GLA and NDNA were committed to continuing to support early years settings** through the unprecedented crisis and to continue the Early Years Leaders Programme, albeit in a slightly altered format. Maintaining participants' engagement in the remainder of the programme at such a difficult time was critical, and required careful management and mitigation of a range of issues. The NDNA programme team worked closely with coaches to ensure that both they and the participants received the support they needed to continue their participation in the programme through social media and online video conferencing platforms. On the whole, **coaches and participants showed considerable commitment, creativity and flexibility to maintain contact** and engagement in the programme, and many reported making the effort to keep in touch *'by whatever means possible'* and creating new, flexible ways of working together. This included not only continuing the one-to-one coaching sessions, but also networking remotely with other practitioners through the triad groups.

This level of engagement was not possible for all participants and coaches, however, and some either formally withdrew from the programme at this stage, or did not have any further contact with their coach. By the end of summer 2020, the number of participants on the programme had reduced slightly from 73 at the end of March to 69. During the autumn term, with the reopening of most early years providers, the situation

for some became increasingly difficult. A further 13 participants withdrew from the programme, most commonly citing that they could not commit the time due to other priorities, or because of redundancy or a change to their job role.

4.1.1 Business recovery webinars

In addition to the ongoing support provided through the Early Years Leaders Programme, the GLA and NDNA also identified a need for additional support for early years providers to help address the challenges brought about by the pandemic. A series of business recovery webinars were developed and delivered by NDNA during summer 2020 to support settings through this crisis, as well as continue to address the original aims of the Early Years Leaders Programme. These webinars were open to all the early years providers participating in the programme and aimed to support settings with business recovery, business planning and marketing.

Attendance at these live webinars ranged from seven to 19 attendees, and the sessions were also recorded and uploaded to the EYDZ so that they could be accessed at a later date. Feedback from attendees was positive and they welcomed the extra support with reopening and rebuilding their settings. Of the 28 participants who responded to the end-of-programme survey, 23 respondents (82 per cent) described the webinars as either 'very helpful' (15 participants) or 'quite helpful'. The remaining five respondents indicated that they had not attended the sessions.

4.1.2 Views on the change to online delivery

There were **mixed views among participants and coaches on the change from face-to-face delivery to online**, and the extent to which this had impacted on their engagement in the programme. Most participants reported that they missed the face-to-face contact with their coach (highlighting the importance of eye contact and body language in building and maintaining a coaching relationship), as well as the opportunity to visit and network with other early years providers. A small number of participants who responded to the survey and the telephone interviews indicated that this had negatively affected their engagement in the programme, and commented that they had '*lost something*' and that '*the pandemic took away the best part of the programme - meeting people and visiting settings.*' In contrast, other participants felt that the move to remote working had little impact on their experience of the programme, and in fact recognised the benefits of being able to participate in the programme remotely. This approach allowed them to remain in setting, minimising issues with staff to child ratios and eliminating travel time, and some felt that this had enabled them to engage more fully in the different aspects of the programme. This suggests that, for any future similar coaching or networking programmes within the early years sector, **a mixed delivery model, involving both face-to-face contact and online activities** would work effectively, as it would help to alleviate work pressures and potential staffing or travel issues.

4.2 Impact of the programme during the pandemic

It was evident that for the participants and coaches who were able to remain engaged, the Early Years Leaders Programme had provided a **valuable source of support during an extremely challenging period** for the early years sector. In addition to the information and guidance provided by NDNA, many of the participants had maintained contact with their coach and triad group throughout the crisis, and they hugely appreciated the support that this had given them. This included sharing knowledge and guidance on the new policies and practices required (for example, risk assessment templates), discussing issues around reopening, as well as moral support from fellow professionals. Both coaches and participants commented that the Early Years Leaders Programme '*came at the right time*' as it played an important role in helping them to lead their setting through the crisis. This was summed up by one participant who described the programme as '*an anchor whilst trying to steer a safe course through this turbulent year*'.

4.3 Key findings and recommendations

- The COVID-19 pandemic and the mandatory closure of early years settings between March and June 2020 had a detrimental impact on participants' and coaches' engagement in the Early Years Leaders Programme, and the extent to which they were able to meet the programme requirements. All face-to-face activity ceased, and the programme moved to remote delivery.
- Contact between many coaches and their participants became increasingly challenging and fragmented, and the priorities and goals that participants had set themselves when joining the programme changed as their focus moved to dealing with the effects of the pandemic.
- Maintaining participants' engagement in the remainder of the programme at such a difficult time was critical and required careful management and mitigation of a range of issues.
- Despite the ongoing challenges the GLA and NDNA were committed to continuing the Early Years Leaders Programme, albeit in a slightly altered format.
- A series of business recovery webinars were delivered by NDNA in summer 2020, which aimed to further support settings with business recovery and business planning.
- There were mixed views among participants and coaches on the change from face-to-face delivery to online. While most participants missed the face-to-face contact with their coach, there were some obvious benefits as difficulties with staffing and travel time were minimised or eliminated. This suggests that, for any future similar coaching or networking programmes within the early years sector, a mixed delivery model, involving both face-to-face contact and online activities would work effectively.

- It was evident that for the participants and coaches who were able to remain engaged, the Early Years Leaders Programme had provided a valuable source of support during an extremely challenging period for the early years sector.

5. Outcomes of the programme for participants, coaches and early years settings

A total of 55 participants across 25 local authorities and 19 coaches completed the full duration of the Early Years Leaders Programme, and remained engaged until the end of the programme in December 2020. This represented a significant achievement given the unprecedented challenges faced by the early years sector as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. An online celebration event was conducted at the end of the programme, giving an opportunity for participants and coaches to reflect on their achievements and consider how they would continue the ongoing development of their leadership and management skills.

This chapter presents findings on the impact of the Early Years Leaders Programme on the participating practitioners and settings, and examines the extent to which the programme met its original objectives to:

- Improve the management, leadership and business skills of early years practitioners
- Improve the quality of early years provision for children, particularly the most disadvantaged 2-year-olds
- Better equip early years practitioners to progress in their careers
- Improve joint working between schools, PVI nurseries, childminders, local authorities and sector experts.

The chapter draws on the documentation for recording participants' progress on the coaching sessions, as well as feedback from participants and coaches through the telephone interviews and end-of-programme survey.

It is important to note that, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, **the impact of the programme observed may not be as originally expected**, and may not fully reflect the intended and potential success of the programme. Participants and coaches had to mitigate against an array of issues to continue with the programme, including staff changes, furlough arrangements, changes to their roles and responsibilities and lower occupancy within their settings. Consequently, this not only impacted the continuity of the support they received, but also meant that the priorities and goals that participants had set themselves when joining the programme had to be reviewed as their focus moved to dealing with the effects of the pandemic. For many participants, this affected their engagement in the programme and limited their progress and the outcomes they were able to achieve. However, it is important to highlight that, for others, the programme helped provide them with support and resilience to continue working in such a difficult context.

5.1 Outcomes for participants

It was evident from both monitoring documentation and feedback from participants that the Early Years Leaders Programme had **succeeded in achieving its key objective of improving the management, leadership and business skills of early years practitioners**. Due to the nature of the coaching process and the individualised priorities and targets that participants set themselves, participants' 'journeys' and outcomes had varied, although there were a number of common themes.

Improved confidence

The key outcome identified by participants was improved confidence in their role as a leader. This was the most common outcome reported, not only through the coaching documentation, but also through direct feedback from participants. As shown in Table 7, 23 of the 28 participants (82 per cent) who responded to the end-of-programme survey felt that they were more confident as a result of participating in the programme. This was particularly beneficial to practitioners in giving them the confidence to manage the issues brought about by the pandemic.

This improved confidence seemed to manifest itself in different ways and led to clear improvements in self-efficacy. Participants reported that they were more confident in, for example, communicating with staff and parents, making decisions, liaising with external agencies, and implementing changes within their setting. Participants commented that the '*collaborative sharing of information*' with other practitioners had given them a '*confidence boost*', as these opportunities often reassured them that other practitioners were facing similar issues to them, as the following comments illustrate:

'Being able to meet people who are in the same boat as you is really helpful, and has definitely built my confidence up.'

'It has been good to have validation for the things I'm doing and to know that many of the things I'm grappling with are the same for others.'

Participants also recognised the valuable contribution of their coaches in improving their confidence – through coaches' ongoing support and guidance, positive feedback, encouragement to achieve their goals, and '*being a shoulder to lean on*'. One participant, for example, stated: '*I feel I have grown in confidence throughout the program and [my coach] has been an amazing support guiding me on my path to success.*' Another, who felt that the programme had been very beneficial for her, remarked that '*having people who encouraged me and supported me to do better has made me shine.*'

Table 7. Impact of the programme on participants

<i>As a result of my participation in the programme...</i>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
I am a more effective leader and manager	9	16	1	0	0	2
I have learnt new management and leadership skills to help me in my role	15	9	2	0	0	2
I am more confident in my role as an early years leader	11	12	3	0	0	2
I have been able to influence change within my setting	10	14	2	0	0	2
I have made improvements to the provision/practice in my setting	8	17	1	0	0	2
I have a clearer idea of how I can progress in my role/career	13	10	2	1	0	2
I would like to progress to a more senior leadership role	10	11	5	0	0	2
I have been more effective in supporting my colleagues	9	16	1	0	0	2
I have developed new partnerships with others working in the early years sector	7	11	6	2	0	2
I feel that I have developed my own coaching skills	6	14	5	1	0	2
I plan to coach colleagues in my own setting in the future	7	13	5	0	0	3
N= 28						

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Improved management, leadership and business skills

When applying to join the Early Years Leaders Programme, participants identified a range of management, leadership and business skills that they were seeking to develop, and by the end of the programme it was clear that many of the participants had succeeded in improving the key skills they need for leadership within the early years sector.

A total of 24 of the 28 participants who responded to the end-of-programme survey (86 per cent) reported that they had learnt new management and leadership skills to help them in their role, with more than half of these respondents strongly agreeing with this statement (see Table 7 above). A similar proportion of participants (89 per cent) felt that they were a more effective leader and manager as a result of taking part in the programme.

Similar feedback was given during the telephone interviews, and participants highlighted a range of skills that they felt had improved through the programme. These included:

- Organisational and time management skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Decision-making skills
- Communication with staff and parents
- The ability to delegate
- Resilience and adaptability
- Budget management skills
- Coaching skills.

Participants also reported that the programme had broadened their perspectives, encouraging them to be more **reflective about their practice and open to change**, and more proactive in dealing with issues that arise. Furthermore, participants had found opportunities to cascade this learning to other staff within their setting.

Improvements in these skills not only had a positive impact on the personal and professional development of the participants themselves, but also reportedly had a **variety of benefits to the staff and provision within their setting**, and participants provided a range of examples to evidence this. These included more effective management of staff and increased staff morale as a result of improved communication and delegation; reduced workload resulting from improved time management skills; and the use of a coaching/mentoring approach to better support and upskill staff. The following comments from participants further illustrate the positive impact of the programme on their leadership skills and practice:

'I was struggling with my time management but this programme has helped so much and also with my confidence...I'm so glad I took part!'

'We're thinking outside of the box more, changing things more. We're having more staff meetings...we're more open with each other...it's more structured.'

'Before I thought everything has to be perfect, but the programme has helped me to realise that it is not all about perfection, it is about what you put in place and being consistent, and addressing issues as they come.'

Career progression

The observed improvements in participants' confidence and leadership skills will likely assist them with their future career progression within the early years sector and support them to progress to more senior leadership positions. Over the course of the programme, **more than one third of participants reported achieving a promotion**, or extra leadership responsibilities within their role. The majority (82 per cent) of participants who responded to the end-of-programme survey also indicated that they had clearer idea of how to progress in their role/career as a result of the programme (see Table 7). Moreover, more than half of these participants strongly agreed with this statement.

Participants also highlighted that the programme had **increased their aspirations for further development and progression**, and three-quarters of the survey respondents indicated that they would now like to progress to a more senior leadership position. Comments from participants included the following:

'I feel like I want to do more. It has convinced me to go to the next stage, to take on a management role, do a degree or next course. I wasn't really interested in studying, but now this has given me the confidence.'

'Since I started the programme I've gained so much confidence – due to this next year I am going to start my foundation degree.'

'Moving from a practitioner to a manager within 2 years has been an amazing achievement and this program has really helped me manage my tasks and priorities appropriately.'

Improved joint working across the sector

The Early Years Leaders Programme was designed to promote joint working across the early years sector, and sought to involve a diverse range of practitioners and settings from across the sector. It drew on the expertise of early years specialists to develop and deliver the coach induction training and termly coach planning and reflection sessions, and to support the network sessions with participants. These network meetings and the triad group sessions were specifically designed to facilitate collaborative working and the sharing of information and best practice across different types of providers in London. Where they worked well, these opportunities were valued considerably by participants, and they planned to maintain these partnerships going forward. One participant, for example, who described the programme as *'an excellent*

experience’ commented that they had made *‘good partnerships with other early years leaders that will carry on when it has finished.’*

However, not all participants had the opportunity for such joint working due to the barriers to engagement outlined in Chapter 3. Just under two-thirds of the participants who responded to the end-of-programme survey reported that they had developed new partnerships with others working in the early years sector (18 out of 28 participants), while a notable proportion were either unsure (six respondents) or disagreed (two respondents) that this had been the case. This is an area for potential development for the sector going forward, and **careful consideration should be given to the most effective ways of encouraging and facilitating partnership working.**

Overall, despite the barriers to engagement encountered by many participants and the considerable challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, there was evidence that the Early Years Leaders Programme had led to significant positive outcomes for the participants involved. While for some, particularly those who withdrew from the programme early, these outcomes may have been more limited, others reported that taking part in the programme had had a *‘major impact’* on them. On the whole, participants spoke very highly of the programme, describing it as *‘encouraging and supportive’* and *‘very positive, informative and enjoyable.’*

A total of 23 of the 28 participants who completed the end-of-programme survey (82 per cent) stated that they would recommend the Early Years Leaders Programme to a colleague. The remaining five respondents were either not sure (four participants), as it depended on the practitioner and setting concerned, or they did not respond to this question (one participant). When asked to explain the reason for their recommendation, participants made the following comments:

‘I have already recommended [the programme] to other staff members as I have been going through the process. It is a positive programme that can only help others achieve and progress through their job role in the early years sector.’

‘It has made a positive impact on me so I would also like to recommend that to another childminder or colleague.’

‘It offered a very effective way of sharing experiences, finding solutions and generally moving forward with improving childcare for early years.’

5.2 Outcomes for early years settings

Much of the primary focus of the Early Years Leaders Programme was on improving the leadership, management and business skills of individual practitioners. However, improving the quality and accessibility of provision in the participating settings were also key objectives for the programme. As outlined in the Theory of Change for the

programme (see Appendix A), which is linked to the Mayor of London's aims for the early years sector in London, the programme aimed to ensure that early years provision is sustained and grows, so that children have better outcomes and that childcare is not a barrier to work.

The majority (89 per cent) of participants who responded to the end-of-programme survey reported that they had made improvements to the provision and practice in their setting. This corresponds with the findings from the telephone interviews, and analysis of participants' coaching documentation, which indicated that most participants had been able to make progress towards their development targets and goals, and had recorded **tangible impacts on their practice and provision**. For some, these were small incremental changes in practice that, although did not appear to have a direct impact on provision, were contributing to a cumulative improvement in the quality of early years provision in their setting.

The outcomes reported within settings were wide ranging, but the actions implemented by participants and their senior managers can be grouped into six main areas:

- Teaching and learning
- Staff recruitment, retention and development
- Staff structure and management
- Business expansion, including increase in the two-year-old offer
- Planning and assessment
- Policies and systems.

Table 8 provides an overview of the changes to practice and provision reported by participants. These outcomes directly contributed to the objectives of the Early Years Leaders Programme to improve the quality and accessibility of early years provision. Feedback from participants indicated that these changes had made a positive difference to their settings, most notably improved staff morale and motivation, greater professional autonomy, a shared sense of purpose among staff, more consistent practice and increased engagement by children. There were also **examples of business expansion and growth** in early years provision, most notably **an increase in the offer of funded hours for disadvantaged two-year-olds**.

Table 8. Changes to practice and provision in participating early years settings

	Examples of changes implemented
Teaching and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements to learning environment and resources (e.g., introduction of 'cosy area', improvements to outdoor environment) • Improvements in specific activities (e.g., circle time) that have increased children's engagement • Improvements to provision for children with special educational needs, including identification and referral process • Improvements to children's transition preparation • Improvements to quality of interactions between staff and children • Changes to daily routine of setting • Improvements to communication with parents (e.g., workshops, newsletters)
Staff recruitment, retention and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of recruitment strategies • Introduction of staff incentives • Development of staff well-being strategy • Training for staff (e.g., EYFS framework, Ofsted requirement, safeguarding, SEN provision) • Development of team building activities • Introduction of peer observations to identify strengths/areas for development
Staff structure and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of new staff induction process • Introduction of new roles and responsibilities for staff/changes to team structures • Greater delegation across teams • Modelling of best practice to ensure consistent approach • Creation of task lists for staff • Development of staff skills audit to aid effective deployment of staff • Introduction of monthly team meetings
Business expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension of opening hours • Increase in occupancy • Expansion of offer to two-year-old children • Recruitment of new staff members
Planning and assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of online tracking system for children • Introduction of planning templates • Introduction of weekly planning meetings • Creation of session plan/circle time handbook
Policies and systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalisation of development plan for setting • Development of staff sickness/absence policy • Development of equality policy

Source: NDNA monitoring data, Early Years Leaders Programme

5.3 Outcomes for coaches

It was evident that the Early Years Leaders Programme not only had a positive impact on the participants and settings involved, but also on the coaches recruited to the programme. Coaches who remained on the programme until the end spoke highly of the programme and the effectiveness of its delivery, describing it as *'rewarding and enriching'*, *'challenging and insightful'* and *'a privilege to take part in'*. They valued the experience and felt that the programme was not only contributing to the development of leadership and management skills among early years practitioners, but was also helping to raise standards in provision. In the view of one coach, the programme *'has enabled and supported reflection of practice at all levels, enhanced leadership across the sector and improved practice for the children and families we work with.'*

Commenting specifically on the outcomes of the programme for themselves, coaches often remarked that they had gained just as much through the programme as the participants they had supported. Recognising the programme as a **valuable development opportunity for coaches**, one coach, for example, described the programme as *'a journey that has extended and challenged my skills and development as a coach and early years leader.'*

Of the 11 coaches who completed the end-of-programme survey, nine (82 per cent) reported that they would recommend the Early Years Programme to a colleague, should it be delivered again in the future. The remaining two coaches were unsure, and said it would depend on the coach or participant. Commenting on the reasons for such a recommendation, one coach described the programme as *'a valuable experience, of growing, collaborating and sharing that others should definitely benefit from'*, while another emphasised that *'a programme like this can only help improve standards in early years and provide support for practitioners at all levels'*.

As a result of the training and support provided by the NDNA programme team, the key outcome for coaches was the development of their coaching skills, and ten of the 11 coaches who responded to the survey reported that they had learnt new coaching skills and techniques that they could use with staff in their own settings. Furthermore, as Table 9 illustrates, most coaches also indicated that, as a result of their participation in the Early Years Leaders Programme, they had become a more effective manager and leader, made improvements in their own setting, and developed new partnerships with others in the early years sector.

Table 9. Impact of the programme on coaches

<i>As a result of my participation in the programme...</i>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
I am a more effective leader and manager	5	3	2	0	0	1
I have learnt new coaching skills and techniques	9	1	0	0	0	1
I have developed new partnerships with others working in the early years sector	4	4	2	0	0	1
I have made improvements to the provision in my own setting	5	3	1	1	0	1
I am coaching colleagues in my own setting and/or plan to in the future	7	2	1	0	0	1
N= 11						

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

The feedback from coaches from the telephone interviews and coach reflection sessions shed further light on the perspective of coaches, and demonstrated that many coaches felt that they had gained as much from the programme as the participants. As a result of needing to manage the requirements of the programme with the workload in their own settings, coaches reported that the programme had helped them to develop their own organisational and time management skills, as well as their confidence. Through supporting participants and encouraging them to reflect on their practice and professional development, coaches felt that the programme had made them more reflective on their own practice and leadership style. As a result, coaches had adapted the way they were supporting and managing staff within their own settings, for example, by using some of the coaching techniques they had learnt, or adopting a more distributed leadership approach, which was helping to upskill their staff.

Coaches appreciated the opportunities that the programme gave them to network with and learn from other professionals within the early years sector, and to share ideas, experiences and best practice, and felt that this had been particularly crucial through the COVID-19 pandemic. Coaches also felt that the programme had given them a valuable insight into the early years sector and the experiences of other leaders and settings across London. Many spoke of being '*inspired*' by the participants' dedication to the children in their care, and the provision they were offering, and gave them a deeper insight into the issues faced across the sector and within different London boroughs and types of setting. One coach, for example, commented that the programme '*has opened my eyes to the different ways that people are working, and the struggles that other people have*', while another said that despite the ongoing challenges faced by the sector it '*gave me hope for the early years sector... we are really vital to the community and society that we live in.*'

5.4 Key findings and recommendations

- A total of 55 participants across 25 local authorities and 19 coaches completed the full duration of the Early Years Leaders Programme, and remained engaged until the end of the programme in December 2020, which was a significant achievement given the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It was evident that the programme had succeeded in achieving its key objective of improving the management, leadership and business skills of early years practitioners.
- The most common outcome identified by participants was improved confidence in their role as a leader. They attributed this to the support and guidance provided by their coach, and the collaborative support and sharing of information with other participants, which reassured them that they were not alone in the issues they were facing.
- Many of the participants had also succeeded in improving the key skills they need for leadership within the early years sector, including organisation and time-management skills, communication skills, and delegation skills.
- The programme contributed to supporting participants' career progression, and participants felt that that they not only had a clearer idea of how to progress in their role/career, but also that the programme had increased their aspirations for further development and progression.
- The majority of participants had made tangible improvements to practice and provision in their settings. Although some may be considered to be small changes, they contributed to a cumulative improvement in the quality of provision.
- The actions implemented in settings could be grouped into six main areas: teaching and learning; staff recruitment, retention and development; staff structure and management; planning and assessment; policies and systems; and business expansion, including an increase in the two-year-old offer.

- The programme also had a positive impact on the coaches involved, and many felt that they had gained just as much through the programme as the participants they had supported. As well as developing their coaching skills, they valued the opportunity to reflect on their own practice and leadership style and to collaborate with other early years professionals.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

The Early Years Leaders Programme was an ambitious and innovative development programme for leaders and aspiring leaders within London's early years sector. The ultimate aim of the programme was to improve the quality and accessibility of early years provision and outcomes for children, and it recognised that a high-quality workforce is central to this aim. Through the use of a coaching model, the programme sought to improve practitioners' confidence, leadership, management and business skills; equip practitioners to progress in their careers; and improve joint working across the sector.

This evaluation has provided clear evidence that the Early Years Leaders Programme succeeded in meeting its key objectives. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the outcomes observed may possibly not fully reflect the potential success of the programme. However, the participants and coaches who completed the programme were overwhelmingly positive about the impact it had on their leadership and management skills and on the quality of provision in their settings. Participants were more confident in their role as early years leaders and had developed a range of key skills that would support them. Tangible improvements to practice and provision were evident and, although some may be considered to be small changes, they contributed to raising the standard of provision. The programme had also succeeded in increasing participants' aspirations for further development and progression and given them a clearer idea of how to progress in their careers.

The network meetings and triad groups were seen as valuable networking opportunities, and facilitated joint working and the sharing of best practice between early years practitioners across London. These ongoing partnerships will be an important legacy of the Early Years Leaders Programme, and will provide a much-needed source of ongoing support and collaborative working going forward.

One unintended but very important outcome of the Early Years Leaders Programme was its contribution to supporting early years settings through the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic created considerable uncertainty and turbulence for early years settings, and exacerbated many of the existing challenges in the sector around high workload, difficulties with staff recruitment and retention and concerns around financial viability. While the pandemic had a detrimental impact on the engagement of some participants, for those who maintained their participation, the programme proved to be an invaluable source of support and guidance, and gave them the skills and resilience to face the challenges ahead.

The success of the Early Years Leaders Programme can be attributed to the following factors:

- The delivery model, which combined one-to-one coaching with opportunities for collaborative sharing of ideas and experiences
- High-quality training and ongoing support for coaches to maximise their effectiveness
- The commitment of the GLA and NDNA to continue the programme and adapt the delivery model in response to the pandemic and the needs of the practitioners involved
- The goodwill, commitment and flexibility of coaches who were key to the successful delivery of the programme
- The dedication of participants to invest in their professional development, and their perseverance to continue their engagement in the programme despite ongoing challenges.

Despite its successes, the Early Years Leaders Programme was not without its obstacles. There were initial challenges with the recruitment of participants and around two-fifths of participants and coaches withdrew from the programme early. Engagement in the programme was reportedly mixed, with some participants unable to participate fully in all elements of the programme due to a lack of time, staffing issues within their setting and a lack of support from their senior leaders (and latterly challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic). These barriers could have been mitigated somewhat by improvements to the marketing and recruitment strategies adopted, and a formalisation of the agreement with participating settings, to ensure that all stakeholders had clear expectations and a mutual understanding of the commitment involved. Senior leadership 'buy-in' and support for participants on the programme was crucial, and more investment to ensuring that this support was ongoing throughout the programme might have alleviated some of the implementation challenges encountered.

There was some evidence that the scope of the Early Years Leaders Programme was too broad, and that it would have been more effective if the recruitment of participants and settings had been more targeted. Starting with a smaller cohort and working in collaboration with local authorities to identify settings and practitioners who could benefit most from leadership development would potentially have led to greater improvements in provision and outcomes for children. Targeting the programme solely at managers and deputy managers would have ensured that participants had the autonomy to enact change within their settings. This would perhaps have been a more sustainable model for the programme and would have provided a clearer pathway for participants to cascade their learning to other practitioners within their settings. However, it is clear that participants at all levels of leadership, including aspiring leaders, benefitted considerably through the programme. Having a mix of participants

with varied levels of experience was a key asset of the programme as it encouraged greater peer-to-peer support and sharing of knowledge and experience.

Further support for the early years workforce

‘There are some really wonderful people within our EY sector. It is important that these remarkable individuals are recognised and valued as the vital professionals and significant influencers of change that they are’.

This quote from one of the coaches on the programme highlights the significance of the early years sector and the importance of ensuring that practitioners feel valued and supported. Although there is currently no commitment to fund further rounds of the Early Years Leaders Programme, the need to invest in the development of the early years workforce remains as strong as ever given the significant challenges currently facing the sector. Support and ongoing professional development opportunities for leaders within the early years are of particular importance given the role of leadership in underpinning the quality of provision. The sector requires a long-term strategy for developing the early years workforce and providing clear progression pathways and access to ongoing leadership training and development to both attract and retain well-qualified staff.

The coaching model adopted by the Early Years Leaders Programme was hugely valued by participants and was considered to be a very effective way of supporting practitioners on their leadership journey. However, it is important to note that coaching makes intensive demands on human resources and, although beneficial, is not feasible for all practitioners. Consideration could be given to how such a coaching model could be streamlined to reduce the demands on those involved, for example, through reducing the number of sessions, or using a combination of face-to-face delivery and remote contact.

Senior leadership can often be a lonely and isolated role, and there are few opportunities for early years leaders to network with their peers in other settings. The Early Years Leaders Programme has demonstrated a clear need and desire for networking and collaborative sharing of information within the early years sector and has shown that this can be an invaluable source of support and guidance. Further consideration should be given to how such networks could be developed and encouraged within the early years sector in London, through for example, online forums or local networks of practitioners.

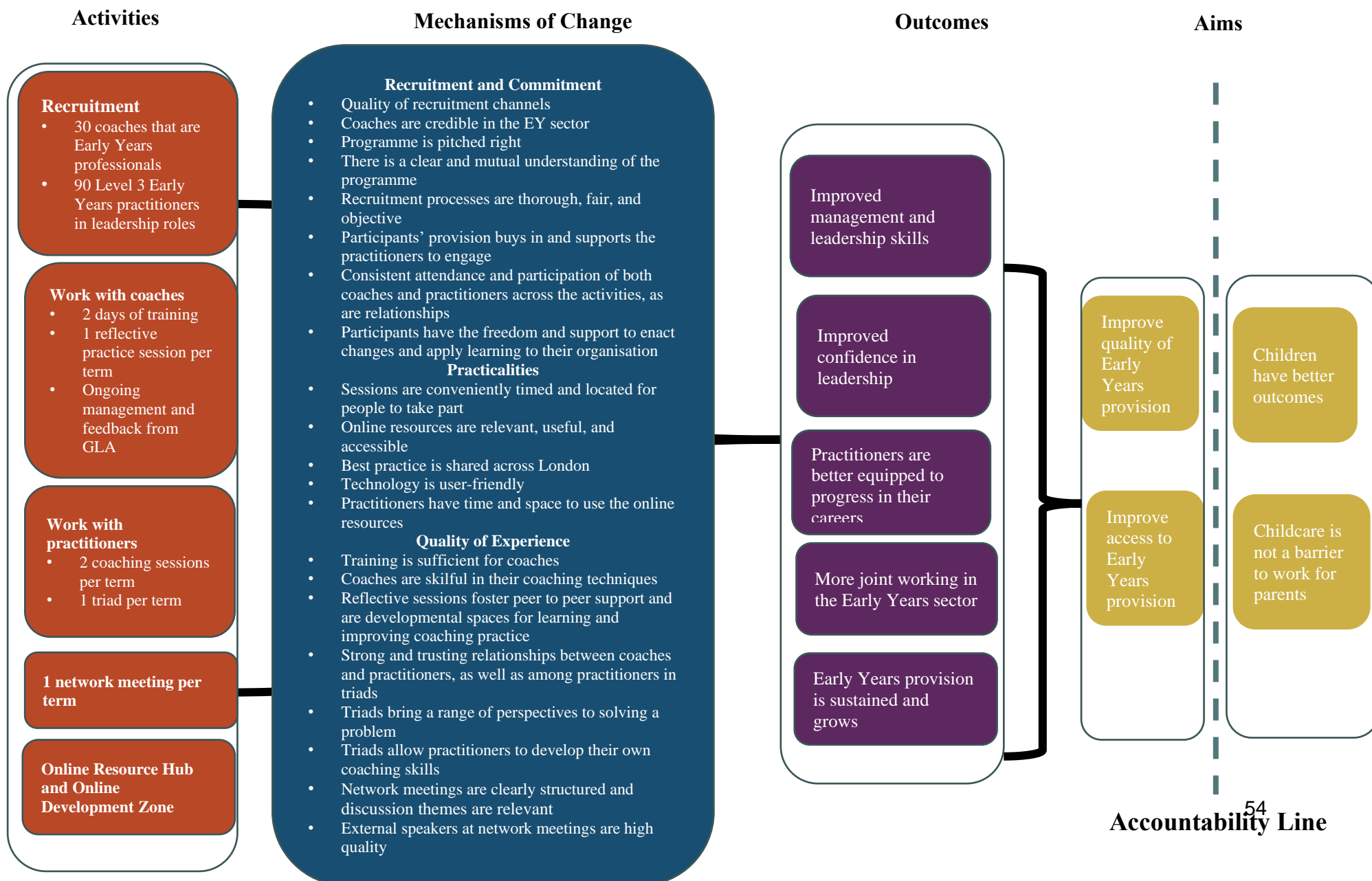
It is hoped that the legacy of the Early Years Leaders Programme will be that participants continue to put their leadership skills into practice in their settings and, using a coaching model, cascade what they have learnt to other staff. This would, therefore, create a self-sustaining model of support that will continue to build and develop the early years workforce. Dissemination of the outcomes and lessons

learned from this programme should be shared widely across London's early years sector. This would not only celebrate the achievements of those involved in the programme, but would also help to raise awareness of the importance of investing in the early years workforce and highlight the importance of leadership development within the sector.

Appendix A Theory of Change

The Theory of Change for the Early Years Leaders Programme was developed by the GLA, in partnership with the Centre for Youth Impact, at the mid-point of the programme (March 2020) – see diagram below.

Figure A.1 Early Years Leaders Programme Theory of Change



Appendix B Timeline of the Early Years Leaders Programme

Table B.1. Timeline of Early Years Leaders Programme

Phase	Activity	Date
Phase 1: Contract initiation	Contract secured	January 2019
Phase 2: Programme set-up, marketing and recruitment	Programme set-up	February 2019
	Marketing and recruitment of coaches began	March 2019
	Training sessions for coaches	May 2019
	Marketing and recruitment of participants began	May 2019
Phase 3: Delivery of coaching sessions	First coaching sessions began	June 2019
	First network meeting	July 2019
	First coach planning and reflection session	November 2019
	Second network meeting	December 2019
	Second coach planning and reflection session	March 2020
	Third network meeting*	March 2020
	Third coach planning and reflection session*	June 2020
	Business recovery webinars*	June-August 2020
	Fourth network meeting*	September 2020
	Final coach planning and reflection session*	November 2020
	Final network session*	December 2020
	Programme completed	December 2020
Celebration event*	January 2021	

**Due to COVID-19 restrictions, sessions were carried out via an online video platform*

Appendix C Coach and participant application forms

Below are the application forms used for the Early Years Leaders Programme – for potential coaches and potential participants. The participant application form includes an employer support agreement, which required a senior manager from the participants' setting to give permission for their employee to participate in the programme. It also required their agreement that they would support the participants' involvement in the programme, for example, through allowing them time out of setting to attend network meetings and training.



National Day Nurseries Association

EARLY YEARS LEADERS PROGRAMME APPLICATION FORM

Please return completed form to EarlyYearsLeader@ndna.org.uk or hard copies to Freya Roper, NDNA, Unit 6 Longbow Close, Huddersfield, HD6 4EB.

Role:	Early Years Leaders Programme Coach
Full Name:	
Address:	
London Borough:	
Post Code:	
Contact Number:	
E-mail Address:	
Current DBS No:	
Education and training details (including course titles and dates achieved):	
Work History - only provide sector specific early years work history (including company, job title and start and finish dates/length of service):	

Please confirm if you are able to meet the following: (if this section is not complete your application will not be taken forward)

Able to travel across the Greater London area. (Paid Oyster cards are provided)	
Available to attend 2 full day training sessions on the 1 st and 22 nd May.	
Able to commit 3.5 days per term to deliver coaching sessions to participants over 7 individual sessions.	
Does your setting provide funded 2 Year-old places?	

Availability for phone interview:	
Monday 15 th April:	
Tuesday 16 th April	
Wednesday 17 th April:	
Candidates will be informed if they have been successful no later than Tuesday 23 rd April.	

SUPPORTING STATEMENT

Please tell us your reasons for applying for the role of coach on this programme and what qualities and experience you believe you can bring to this role. Include your leadership and management experience, both in terms of business success and high quality practice. Please also provide any other information you wish to be taken into account in support of your application. (see selection criteria included in application email)

REFERENCES

Please provide the names and contact details of two professional persons who can be approached for references. One of these references must be from your employer or an external source such as the LA. References will be taken for individuals who have been successful within this selection stage.

1.

2.

GDPR STATEMENT

By submitting this application form, I accept that my information will only be used in compliance with GDPR regulations and for the sole use of the Early Years Leaders Programme. Data for this Programme will be held for a specified period stated by the Mayor of London Contract and not shared with third parties or used for any other purpose than the Early Years Leaders Programme by NDNA or the Greater London Authority.

DECLARATION

I confirm that the information I have given on this form is correct.

Signature: Date:

If you are not the decision maker in the setting, please have this application countersigned by them.

I confirm that the setting fully supports the candidate making this application and will release them when required to attend training and provide coaching sessions to participants on this programme

Signature: Date:

Print name and position in the setting

.....



National Day Nurseries Association



Early Years Leaders Programme Application form - Participant

National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)

NDNA is the national charity and membership association for nurseries across the UK. NDNA's vision is for all children and families to flourish through excellent early years care and learning. Our mission is to lead and empower the sector so that nurseries and the early years workforce deliver sustainable, high quality care and learning. NDNA is committed to equal opportunities and ensuring that everyone is able to access our services.

Aim:

The NDNA has been commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA) to deliver the Early Years Leaders Programme.

The Early Years Leaders Programme will help early years practitioners in Greater London progress in their careers by increasing their confidence, leadership and management skills and by providing opportunities for them to share best practice. Its aim is to help address the availability and quality of childcare by increasing the number of participants with the skills to grow their settings and upskill their staff. This in turn will improve outcomes for children, particularly those from less advantaged backgrounds.

Objectives:

The Early Years Leaders Programme will:

- Improve the management, leadership and business skills of early years practitioners
- Improve the quality of early years provision for children, particularly the most disadvantaged two-year olds.

Completed form to be sent to EarlyYearsLeaders@ndna.org.uk and CC. Freya.Roper@ndna.org.uk or post to FAO Freya Roper, NDNA, Unit 6 Longbow Close, Huddersfield, HD2 1GQ.

Deadline Friday 10th May.

Your details:

Name	
Contact Phone No.	
Email Address	

Setting/provider details:

Setting/Provider name	
Address	

Post Code	
London Borough	
Phone number	
Do you offer funder 2 year old places?	

Please tell us how you meet the eligibility criteria:

What is your highest early years' qualification?	
What CPD have you undertaken in the last year?	
What is your current job role?	
How long have you been employed in this role?	
If less than 3 years what was your previous role?	
What is the most recent inspection grade of the early years setting you currently operate in?	
Do you hold an up to date DBS?	

What lead role do you have in the setting, and duration of time in this role?

--

Please explain how you meet the eligibility requirements for the Programme (refer to essential and desirable criteria later in document).

--

Please score how strongly you agree with the following questions using scores 1-5 , 1 as the lowest and 5 the highest	1	2	3	4	5	Additional information
Q1 I am driven by the desire to improve outcomes for children in my setting/local area						
Q2 I have made a significant impact on outcomes for children in my setting/local area						
Q3 I seek out opportunities to collaborate with other Schools, Maintained nurseries and PVI's						
Q4 I demonstrate an interest in driving system-level change across London						
Q5 I adapt quickly and effectively to change						
Q6 I deal with challenging situations effectively						
Q7 I demonstrate determination when implementing change						
Q8 I take on feedback and adapt my practice based on it						
Q9 I have self-awareness and understand my development needs						
Q10 I actively pursue opportunities to develop new skills						
Q11 I am open and collaborative and seek opportunities to learn from others						
Q12 I am committed to basing my practice on research or evidence						
Q13 I am innovative in my practice, and try new approaches to improve outcomes for children						
Q14 I seek opportunities to lead within the setting						
Q15 I am respected for my leadership skills by my peers						
Q16 I have successfully driven significant change within the setting						
Q17 I have demonstrated a strong desire to become a manager/leader at some point in my career						
Q18 I coach and give meaningful feedback to others I display a range of leadership styles for different contexts						
Q19 I navigate and manage uncertainty well, and try to create clarity for others						
Q20 What knowledge, skills and attributes do you think you need to develop in order to progress to management and leadership? (300 words max)						

Q21 What factors might influence your decision to lead a setting? (300 words max)

Q22 What do you hope to get from this initiative? (300 words max)

By signing below, you are agreeing that all information provided is accurate and you are able to commit to the duration and expectations of the programme.

SIGNATURE: DATE:

EARLY YEARS LEADERS PROGRAMME - PARTICIPANT EMPLOYER SUPPORT AGREEMENT

Dear Employer

Thank you for agreeing to support (Name of Participant) participation in the Early Years Leaders Programme.

I confirm that my position within the setting, allows me to complete this support agreement.

By signing this Agreement, I am confirming:

- (Participant name) is employed as.....
(Participant job title).
- I have read and understood the Programme information and commitment required
- (Participant Name) holds the required qualification
- To the best of my knowledge (Participant name) possesses the eligible skills, knowledge and experience
- I give permission for (participant name) to participate in the Programme
- I will provide the time away from the setting for attendance at training and networking sessions as outlined in the Schedule
- I (or a senior member of staff) will provide supervision sessions throughout the duration of the Programme
- I will provide opportunities for development activities, if and when required
- I am aware of the confidential nature of the coaching relationship and will not expect (Participant Name) to share information of a confidential nature

Employer Name:

Position within the setting:

Setting Name and Address:

Contact Email:

Signature: Date:

In order to meet the objectives of the Early Years Leaders Programme, NDNA is offering early years practitioners who have aspirations to develop and improve leadership and management skills, the opportunity to work with a Leadership Coach. The Leadership Coach will provide coaching, professional guidance and support.

Coaching is a talk-based form of professional development which has its roots in psychotherapy and counselling, however is not a therapeutic intervention. Through effective coaching conversations, the coach acts as a facilitator to help the coachee identify, target and plan for development of their practice and realise work related goals.

As a participant in the Early Years Leaders Programme, you will receive regular coaching sessions with a Leadership Coach who has demonstrated knowledge, skills and expertise in the leadership and management of a highly rated early years setting, and attend networking sessions. Participation in the Programme will also contribute to your continuing professional development.

Eligibility Criteria (Essential):

- Must be an early years practitioner in an OFSTED registered setting rated Good or Outstanding which offers places to 2 year olds eligible for free early education and childcare
- Must have a Level 3 or above early years qualification.

Eligibility Criteria (Desirable):

- Key role in setting, eg room supervisor/leader; SENCO, Behaviour Lead, Designated Safeguarding Lead.

What you will receive:

- Regular coaching sessions (two individual and one group per term)
- Support with developing professional knowledge and skills and adopting a leadership and management approach
- Regular networking opportunities – one per term
- Opportunity to develop management, leadership and business sustainability skills.

Can you also demonstrate that you are:

- Passionate, dedicated and enthusiastic about early years provision
- Committed to providing a high level of care and education to children
- Driven to progress in your career.

Benefits to you:

- Increased confidence
- Support with personal and professional goal and target setting
- Development/Enhancement of staff management and leadership skills
- Acquisition of new skills and abilities
- Development/Enhancement of business skills

- Sharing of best practice
- Fulfil your leadership potential.

Duration of programme/commitment

The Programme will run from May 2019 - December 2020.

During this period, you will be expected to attend termly networking sessions and one-to-one and group coaching sessions; complete activities/tasks agreed with your Leadership Coach.

Application and selection process:

- Registration of application by 14th June 2019
- Successful Applicants notified
- Completion of Participant Agreement and Employer Support Agreement.

Appendix D Characteristics of Participants

The tables below provide information on the characteristics of all 92 participants that were recruited to the Early Years Leaders Programme. It is worth noting that 37 of these participants subsequently withdrew from the programme at some point between summer 2019 and autumn 2020. The characteristics of these participants and the reasons for their withdrawal are presented in Section 2.3.

Table D1. London borough where participants were based

London Borough	Number of participants
Barking and Dagenham	1
Barnet	8
Bexley	1
Brent	2
Bromley	1
Camden	0
Croydon	0
Ealing	0
Enfield	3
Greenwich	3
Hackney	2
Hammersmith & Fulham	0
Haringey	1
Harrow	6
Havering	2
Hillingdon	0
Hounslow	7
Islington	1
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea	5
Kingston-upon-Thames	4
Lambeth	3
Lewisham	4
Merton	2
Newham	1
Redbridge	16
Richmond-upon-Thames	3
Southwark	3
Sutton	2
Tower Hamlets	0
Wandsworth	6
Westminster	4
Waltham Forest	1
N= 92	

Source: NDNA monitoring data, Early Years Leaders Programme

Table D2. Job role of participants

Role in setting	Number of participants
Manager/headteacher	26
Deputy Manager	19
Room/Team Leader	18
Practitioner	12
Childminder	10
Owner	3
Director	2
Unknown	1
N= 92	

Source: NDNA monitoring data, Early Years Leaders Programme

Table D3. Length of time participants have been in current job role

Time in current role	Number of participants
Less than 6 months	12
6-12 months	14
1-2 years	28
3-5 years	14
6-10 years	14
More than 10 years	7
Unknown	3
N= 92	

Source: NDNA monitoring data, Early Years Leaders Programme

Table D4. Participants' highest qualification level

Qualification level	Number of participants
Level 7	2
Level 6	12
Level 5	8
Level 4	4
Level 3	51
Early Years Professional Status (EYPS)	7
Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS)	1
PGCE QTS	1
QTS	1
Unknown	5
N= 92	

Source: NDNA monitoring data, Early Years Leaders Programme

Table D5. Type of setting where participants are employed

Provider type	Number of participants
Group setting (private, voluntary or independent)	76
Group setting (maintained)	6
Home-based setting	10
N= 92	

Source: NDNA monitoring data, Early Years Leaders Programme

Table D6. Ofsted rating of participating settings

Ofsted rating	Number of participants
Outstanding	17
Good	66
Requires improvement	1
Awaiting inspection	8
N= 92	

Source: NDNA monitoring data, Early Years Leaders Programme

Appendix E Responses to End-of-Programme Survey

The responses to the end-of-programme survey that was carried out in autumn 2020 are summarised in the tables below. The survey was sent to the 55 participants and 19 coaches who remained on the programme at this point. A total of 41 practitioners completed the survey – 28 participants and 11 coaches. An additional two respondents did not indicate their role in the programme, and only provided responses to the first three questions on the survey. Their responses have not been included in the data below.

Characteristics of respondents

Table E1. Type of early years setting where respondents were employed

	Number of participants	Number of coaches
Group setting (private, voluntary or independent)	20	5
Group setting (maintained)	1	2
Home-based setting	4	0
Other	2*	4**
No response	1	0
N=	28	11

* Other responses were Children's Centre and charity run nursery

** Other responses included Local Authority and university nursery

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Table E2. Job role of respondents

	Number of participants	Number of coaches
Nursery Owner	2	1
Nursery Manager or Headteacher	11	4
Deputy Nursery Manager or Assistant/Deputy Headteacher	3	0
Room/ Team Leader	7	0
Early Years Practitioner	0	0
Childminder	3	0
Other	2*	6**
N=	28	11

* Other responses were Childminder Assistant and Early Help Practitioner

** Other responses included LA adviser, independent coach and Quality Assurance manager

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Table E3. London borough where respondents were based

	Number of participants	Number of coaches
Barking and Dagenham	0	0
Barnet	3	1
Bexley	0	0
Brent	0	0
Bromley	1	0
Camden	0	0
Croydon	0	1
Ealing	0	0
Enfield	1	0
Greenwich	1	0
Hackney	1	0
Hammersmith & Fulham	0	0
Haringey	0	0
Harrow	1	2
Havering	1	0
Hillingdon	0	0
Hounslow	3	0
Islington	0	0
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea	2	1
Kingston-upon-Thames	0	0
Lambeth	2	2
Lewisham	2	0
Merton	1	1
Newham	0	1
Redbridge	0	0
Richmond-upon-Thames	2	0
Southwark	1	0
Sutton	3	0
Tower Hamlets	0	0
Wandsworth	2	1
Westminster	1	0
Waltham	0	0
No response	0	1
N=	28	11

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Table E4. How respondents heard about the programme

	Number of participants	Number of coaches
Through a manager or colleague	14	1
Communication from GLA	0	1
Communication from NDNA	6	8
Through the Local Authority	10	4
N=	28	11

More than one answer could be given

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Responses from participants

Table E5. Changes experienced by participants during the programme

	Yes	No	No response
Change of coach	10	17	1
Change of triad	8	18	1
N= 28			

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Table E6. Participants' views on the elements of the programme

	Very helpful	Quite helpful	Not very helpful	Not at all helpful	Not attended/ used	No response
1:1 sessions with your coach	21	5	1	0	0	1
Triad meetings with other participants	14	10	1	0	1	2
Termly network meetings run by NDNA	16	8	1	0	2	1
Resources on the Early Years Development Zone	14	9	1	0	3	1
Business recovery webinars run by NDNA (in Summer 2020)	15	8	0	0	4	1
N= 28						

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Table E7. Ease with which participants attended face-to-face sessions

	Very easy	Easy	Neither easy nor difficult	Difficult	Very difficult	No response
1:1 sessions with your coach	17	7	2	1	0	1
Triad meetings with other participants	11	8	4	3	1	1
Termly network meetings run by NDNA	7	14	3	2	1	1
N= 28						

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Table E8. Participants' experience of the programme

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
My manager/setting has been supportive of my involvement in the Early Years Leaders Programme	16	6	4	0	0	2
My coach has been effective in helping me to develop goals and objectives	22	4	1	0	0	1
My coach has been effective in supporting me to achieve my goals	20	4	2	1	0	1
The programme has encouraged me to review my day-to-day work	17	8	2	0	0	1
I have been able to make the relevant changes in my setting to achieve my development goals	14	9	3	1	0	1
The programme has helped support me during the COVID-19 crisis	11	8	8	0	0	1
N= 28						

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Table E9. Impact of the programme on participants

<i>As a result of my participation in the programme...</i>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
I am a more effective leader and manager	9	16	1	0	0	2
I have learnt new management and leadership skills to help me in my role	15	9	2	0	0	2
I am more confident in my role as an early years leader	11	12	3	0	0	2
I have been able to influence change within my setting	10	14	2	0	0	2
I have made improvements to the provision/practice in my setting	8	17	1	0	0	2
I have a clearer idea of how I can progress in my role/career	13	10	2	1	0	2
I would like to progress to a more senior leadership role	10	11	5	0	0	2
I have been more effective in supporting my colleagues	9	16	1	0	0	2
I have developed new partnerships with others working in the early years sector	7	11	6	2	0	2
I feel that I have developed my own coaching skills	6	14	5	1	0	2
I plan to coach colleagues in my own setting in the future	7	13	5	0	0	3
N= 28						

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Table E10. Participants' views on whether they would recommend the programme to a colleague

	Number of participants
Yes	23
No	0
Not sure	4
No response	1
N=	28

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Responses from coaches

Table E11. Changes experienced by coaches during the programme

	Yes	No	No response
Change of participant(s)	9	2	0
Change of triad participants	8	2	1
N= 11			

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Table E12. Coaches' views on the extent of support they received

	Number of coaches
Yes, I felt well-supported and did not need any further support	10
Yes, I felt well-supported, but would have liked more support	0
No, I did not have enough support	0
Not sure	1
N= 11	

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Table E13. Coaches' views on the support they received

	Very helpful	Quite helpful	Not very helpful	Not at all helpful	Not attended/used	No response
Two-day training at the start of the programme	9	2	0	0	0	0
Termly coach reflection sessions	5	1	1	0	0	0
Termly network meetings	3	6	1	0	1	0
Resources on the Early Years Development Zone	6	3	1	0	1	0
Ongoing support and feedback from NDNA	6	4	0	0	1	1
Business recovery webinars run by NDNA (in Summer 2020)	2	6	2	0	0	1
N= 11						

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Table E14. Impact of the programme on coaches

<i>As a result of my participation in the programme...</i>	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	No response
I am a more effective leader and manager	5	3	2	0	0	1
I have learnt new coaching skills and techniques	9	1	0	0	0	1
I have developed new partnerships with others working in the early years sector	4	4	2	0	0	1
I have made improvements to the provision in my own setting	5	3	1	1	0	1
I am coaching colleagues in my own setting and/or plan to in the future	7	2	1	0	0	1
N= 11						

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020

Table E15. Coaches' views on whether they would recommend the programme to a colleague

	Number of coaches
Yes	9
No	0
Not sure	2
No response	0
N=	11

Source: Survey of participants and coaches, Early Years Leaders Programme, 2020