

MOBLISE



Lessons learned about translating evidence into policy



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LESSONS ABOUT TRANSLATING EVIDENCE INTO POLICY: THE STORY ON A PAGE

The Centre for Research on Play in Education, Development and Learning (PEDAL) is a multidisciplinary research centre at the University of Cambridge. We conduct research into early childhood, and we support policymakers and practitioners in their work to improve children's lives and life chances.

We wanted to overcome the widely reported "gap" between academia and policy. Therefore, we developed and tested a new programme – Mobilise – which aimed to teach policymakers about early childhood development and to support them to use that knowledge to achieve impactful, evidence-based change in their work. This report describes how we developed the programme, what it looked like, and findings from a formative evaluation.

This report is for anyone interested in improving collaboration between academics and policymakers. We draw out transferable learning from this project, which we believe is useful for anyone working to close the gap between evidence and policy on a range of social policy issues.

Mobilise embodied a paradigm shift; in delivering the programme, we moved from focussing on sharing the findings of our latest studies, to convening and curating information from different sources to support policymakers in their work. The programme did not fit into a neat box – it blended aspects of training, networking, action learning and consultancy support. Our focus was on knowledge mobilisation – not just telling people what we know but supporting the application of that knowledge.

This evaluation suggests that Mobilise worked: It was enjoyable and engaging for the policy actors involved. Importantly, participants and their colleagues report that it had a positive impact and led to improvements in knowledge, capabilities, motivation and networks, in ways that are supporting policy development and implementation. In the short timescale for this evaluation, we could not measure if the benefits of the programme were sustained or the impact it had for children.

We identified these transferable lessons for other academics looking to influence policy:

- **Start with policymakers' needs:** Before planning any engagement, understand what policymakers are currently working on and what they need to know to help them with current issues and priorities.
- **Target changemakers:** Identify the people within and across the system who have the opportunity and appetite to use evidence in the months and years ahead.
- **Invest in relationships:** Build trust and mutual understanding as the foundations for meaningful conversations now, and so that policymakers can call on your support when opportunities arise in future.
- **Value informal connections:** Face-to-face meetings and informal conversations often lead to the most meaningful exchanges and insights.
- **Use a range of learning activities to support action:** Share information in different ways to accommodate different styles, preferences and time constraints, but keep a focus on what will support policymakers in their work.
- **Be playful:** Design activities that are joyful, socially interactive, engaging, iterative and meaningful.
- **Convene a range of evidence:** Your research is just one piece of the puzzle. As an expert, you have a wealth of other knowledge that is also useful to policymakers. Consider if you can share other relevant research or other sources of information such as insights from families and professionals.
- **Think long-term:** Recognise the limitations of piecemeal activities (e.g. events about specific studies). Ideally, incorporate these into a longer term programme of work to help policymakers to develop and utilise a broad and deep understanding of the evidence.

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INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Research on Play in Education, Development and Learning (PEDAL) is a multidisciplinary research centre at the University of Cambridge. We conduct world-leading research into early childhood.

We believe that knowledge about how children develop, how they learn, how they experience the world, and what promotes healthy development, is valuable in its own right. We also believe that it is a vital tool for parents, practitioners and policymakers who are working to make children's lives better.

Pregnancy and early childhood are an age of opportunity, when we can transform children's lives and life chances. What happens during this period matters for children and families now, and it lays the foundations for lifelong learning, health and wellbeing with pervasive consequences for individual children, society and the economy for years to come^{1,2,3}.

Early childhood is a period of rapid growth, when children's development is shaped by their interactions, environment, and experiences. Nurturing relationships are critically important, as are stimulating learning experiences, safe environments, opportunities to play, and access to nutrition, healthcare and decent housing. The interactions and environments that shape children's development are, in turn, shaped by government policies.

Because government policy plays a vital role in shaping children's lives, we want to support policymakers to ensure that their work is informed by the best evidence. We believe that if policymakers have a good understanding of early childhood development, they will be better able to find innovative and evidence-based solutions to pressing policy challenges.

Many academics share their work with policymakers, but this often does not result in policy change. To understand how we might have a positive impact on policy, we interrogated the evidence about the gap between research and policy and learned from promising approaches to close that gap. Using this learning, we developed a programme to support policymakers to understand and use evidence on early childhood. This programme was called Mobilise. In this report we describe the programme and what we learned about how academics can work with policymakers to put evidence into action.

- **Section 2: The Challenge**

explains why we needed a paradigm shift in how we think about evidence dissemination.

- **Section 3: The Programme**

describes the evidence and values that informed the Mobilise programme, and what the programme involved.

- **Section 4: The Evaluation**

describes how we evaluated the programme.

- **Sections 5–8: The Findings**

summarise what we learned about what worked in the programme, and what could be better. We share findings about participants' experiences of Mobilise and its impact on their work, and about the benefits of the programme for academics.

- **Section 9: The Learning**

sets out key lessons from this project which may be useful to others working to support evidence-based policy making.



THE CHALLENGE: WHY WE NEED A PARADIGM SHIFT IN HOW WE THINK ABOUT EVIDENCE DISSEMINATION

It is widely recognised that there is a gap between evidence and policy. We recognise that government policy will not always implement what our evidence suggests is best for children. Policymakers must balance a wide range of pragmatic and political factors when making decisions. However, we would hope that policymakers know and understand the evidence and are able to use it to inform the policy making process. In this section, we discuss the reasons why it can make it hard for academics^a and policymakers to collaborate and ensure that policy is informed by the best evidence.

Challenges in the academic system

Nationally, there have been several efforts to incentivise academics to ensure research has an impact beyond academia. Since 2014, the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF), which reviews the quality of research in universities, has included the impact of research in its assessments, defined as: "*the effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life beyond academia.*" Similarly, the Times Higher Education includes impact in its university rankings rating system⁴.

At an institutional and individual level, however, there are challenges that make it harder for academics to have an impact on policy. These challenges mean that, while some academics make meaningful contributions to public policy, this tends to be because of individual factors such as personal motivation, values, previous experiences and individual capacities⁵. For many academics, sustained and effective impact work is often a "pro bono" activity that happens despite, rather than because of, the way that universities and research funders operate.

a. In this report, we use the word academics to describe researchers working in universities, and our focus is on the UK.

Factors that make it harder for academics to engage with policymakers

SKILLS AND UNDERSTANDING: Working with policymakers and influencing policy requires different skills, insights and expertise to academic research and teaching.

CAPACITY: Academics tend to be very busy. Teaching and research work often fully account for their time, so they do not have time to invest in policy engagement.

FUNDING: Traditional research funding often only includes limited funding for impact. A research grant might include funding for communicating the findings of specific studies at the end of a project, but not for longer term more meaningful engagement to build understanding of a body of work.

PERFORMANCE MEASURES: Funders tend to measure outputs linked to specific studies which can be delivered in limited timescales and clearly quantified, such as publishing in peer-reviewed journals and presenting at conferences. Impacts on policy take longer and can be harder to measure and attribute.

VALUE: Across most academic institutions, value is derived mainly from the "*productivity, prolificacy, status and reputation of the academic as researcher.*"⁶ Policy engagement activities are undervalued or may even be seen negatively if they are perceived to interfere with the pursuit of teaching and research excellence.

INCENTIVES AND PROGRESSION: Policy engagement and wider impact work is rarely recognised and rewarded in academic career progression which is primarily based on measures of teaching and research, such as peer-reviewed publications and grant funding^{7,8}.

TIMESCALES: Academic timescales also don't align with policymakers' timelines. It can take years to conduct a study and to get it published^{b,9}, whereas policymakers often need information quickly because decisions must be made and implemented quickly to deliver within political cycles.

Given these constraints, it is not realistic to expect academics to effectively support policymakers to mobilise evidence, without changes in how universities work to both resource and value meaningful knowledge mobilisation activities.

PEDAL has had funding from the LEGO Foundation which has enabled us to employ a Senior Policy Fellow with experience working in government and public services, and to have dedicated programme funding for meaningful, longer term work with policymakers. This sort of funding has helped us to overcome the constraints listed above. 'In-house' resource of this kind is rare, but there are intermediary organisations, such as the What Works centres, which exist to bridge the divide between academia, policy and practice, and we have also worked successfully with these organisations in the past.

Challenges in government

In recent decades, there has been a commitment to increased evidence-based policy in UK governments¹⁰. However, several factors make it harder for civil servants working on policy to engage with, understand and utilise evidence.

Government policy is made and enacted by a number of different actors across national and local systems. In national government, policy decisions are ultimately made by Ministers, who are advised and influenced by a range of advisors, politicians and civil servants. To influence policy, we should look to influence all these stakeholders. For this programme, we focused our attention mainly on

civil servants – those who advise Ministers and enact their decisions. In the rest of this report, the word “policymakers” tends to be synonymous with civil servants although we recognise they are only a subset of those who shape and enact government policy.

Knowledge and skills

In the UK, civil servants often move around policy areas and come to post without deep expertise in the specific areas of policy they work on and the underpinning science. UK civil servants are generally expected to be generalists – able to work across a broad range of policy areas, and regularly moving between them. Therefore, skills development and training activities tend to focus on the generic skills required to perform a broad function, such as policy development¹¹, not on enhancing understanding relating to an area of public service delivery, such as child development or education. Paired with this, a long period of workforce cuts over the past decade followed by a rapid increase in new hires over the pandemic has led, in some places, to institutional knowledge gaps around specific policy areas and the research relating to them¹².

There are also cultural and organisational barriers to the knowledge development opportunities in the civil service¹³. Despite recognised skills gaps in the civil service, training tends to be seen as a 'nice to have'. Training budgets have been cut and when training does happen it can lack practical applications or value in people's work^{14,15}.

Opportunity barriers

Civil servants can be under pressure to provide advice quickly in response to emerging issues or to fit with short political or financial timescales. The complexity of the issues that civil servants must consider can also mean that it would be impossible for them to review and consider all the available information that they could use to make decisions in any situation, but particularly in the fast-paced environments in which they operate^{16,17}.

High-quality research is often not available in ways that are easy for policymakers to access, assimilate and understand. The evidence about any policy topic is often distributed across many research papers, which are written for an academic audience and often sit behind paywalls. It can also be difficult for civil servants to interrogate and navigate issues where there is contradictory evidence.

b. The average time for a journal to publish an academic paper is 163 days, with 137 days between submission and acceptance. This means that even if papers are accepted first time, it is five months until they are published.



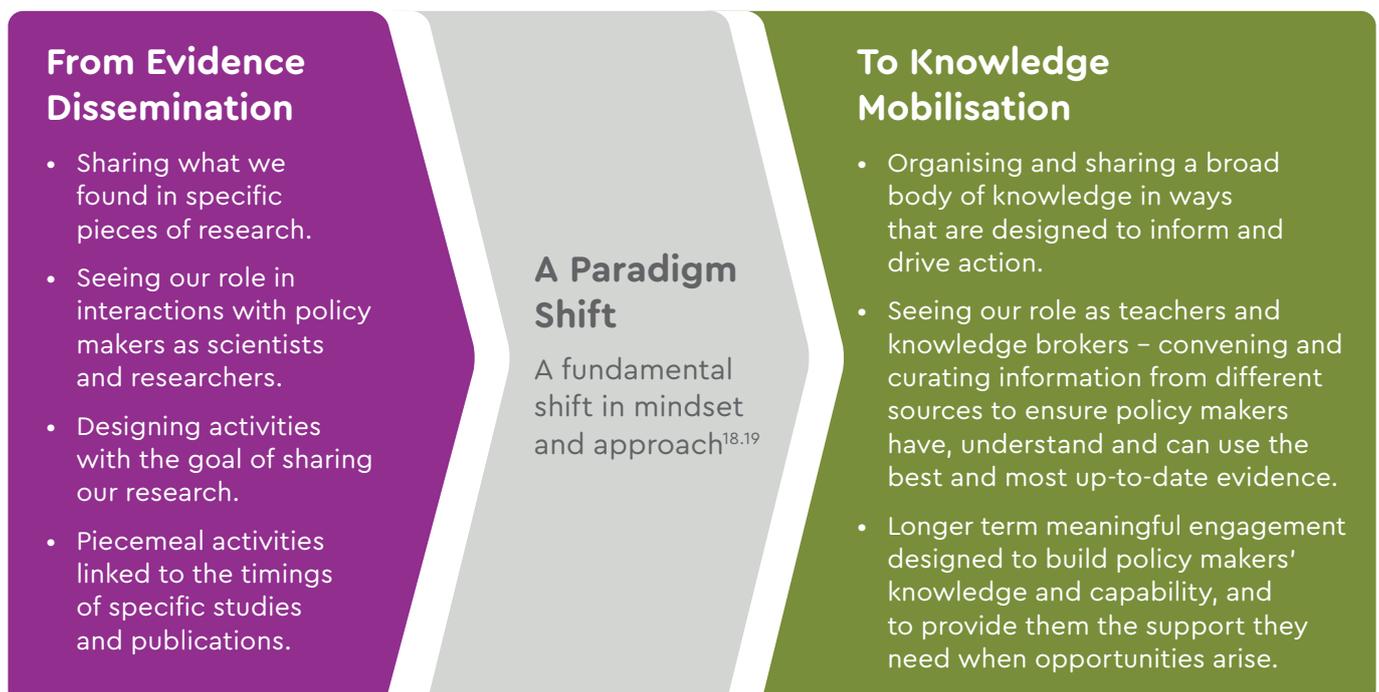
Specific challenges in evidence-based practice in early childhood

In the evaluation of the Mobilise programme, we asked participants about what makes it difficult for them to make deliver evidence-based policy for children. They highlighted the following themes:

 <p>Resource constraints</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited resources/budget constraints
 <p>Political and systemic challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electoral cycles do not allow for long-term thinking Lack of collaboration across government/public agencies High levels of pressure on the system
 <p>Values and awareness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A lack of emphasis on prevention Lack of awareness of the importance of early childhood
 <p>Evidence issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulties accessing evidence on specific issues Parents and families' voices not being heard. Lack of evidence-based interventions that are scalable and can be delivered at pace
 <p>Individual challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of skills and knowledge in the workforce to make/advocate for evidence-based approaches

A paradigm shift in engagement with policy makers

The traditional approach to academic engagement with policymakers focusses on the dissemination of specific research findings. This often means just sharing specific pieces of evidence and hoping that people will use it. It is clear this approach is not fit for purpose if we want to ensure evidence can inform policy. We need a fundamental change in how we think about and approach engagement with policymakers:



THE MOBILISE PROGRAMME: THE PROGRAMME AND THE VALUES THAT UNDERPIN IT

Developing an evidence-informed programme

In developing the Mobilise programme, our goal was to develop a model which could be used to improve policymakers' understanding of the evidence about early childhood development, and to work with them to mobilise this knowledge to address policy issues. We wanted to apply the same rigour and evidence-informed approach to developing this programme as we would to developing interventions for children and families.

We began by reading the literature about knowledge mobilisation and policy engagement activities and talking to a range of people around the world who had done similar work^c. We also learned and reflected on the characteristics of effective learning and development activities which translate into changes in behaviour.



c. We read about and spoke to people involved in the: Kings College London's "policy labs"; What Works Centres; Cambridge's Centre for Science and Policy; Government's Delivery Unit and Policy Labs; MMHA's Mums and Babies In Mind Leaders' Programme; Harvard and Bernard Van Leer's Executive Programme on leading and scaling early childhood programmes; the Executive Leadership Program on Early Childhood Development led by Harvard's Centre for the Developing Child in Brazil.

The table below captures the key lessons that we took from this preparation.

Lesson Learned	Implication for this programme
<p>Policy is made and delivered in complex systems</p> <p>Many people and groups are involved in the development and implementation of policy, and they are spread across multi-level and fragmented systems²⁰. This includes politicians and civil servants in different parts of national government through to service managers and practitioners²¹ whose decisions influence how policy translates to practice.</p>	<p>To have maximum impact we should collaborate with people across and down through the system</p> <p>We should bring together policy actors from different parts of government and other levels of the system. Different policy actors from across the system will have different opportunities to implement change, and there might be multiplier effects from driving change across different levels of the system at the same time. By convening people from across the system we might catalyse joined-up working.</p>
<p>Change does not happen only through sharing evidence; we must build trusting relationships first</p> <p>Simply sharing evidence does not drive change²². Trusted relationships are key to gaining influence. Relationships enable us to understand and respond to policymakers' contexts, motivations and needs so that we can provide useful information and support. Building trust is key to ensuring information is well-received.</p>	<p>We should be relational in our work</p> <p>We should invest in the relationships between policymakers and academics. This includes investing in face-to-face activities which provide opportunities for relationship building and more meaningful conversations.</p>
<p>Didactic interactions do not result in high quality learning and behaviour change</p> <p>People learn best when learning is sociable, interactive and fun, and there are opportunities for them to reflect and apply their learning.</p>	<p>We should make the programme interactive and varied</p> <p>Learning activities should be interactive, sociable, meaningful and memorable. We should mix theoretical and practical content and allow opportunities for reflection, processing and meaning-making.</p>
<p>Sharing evidence alone is not enough</p> <p>Behaviour change results not only from sharing evidence, but also from contributing to people's capacity, opportunity and motivation to put learning into practice. Sometimes evidence does not prescribe a particular action, so we need to help people to think through what it means for them and what evidence-informed actions they might take.</p>	<p>We should make the programme action focussed</p> <p>Alongside sharing evidence, we should help to build participants' capacities to drive change and to put learning into action. We should recruit participants who are keen to be "changemakers" in their systems. We should help participants to share learning and build support within their organisations to put evidence into action.</p>

Lesson Learned	Implication for this programme
<p>Change rarely happens through isolated events or communications</p> <p>Telling someone something once rarely changes their behaviour. Repeated engagement builds trust and deepens knowledge and understanding.</p> <p>There is often no single moment in which we can influence a policy decision. If we build relationships and shared understanding, then it is more likely that evidence will be deployed when opportunities arise.</p>	<p>We should engage in different interactive and iterative ways over a prolonged period</p> <p>We should create multiple “touch points”, engaging with policymakers repeatedly over a prolonged period to embed learning and allow reflection and application. We should build relationships so policymakers can call on us to share knowledge as opportunities arise.</p>
<p>Information must be tailored to needs</p> <p>There is too much information about any issue for policymakers to process within the timescales they work to²³. Ongoing relationships and shared understanding are important to enable us to marshal, tailor and translate evidence in a way that meets their needs.</p>	<p>We should tailor our approach with our participants</p> <p>We should co-design the content of our programme with policymakers so that it responds to their needs and is relevant to their work. We should continue to adapt to changes in circumstances and opportunities.</p>
<p>We need a broad understanding of evidence-based policy</p> <p>Discussions can narrow too closely on “evidence-based programmes” and the findings of randomised controlled trials, but this is only part of the evidence that is useful to policymakers when making decisions. Policymakers need to understand about children, and what outcomes and experiences matter for children. They need to understand what works in driving these outcomes, and how to implement change.</p> <p>Research provides only one form of evidence: insights from communities and the expertise of professionals are other important forms of knowledge that can support evidence-informed policy making.</p>	<p>We should curate a range of evidence about early childhood development, what works and how to make the case and implement change</p> <p>We will draw together a wide range of evidence, including professional expertise and families voices as well as research evidence^d recognising that combining these different sources of information will help policymakers to find solutions that best meet the needs of the children and communities they care about.</p> <p>We will begin the programme by building shared understanding of development in early childhood, as an important foundation to help policymakers to understand children and make sense of other evidence about programmes and policies.</p>

We also learned that quality of delivery of any engagement activity really matters. We heard about the importance of planning and attention to detail. If we ensure events work well, we can build credibility and trust, and enable participants to focus on the content. Activities needed to be attractive and rewarding to attend. We were told not only to think about the quality of our content, but also of venues, accommodation and food. This helped us to make the case for things that might otherwise see as an indulgence, such as dinners in Cambridge colleges when participants joined us for overnight stays.

d. In this programme, we drew on Foundations' "Evidence Wheel" and Research in Practice's conceptualisation of what constitutes evidence. Both advocate for a broad understanding of evidence, which includes research findings, local data, insights from children, families and communities, and professional expertise.

THE VALUES UNDERPINNING MOBILISE

Based on our learning and the principles that guide our work, we identified seven core values which underpinned the Mobilise programme.

Co-produced



Content is designed with participants, with a focus on what will help them to drive change.

Child-focused



A focus on children and their development allows different policy actors to see synergies between their work and to find new opportunities. There are meaningful opportunities to observe, engage with and learn from children throughout the programme.

Evidence-based



Participants learn about, discuss and reflect on up-to-date evidence about early childhood development, drawing on a range of sources.

Action-focused



At every stage of the programme, from recruitment onwards, we are focussed on how evidence will be applied in policy making. Recruitment focuses on finding those with internal capacity and external opportunity to drive change.

Action learning runs throughout the programme as participants are supported to continually apply their learning and to deliver change for children.

Interactive



The programme is delivered through a range of high-quality face-to-face and online interactive and engaging learning experiences. Learning experiences harness the core components of playful learning: They are joyful, socially interactive, actively engaging, iterative and meaningful. Activities are designed to support learning, reflection, innovation and relationship building.

System-wide



Participants are a diverse cohort of policy actors from different government departments, different regions and nations of the UK, and different levels of the system. They bring different perspectives from across the system to deepen understanding of issues, opportunities, challenges and solutions. Participants have opportunities to apply learning in different ways.

Relational



Participants are supported to develop trusting relationships, to learn from and with each other. We create a safe space where participants can reflect together to test and deepen their understanding and can share challenges with the group. We build relationships with the group to support knowledge mobilisation now and in the future.

What the programme looked like in practice

Mobilise was six-month long programme supporting policymakers and implementers to learn about early childhood, and to use that knowledge to achieve impactful, evidence-based change in their work.

The programme consisted of a range of carefully curated activities to support participants to learn from and with each other, from evidence and from children, and to use this learning in their work.

The model was an unusual one: as one advisor described, it was "*part training course, part support group, part mentoring opportunity, part network.*" It was a holistic approach to building understanding, capacity, motivation and opportunity to make and deliver evidence-informed policy for children.

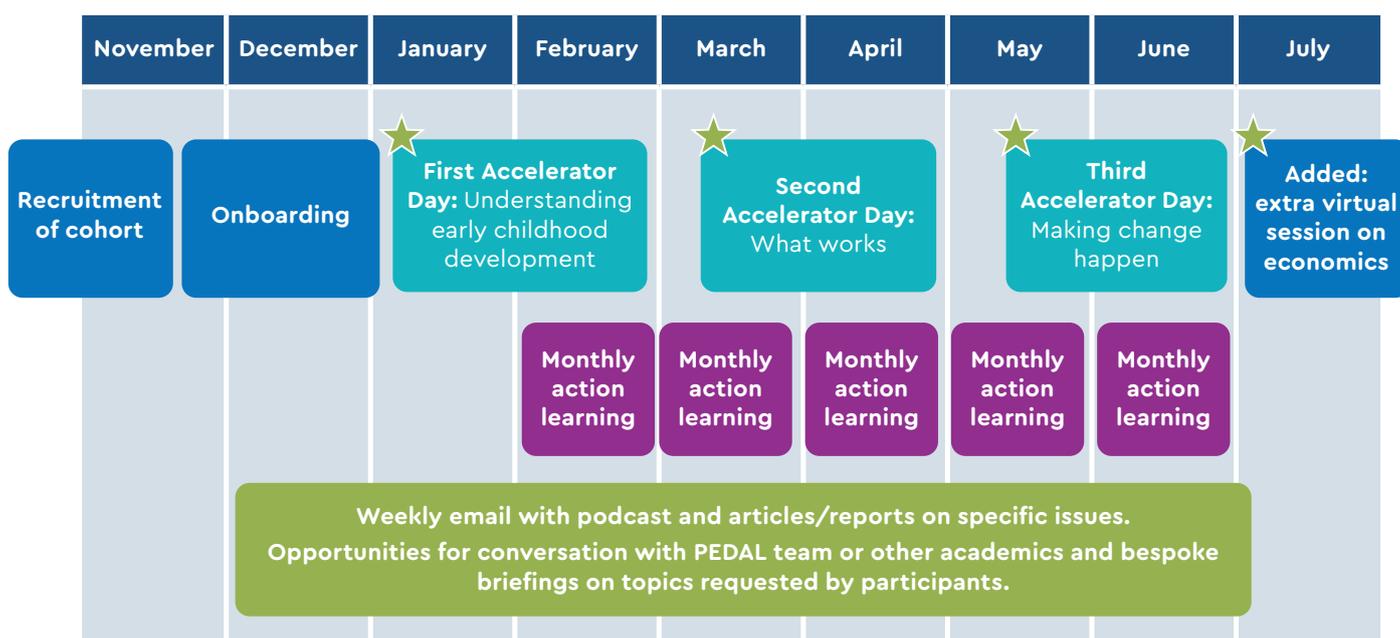
The elements of the programme

Mobilise consisted of a diverse range of learning opportunities. The most intensive elements of the programme were three face-to-face "accelerator days" in Cambridge. In addition, the programme also consisted of:

- A welcome pack including a journal and guidance on journaling to support their learning.
- Action learning sets of around five people each, which met virtually each month.
- A weekly email on a specific topic relating to early childhood development, containing a link to a podcast and a range of accessible resources^e. The list of topics covered is in **Annex A**.
- Access to an online platform (Moodle) where all programme resources were stored.

During the programme, participants had the opportunity to ask for bespoke help, including introductions to academics with specific expertise, and help navigating the evidence on particular issues.

The programme content began with a focus on early childhood development, it then progressed to covering "what works" in programmes and services, and then how to make the case for action and deliver change. Spreading the programme over six months allowed time for relationships to be built across the cohort and with the PEDAL team, and for participants to absorb and build on their learning.



e. We curated podcasts, videos and written resources from a range of sources. These were not academic papers, but more accessible and digestible summaries of the evidence.



Co-design and evolution of the programme

We were committed to co-design to ensure the programme was as relevant and useful as possible. At the start of the programme, we had devised the skeleton structure for Mobilise and the core curriculum on early childhood development for the first accelerator day. The specific speakers and topics for the accelerator days and the topics for the weekly emails were chosen through a co-design activity with participants on the first day together.

The programme content and delivery evolved over the six months based on our own reflections on what participants needed and their feedback. For example, we:

- Added an extra virtual learning session with Dr Sarah Cattan on the economics of early childhood development after participants expressed a need for more information on this topic.
- Created our own podcast mini-series with politicians and leaders to capture real experiences of the challenges and opportunities of making evidence-informed policy for children in the UK.
- Established a WhatsApp group to share podcast links so they were easier for attendees to access during daily life.
- Changed how we ran the action learning sets, moving from a more formal Action Learning Set approach^f to a broader, facilitated discussion.

The accelerator days

The face-to-face days were called “accelerator days” due to their immersive and intensive nature, designed to accelerate learning and facilitate new insights. Across the days there were:

- Presentations from academics about early childhood development and promising interventions.
- Presentations and informal conversations with national and local system leaders.
- Presentations from experts in aspects of “making the case” and delivering change.
- Visits to spend time with, speak to and observe babies, young children and their families.
- Small-group discussions with local leaders and skilled professionals. We used free-flowing small discussions, alongside or instead of presentations, to enable participants to gain broader insights from these sessions and to ask questions relevant to their work.
- Activities and time to reflect, process, discuss learning and think about action.
- Dinners and overnight stays, to enable participants to build relationships and immerse themselves in the Cambridge environment.

f. The more formal Action Learning Set approach that we used at first involved participants bringing an issue to the group which was the focus of a 30-minute discussion where other participants asked coaching questions.

The boxes below shows some of the content in the programme. These presentations and visits were interspersed with discussions, interactive activities, time to reflect and connect, and other playful activities. The programme coordinator, Sally Hogg, also gave presentations at the start and end of each day to help draw together key themes to help participants to consider how they put evidence into action. Although the programme was based in Cambridge, we invited speakers from other universities and practitioners from other regions.

Academic talks



- The value of play (Prof Paul Ramchandani)
- Self-regulation and executive function (Prof Sara Baker):
- Emotional development (Dr Christine O'Farrelly):
- Communication and language development (Prof Jenny Gibson):
- Social development (Dr Elian Fink):
- Video interaction feedback interventions (Dr Beth Barker):
- Empowering parents to foster children's executive function development (Dr Alex Hendry)
- The benefits of book sharing (Natalie Kirby and Prof Paul Ramchandani)

Time with children and families

- Time playing with and observing two and three-year-olds in local nursery schools.
- Time observing and talking to parents at either library rhyme time or through the Red Hen Project at North Cambridge Children and Family Centre.



Discussions with practitioners and system leaders

- Roundtable discussions with three practitioners: Sarah Carter, a health visitor, Dr Lisa Marsland, a parent-infant psychologist and Michelle Deans, a charity leader. These speakers were selected from areas with high disadvantage across the country and represented universal, targeted and specialised services focussed on supporting parent-child interactions in early childhood.
- Presentations and roundtable discussions about system change with local leaders: Clare Law from Better Start Blackpool and Aida Cable from Thrive at Five.



Presentations about making the case and delivering results

- Delivery Lessons (a presentation drawing on the work of Michael Barber and the Prime Ministers' Delivery Unit, Simon Day, ISOS Partnership)
- Communicating About Early Childhood to Build Understanding and Support (Kate Stanley, Frameworks)
- Working with Treasury (discussion with Nick Donlevy, Director of Public Spending, HMT).



The cohort

The cohort was 15 people, which we believed was the right size to balance diversity and intimacy. For this pilot programme, we decided to focus on civil servants, but we also opened the programme up to other “policy actors” such as local authority, voluntary sector and public service leaders. We believe that the programme format could have worked well for other groups of policy actors, such as local authority officers or politicians.

In our recruitment decisions we strived to get representation from different policy areas and across the UK. We wanted to bring together people from national, regional and local systems with different perspectives and insights. We also hoped this would facilitate ongoing joint working, overcoming widely recognised challenges about siloed and unconnected work across the civil service^{24,25}.

In this pilot we were learning about the optimal make-up of the cohort. We were concerned, for example, that while local system leaders might bring valuable insights to civil servants, they might not get as much out of a programme that was dominated by policymakers.

The UK Departments for Education, Health and Social Care, and Communities selected their own participants for the programme and were allocated seven places between them. We ran a competitive process for the other eight participants. Potential participants had to complete an application explaining how they demonstrated a commitment to the core values of the programme and assessing their internal and external abilities to drive change. 19 people applied for these places. Decisions on the final participants were based on scoring their applications and balancing the diversity of the cohort.



When recruiting for the programme, we were looking for “change makers” – people who would be able to mobilise evidence to drive change for children.

We did not focus on job roles or seniority, although participants had to be sufficiently senior to influence significant decisions. We looked for people with specific internal characteristics and external opportunities:

- **Internal characteristics**

Someone with the characteristics required to drive change, and a track record of taking action to solve social problems. We looked for motivation, tenacity, the ability to influence others, curiosity, creativity and resourcefulness.

- **External opportunities**

Someone working in a role which gives them an opportunity to make change for babies and young children in the year ahead. We looked for the mandate and opportunity to influence relevant policy and delivery decisions.

Our funding from the LEGO Foundation enabled us to cover the cost of programme delivery, accommodation and food for participants. We asked participants to pay for their own travel, partly because we felt this would ensure some “buy-in” from their organisations. We had a discretionary fund to help address any barriers to participation which could cover travel costs if appropriate.

Importantly, at the time of application, we asked for line managers to commit to funding travel, to supporting their colleagues' attendance, and to enabling their colleagues to put their learning into action. This was done following advice from other programmes about the importance of senior buy-in, and we believe it proved vital in ensuring our participants could commit to the programme, even when travel budgets became restricted and there were other pressures on their time.

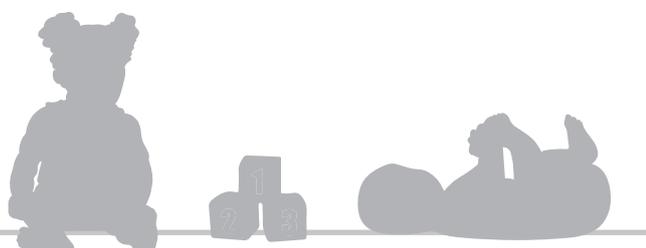


The roles of the cohort at the start of the programme are shown below^g.

Job role	Organisation ^h
Senior Policy Lead: Parenting (Family Hubs)	Department for Education
Policy Lead: Supporting Families Programme	Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
Senior Policy Advisor, Supporting Families Programme	Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
Head of School Age Children and Young People	Office of Health Improvement & Disparities, DHSC
Head of Health Improvement	Office of Health Improvement & Disparities, DHSC
Nurse Consultant, Chief Public Health Nurse Directorate	Office of Health Improvement and Disparities, DHSC
Head of Start for Life Policy	Department of Health and Social Care
Head of Children & YP Improvement Collaborative and Early Child Development Transformation Programme Lead	Scottish Government
Team Leader, Perinatal and Early Years Mental Health	Scottish Government
Deputy Director, Improving Health and Wellbeing, Directorate for Children and Families	Scottish Government
Public Health Consultant	Public Health Wales
Sure Start Lead	Department of Health, Northern Ireland
Head Teacher	Nursery School, Bristol
Consultant in Public Health (Babies, Children & Young People)	London Borough of Barking and Dagenham
CEO	Home-Start Oxford

g. Some changed during the programme, for example the Supporting Families team moved into DfE.

h. Departments are in the UK Government unless otherwise stated.



THE EVALUATION: HOW DID WE LEARN ABOUT THE PROGRAMME?

We undertook a formative evaluation to understand how Mobilise worked, and to capture transferable lessons for others wanting to mobilise evidence and bridge the gap between academia and policy.

We knew it would not be possible within the timescale or scale of the evaluation to capture the impact of the programme on children, or to attribute that impact to Mobilise. However, we did develop a theory of change which described how we believed the programme would influence children's lives, and this enabled us to investigate whether the programme influenced outcomes that might lead to this. A revised version of this theory of change can be seen in Section 7 of this report.

The theory of change for the programme was informed by the COM-B model, a behaviour change model which describes three necessary components for successful and sustained behaviour change²⁶:

- **Capability**

Refers to an individual's knowledge, skills and abilities such as their knowledge of early childhood development, skills in eliciting and using evidence, and ability to deliver policy change.

- **Opportunity**

Refers to external factors which make a behaviour possible or prompt it, such as time, resource, power, support.

- **Motivation**

Refers to the conscious and unconscious energy and desire to drive evidence-informed policy change.



The evaluation consisted of a range of qualitative and quantitative measures, and pragmatic and opportunistic data collection, described in the diagram below. The evaluation was designed to learn about:

- What parts of the programme participants did and did not enjoy and engage with.
- If participants felt their understanding of early childhood development improved.
- If Mobilise helped to participants to overcome any of the challenges that make it harder to develop evidence-based policy.
- If there was a change in participants' morale and motivation to drive change.
- If participants made new relationships that might support future learning and collaboration.
- If participants used their learning, and if new insights and ideas influenced decisions or actions.

In sections 5–8 we describe key findings from the evaluation, illustrated by some statistics and quotes which provide additional detail and depth. **Annex E** also contains additional information on participants' and line managers' goals for the programme and whether these were achieved.



Programme activity	Recruitment	Onboarding	During the programme	After completion
Evaluation activity	Data on number and demographics of applicants	Baseline survey of participants, their manager and a colleague capturing baseline knowledge, perceived ability to make change, and goals for the programme	Attendance at each day and at action learning sets Feedback survey collecting qual and quant feedback on each day to capture engagement, enjoyment and perceived value Download/views of materials	Final survey for participants, managers and colleagues, capturing feedback on the experience, changes in knowledge and motivation, and impact on action
Taking notes and capturing emails/messages to support learning, including examples of strengths/weaknesses of the programme, and stories that show participants engagement and use of the programme.				

THE FINDINGS: WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT PROGRAMME DESIGN?

What we learned about the cohort

Diversity across the system

In the feedback, participants commented on how much they appreciated the diversity of the cohort and how much they learned from each other. Civil servants got a lot out of meeting counterparts from different nations. Some told us they would appreciate even more diversity.

"An excellent opportunity to be given access to a range of excellent resources, evidence and practice and to network with a range of other professionals in the PEDAL team and the programme participants from other nations."

Participant, Final Survey

"Cohort is great that its drawing from so many areas of national government. Would welcome more LA + frontline staff involved too."

Participant, January Accelerator Feedback Form

We worried that the three participants who did not have national roles might not benefit as much from the programme or might not feel as connected with the wider group, who were mostly civil servants. However, their feedback was hugely positive, and the evaluation captured how valuable it was for them to have greater insights they had into the policy-making process.

"... There is often a huge disconnect between policymakers and funding from central government and the realities on the ground for those who are trying to provide a high quality of early years education to children (not just childcare!). This course provided [Name] with an opportunity to meet and discuss with people who do have the power and position to influence the national landscape which has a direct bearing on his day-to-day work. It has given him connections at this level, shown that he can add value to the discourse at national level and thereby have some impact in the longer term on the condition in which maintained nursery schools have to work."

Line Manager, Final Survey

Characteristics of the group

We collected information about the characteristics of the cohort to understand how representative they were of the wider policy making community^{i,27}. Our cohort was generally less diverse than the UK civil service according to gender, ethnicity, disability and religion (but not sexual orientation). 14/15 of the final cohort were female, and all our applicants – both successful and unsuccessful – identified as White. If we were to repeat the programme, we would want to increase this diversity within the cohort.



i. We compared the characteristics of our cohort with published characteristics of the UK civil service.

What we learned about activities

Programme design

Overall, participants enjoyed the programme and particularly valued the mix of activities, the varied nature of the content and the mix of voices involved in the programme.

"I think in terms of engagement it was spot on – really good balance of online and in-person stuff. The 6-month nature of it meant that you really had time to get into it..."

Participant, Final Survey

"Engaging, well thought through, content rich, imaginative, well-structured and delivered in a way that enabled engagement in a number of settings. It showed real understanding of how to support learning, particularly developing learning for people who already have some knowledge..."

Participant, Final Survey

"An excellent blend of learning about the theory of early childhood development, opportunities to see this theory in practice and talk to an amazing range of academics, practitioners, parents and children, coupled with learning from our diverse peer group, all incredibly well-organised and smoothly run (and with great food!)."

Participant, Final Survey

"... I loved that we had time to hear from academics, policymakers, babies, front line practitioners and others. We looked at the policy area from a range of different and important angles. It was a course that directly impacted how I think about and deliver my work."

Participant, Final Survey

"... It was all so relevant and approached the policy area through different lenses, starting with visits to babies. Other courses don't tend to show you so many different parts of the system and how they come together."

Participant, Final Survey

Several participants appreciated that the programme coordinator had experience working in policy and how the PEDAL team connected with the participants through the programme.

"I loved that it was led by Sal who is so uniquely placed to deliver a course like this for policymakers. She is intelligent, personable, well-networked and knows what policymakers need to know better than we might know ourselves given her cross-sector expertise."

Participant, Final Survey

"... How the programme was developed and delivered added to the experience with connection at the core. Sally and Brian did a wonderful job of staying in contact and really making everyone feel welcome and a valued part of the programme."

Participant, Final Survey

Participants also appreciated the responsive nature of the programme.

"... Also liked the responsive nature of the programme – exploring the areas I and other participants were grappling with."

Participant, Final Survey

"... One of the strengths of Mobilise was the real sense of gathering the groups requirement's and shaping a programme in response to those..."

Participant, Final Survey

Participants were very positive about the programme. When asked "How likely are you to recommend Mobilise to your colleagues?" On a scale of 0 to 10, all the participants gave a score of 10 (Most likely).

"I just wanted to say that this course has been exceptional. I have thoroughly enjoyed being on it and I'm incredibly sad it's over. I feel like if I did it all again, I would still take some much from it..."

Participant via email

"It's opened up a whole new world for me. It's taken my thinking and action to another strategic level. It's been energising and inspiring. I will be forever grateful in my career to have had this opportunity."

Participant, Final Survey



Accelerator days

Participants have very positive feedback about the accelerator days, and the evaluation measures showed that levels of enjoyment and engagement were high. This is described more in **Annex B**.

Academic Speakers

Presentations by academics were highly rated by our participants, with most participants rating all presentations as excellent or good. Participants welcomed the quality of the presentations and the way knowledge was synthesised by speakers. Those who did not rate the presentations as highly expressed a desire for more detail and more time for discussion.

"The clarity of presentations was really notable, lots of pieces of evidence that have been synthesised into something easy to use in our day-to-day work – I referenced the development of self-regulation slide in an email on the way home in relation to a question from an external policy lead."

Participant, January Accelerator Feedback Form

During the programme, we only had time for a small number of academic speakers. This meant that the disciplines represented were limited and there was little time to discuss different perspectives or areas of controversy in the literature. Some of this was covered in the weekly email content, but it is an area for further consideration in future.

Presentations and discussions with practitioners, system leaders and others

Participants enjoyed the small group discussions with expert practitioners. 12 out of 14 attendees rated this exercise as excellent, with five describing it as one of the highlights of the March Accelerator event.

"All of the conversations with parents and practitioners really highlighted what is important."

Participant, March Accelerator Feedback Form

Presentations from local leaders, civil servants and others about how to drive effective national and local system change were all rated as entirely good or excellent. Simon Day's talk on Delivery and Kate Stanley's talk on Framing were highlighted as being particularly useful in a lot of the feedback.

"... Sessions on Framing and the Economics of early child development and deliverology stick out for me..." **Participant, Final Survey**

"It was really illuminating seeing what it has taken for Thrive at Five and Better Start, to achieve system change, and is encouraging as well as highlighting the scale of the challenge (without their scale of resources!)."

Participant, May Accelerator Feedback Form

"Kate Stanley's talk – unusual to get genuinely 'new' ideas/info which is immediately useful and specific to ECD."

Participant, May Accelerator Feedback Form

Participants appreciated the quality and breadth across the speakers:

"I've been reflecting. The calibre of contributors has been remarkable. Diverse, operating on so many levels. You've opened up a whole new world to me, which I am very grateful for..."

Participant via WhatsApp message

"I enjoyed the space and opportunity to hear from academics, to ask questions and to discuss informally with a range of experts and colleagues across the UK working in policy and delivery roles."

Participant, Final Survey

One area identified for improvement was to make the content more representative of all the UK nations, this was taken on board and we tried to be more inclusive in the rest of the programme – although undoubtedly, we could have done more. Another suggested areas for improvement included more discussion on how to shift cultures and mindsets in organisations.

"Understand why the references to government, policy and service landscape focused on England but would be helpful for there to be broader references too."

Participant, January Accelerator Feedback Form

"Maybe a bit more on effective ways for changing cultures in areas (so changing from status quo to a culture where we value play and good attachment more)."

Participant, Final Survey question on what could be improved

Time with babies, young children and families

Most of the participants rated their visit to the nursery and to meet parents and children at local services highly and gave positive feedback on these activities, which were said to show "theory in action" and brought breadth, depth and richness to the programme.

Participants appreciated how the programme made the effort to get out and engage children and families in the community:

"... The other notable difference was going out to engage with people in their settings rather than them always coming into 'our' space to talk to us..."

Participant, Final Survey

These activities were, however, not universally popular. For example, some participants, were unsure about the nursery visit, particularly the way they were encouraged to observe and play with children without any structure (this was done so as not to interrupt the children's play and routine).

"Unsure about the Nursery visit. Although I thoroughly enjoyed seeing the nursery environment and speaking to the head and staff. I felt uncomfortable entering the child's space as a stranger for a short period of time and who was benefitting from this."

Participant, January Accelerator Feedback Form

Five of the participants described the visit to the children's centre or library the highlight of the March Accelerator event.

"The session with parents was really nicely managed and it was great to be part of a programme that had the confidence to deliver this type of session with parents who have had more challenging experiences."

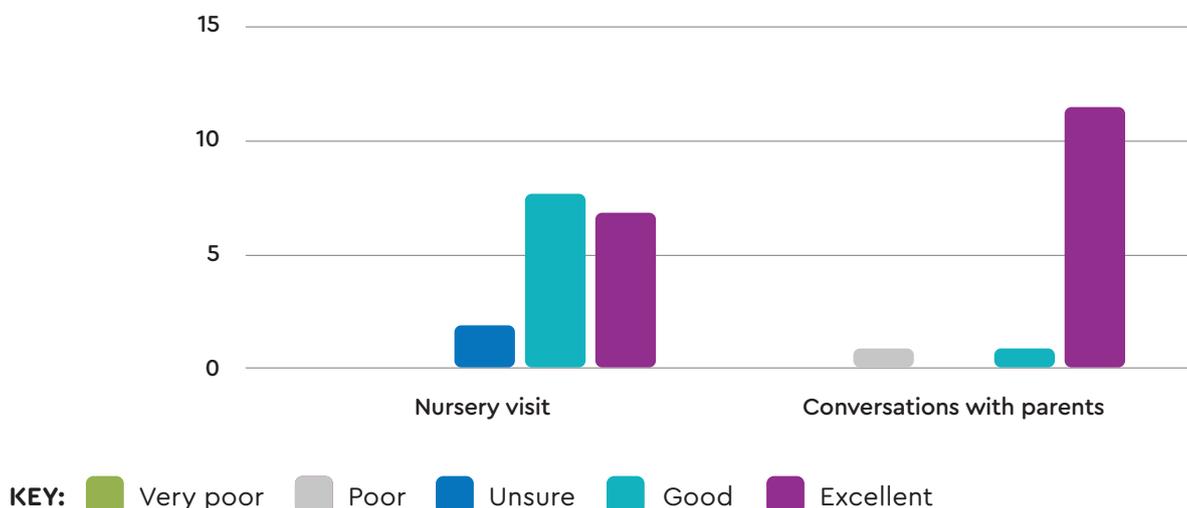
Participant, March Accelerator Feedback Form

"I was very impressed with the levels of need of the parents and their willingness to participate and brought home the importance of relationships and a different lens compared to the research."

Participant, March Accelerator Feedback Form

Figure 1. Participants' ratings of community activities

In the feedback sessions at the end of the activities, participants rated these parts of the programme on a five-point scale.



A small number of the participants did not find the visit to local services useful. This was particularly true of those who visited the library rhyme time, where there was a mix of parents including some who were not experiencing disadvantage.

"I found the 'talking to parents' bit a bit unrelatable – the lady I spoke to was just like me (white, middle class, well educated) so didn't really give me an insight into the kind of people that I need to cater for in my work."

Participant, March Accelerator Feedback Form

Some participants would have liked even more time for discussion with parents and practitioners built into the programme. There was also a desire for greater diversity amongst the presenters and parents involved in the programme and more discussion on race and culture.

"I'd have liked even more opportunities to seek views from parents and young children themselves, possibly those who have actually experienced some of the interventions we know about only in theory. Also, more opportunities to speak to practitioners in more depth too."

Participant, Final Survey

"... Maybe more diversity in the parents and operational professionals who came in and spoke (I work in an area which is 70% non-white British and didn't feel global majority was represented in the families we saw)."

Participant, Final Survey

Reflective space and interactive activities

The programme was always intended to include plenty of breaks and time for facilitated discussion, reflection and interactive activities to make the content meaningful. As the programme progressed, we created even more time for these types of activities in response to feedback. However, we did have to balance competing preferences – some participants preferred more structure and input and felt less comfortable with long periods of free-flowing discussion.

Participants generally valued time at the end of the last accelerator day to discuss their future plans with others in the group. They got most from this if they had planned and prepared for how to use the time.

The participants who applied for the programme had to set out describe at the start exactly how they would use the learning in their current work, but those who were appointed by colleagues within government departments perhaps did less preparation to consider how they want to utilise the programme.

If we were running the programme again, we would do more to ensure that all participants identified particular tasks or programmes of work that they would be focussing on during Mobilise, and the discussions and activities could have focussed more on these specific projects.

"It was SO valuable to have the focused time from Sal and other Pedal staff, looking at my local actions."

Participant, May Accelerator Feedback Form

"... time for action activity was too unfocused. Probably our fault that we hadn't planned what we wanted to achieve/get out of session ahead of time..."

Participant, May Accelerator Feedback Form

"I wonder whether each participant having a piece of work/project in mind that is followed through throughout the course might be useful in supporting application of learning. The action learning sets provided some opportunity for this but maybe this could have been strengthened by creating space for us to hold each other to 'account' for actions we agreed to take."

Participant, Final Survey

The evaluation also generated learning about the playful elements of the programme, which can be found in **Annex C**.

Dinner and overnight stays

Participants appreciated the face-to-face design of the accelerator days, and how they involved dinner and overnight stay, giving an opportunity for participants to immerse themselves in the Cambridge environment and to have time to connect and reflect.

"... Having the evening together meant we could really build relationships with the participants and the hosts and strengthen the discussion and sharing of views and work."

Participant, Final Survey

"... the opportunity to talk over dinner has provided lots of wider opportunities to make connections and I have found I have a clearer head going into the full day session as I have made a mental shift into my 'Mobilise' zone."

Participant, Final Survey

"... I thought the face-to-face sessions and dinners were critical to the programme's success." **Participant, Final Survey**

Action learning sets

Attendance at the virtual action learning sets overall was high. On average, 12 people attended action learning sets each month. Attendance was at its highest (14 people) in March and April and dipped towards the end of the programme. In the feedback some participants reflected that they found it hard to make time for the action learning sets in their busy diaries.

The format of the action learning sets changed over time in response to feedback and they became a more unstructured forum for discussion. Participants had different views about the sessions, some wanted more structure, others preferred free-flowing discussions. There was some feeling that they were too short, but participants also reflected that they would struggle to find time for longer or more regular discussions.

"They (action learning sets) are brilliant too – a really valuable way to deepen & embed learning. A model to use going forward."

Participant, March Accelerator Feedback Form

"It is great to share things and hear other people's challenges and ideas."

Participant, March Accelerator Feedback Form

Participants reflected that they benefited from learning more about each other's programmes of work through the action learning sets.

"... some of the discussion during the action learning sets made me think about policy in other nations and how this was done. Also, it was very interesting discussing the Sure Start research in England and thinking about the application of this in Northern Ireland."

Participant, Final Survey

Weekly emails

Engagement with the materials sent out in the weekly emails was low. Data from Moodle showed that ten of the 15 participants accessed the platform in the first weeks, but this dropped from February and then fluctuated between two and five people accessing the email content each week.

Some participants did ask that their colleagues could be given access to the materials, so that by the end of the programme 22 people were enrolled on the Moodle platform although they did not all use it.

The primary reason given for not reading the content was participants' busy schedules. Some participants suggested there should be less content, or less frequent emails, others reflected that even if they did not read the content, it was good to have it to look at an appropriate time. The Moodle platform^k was also critiqued for not being user-friendly.

"I still haven't found the time to look at all the resources provided in weekly emails etc. – found it hard to keep up with these though all content I have accessed has been interesting and relevant – this is more about me having more time for the programme rather than anything the programme could do though." **Participant, Final Survey**

"Have found it hard to prioritise in an out-of-control inbox but have been really interesting when I have managed to engage..."

Participant, March Accelerator Feedback Form

"I am sure they will come in useful in the future, so I am hanging onto all the links for future reference." **Participant, Final Survey**

The inclusion of the podcasts proved to be the highlight of the weekly email for many, and several participants commented on how these fitted better into their busy schedules. Many appreciated that we sent out links to the podcasts to the WhatsApp group, which made them easier to access.

"Love the weekly email and the podcasts are amazing – really thought provoking and great to listen to in the car!"

Participants, March Accelerator Feedback Form

k. Moodle is an online learning platform used by the University of Cambridge, which provides a place to upload resources for courses.

"Like the email, love the WhatsApp with links to the podcasts. Podcasts work really well for me to absorb information while doing household chores. My workday does not afford much time for reading above and beyond the 'day job'."

Participants, March Accelerator Feedback Form

The podcasts and weekly emails also facilitated sharing of learning beyond the cohort. We discuss more about how learning was shared with colleagues in Section 6.

"... The weekly emails and podcasts meant I could share the learning with my wider team and Unit every week, so they too learnt more..." **Participants, Final Survey**

The six additional podcasts about evidence-based policy that we created for the programme also enabled us to facilitate learning beyond the Mobilise participants and their colleagues, and we had feedback from academics in other universities who were using them as teaching resources.

Journalling

When asked, only two of the participants said they used their journals "often" or "always".

"I've been using my journal to plot my actions, which has helped keep me more focused than I would have been..."

Participant via email

Bespoke support

The bespoke support for participants included providing briefings, signposting evidence, arranging calls with academics, commenting on documents and supporting in presentation preparation. Participants reported that this helped them to put their learning into practice.

"The ongoing bespoke support from Sal – this was incredible and had a big impact. It meant that I could apply my learning during the course and has left me feeling in a really strong position to continue to drive systems change..." **Participant, Final Survey**

IN SUMMARY

What did we learn?

What worked well:

- Varied contributors, activities and structure.
- Face-to-face activities, including dinner and overnight stays.
- Plenty of opportunities to talk, connect and reflect.
- High quality content covering the science of early development, what works, and how to drive change.
- Drawing on academic input, professional expertise and insights from parents and children.
- Action-focussed discussions and activities to think about how to make learning meaningful in individual roles.
- Constantly evolving the content and format in response to feedback.
- Using podcasts and WhatsApp to provide supplementary material.

Things we learned to inform future work:

- Participants have different preferences for structure vs unstructured activity. Some enjoy the time for reflection, free-flowing and self-guided work while others want more structure and scaffolding.
- In future we would aim to achieve greater diversity in the characteristic of the cohort, and in the speakers and service users involved in the programme and ensure that content speaks to all nations and regions.
- Some participants would have liked more preparation before the accelerator days and needed more guidance about how to connect learning with their own work. It could be helpful for people to identify particular projects or pieces of work that they focus on in activities and discussions.
- Once back at their desks, it is hard for participants to make time to read and digest content. Using different medium like podcasts is useful.
- In future we would try to expand the range of academic disciplines represented on the programme and to create space for discussions about areas of disagreement in the research.

What we learned about the values underpinning the programme

In the evaluation, we probed whether participants had experienced the values that underpinned the programme and if these had contributed to their experience and outcomes. The evaluation suggested that participants had experienced and appreciated the values of the programme. The co-production approach and relational focus stood out as particularly strong in the feedback. The quotes below – all from participants in the final survey – illustrate how the values came to life for participants.

Co-produced



"I especially liked being able to co-design the programme with the organisers and other participants but that this was balanced by a carefully curated diet of content on a wide range of topics."

"... Eliciting what the group was keen to get from the programme during the first session was really well facilitated and seeing that through in terms of shaping the content in response was impressive – and very valuable..."

"In all other professional development programmes, I have been on the content has been pre-set. One of the strengths of Mobilise was the real sense of gathering the groups requirements and shaping a programme in response to those."

Relational



"Training is rarely face to face anymore which was really nice to have. Made it more impactful. More of a cohort."

"I have never been involved in a programme which has lasted over a number of months, allowing for the development of really meaningful relationships both between member of the cohort but also between the cohort and the organisers."

"I really enjoyed the social aspect to the programme in that we met face to face – the presentations and environment set up was very welcoming and friendly and offered lots of opportunity for discussions on the material that was being presented."

Action-Focused



"A great opportunity to gain knowledge, test it out in discussions with really knowledgeable peers, and see how it might be applicable to my own work."

"... Full of excellent content that took us on a journey from evidence to application."

Evidence-based



"The exposure to so much rich evidence and the chance to really pause and consider it was very good – and the exposure to so many experts."

"The Mobilise programme has been hugely motivating. Providing the space to dive deep into the evidence and to then critically appraise that with respect to our own policy making and that of others has been really valuable."

Child-Focused



"Much deeper and richer, with an important balance of visiting real settings, speaking to children and families, balanced with building understanding of evidence and research, and ways to apply to policy making."

System-wide



"Participates from across nations and government departments. The network element has been excellent, and I feel part of a group that is supporting each other post programme."

Interactive



"Much more interactive and developed to meet participants' needs. Real and meaningful time to network with others on the course and course tutors."

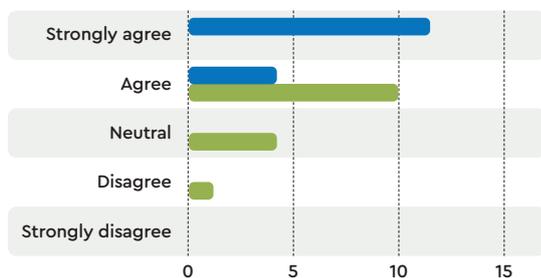
THE FINDINGS: IMPACT ON POLICYMAKERS' CAPACITIES, OPPORTUNITIES AND MOTIVATION

Impact on capability, opportunity and motivation to use evidence

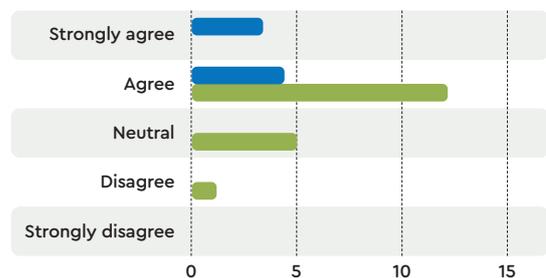
Our evaluation attempted to understand how participants' capability, opportunity and motivation were influenced by the programme, as the foundations for behaviour change. We created a brief measure of capability, opportunity and motivation to drive evidence-informed change, informed by Keyworth, Epton, Goldthorpe et al.'s six item measure²⁸. Comparing the baseline survey to the final survey, we saw a positive change across all measures. For example, at the start of the programme, no participants strongly agreed with the statement "I have the internal capability to drive evidence-informed change for children in my work." By the end of the programme, 11 strongly agreed.

Figure 2. Participant self-reported capability, opportunity and motivation

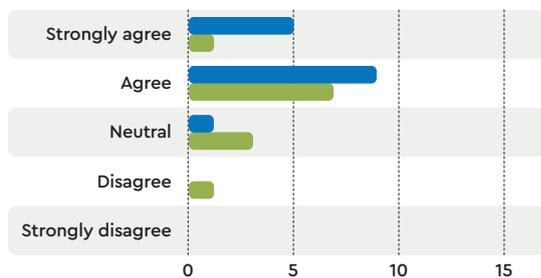
I have the internal capability (e.g. skill, knowledge) to drive evidence-informed change for children in my work.



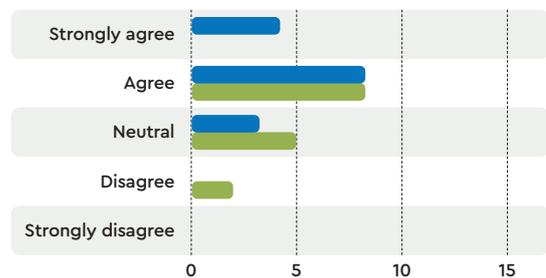
I have the external capability (e.g. power, mandate) to drive evidence-informed change for children in my work



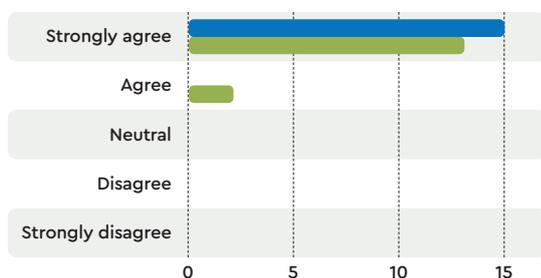
In my job I have the social opportunity (e.g. influence, support, networks) to drive evidence-informed change for children in my work.



In my job I have the physical opportunity (e.g. time, space, resource) to drive evidence-informed change for children in my work.



I am motivated to drive evidence-informed change for children in my work.



KEY

■ Baseline data ■ Final Survey

In this question, and in other measures used in the evaluation, motivation was already high at the start of the programme. This is unsurprising as participants who applied for and joined a programme like this were likely to be already highly motivated.

Capability, opportunity and motivation to use different forms of evidence

The programme was informed by an understanding that evidence takes many forms, including academic research, insights from children, families and communities, and the expertise of professionals. We looked at whether the programme had influenced capability, opportunity and motivation to engage with these different forms of evidence. In the tables below, we capture combined scores for those who agreed and strongly agreed with these statements at baseline and in the final survey. There was an improvement in the extent to which participants reported having the knowledge and skills to use different forms of evidence. As motivation was already high at the start of the programme there was less change in this domain.

Baseline		Final
Using academic evidence to inform decisions		
I have the knowledge and skills I need to use academic evidence to inform our decisions		
67% Agree & Strongly Agree		100% Agree & Strongly Agree
I have opportunities to use academic evidence to inform our decisions		
87% Agree & Strongly Agree		100% Agree & Strongly Agree
I am motivated to use academic evidence to inform our decisions		
100% Agree & Strongly Agree		100% Agree & Strongly Agree
Seeking and utilising views and perspectives of babies and young children		
I have the knowledge and skills I need to seek and utilise the views and perspectives of babies and young children to inform our decisions		
27% Agree & Strongly Agree		93% Agree & Strongly Agree
I have opportunities to seek and utilise the views and perspectives of babies and young children to inform our decisions		
33% Agree & Strongly Agree		80% Agree & Strongly Agree
I am motivated to seek and utilise the views and perspectives of babies and young children to inform our decisions		
100% Agree & Strongly Agree		100% Agree & Strongly Agree
Using the views and insights of leaders across the system		
I have the contacts and relationships required to have honest, open conversations with national, regional and local leaders to inform our decisions		
47% Agree & Strongly Agree		93% Agree & Strongly Agree
I have opportunities to have honest, open conversations with national, regional and local leaders to inform our decisions		
87% Agree & Strongly Agree		100% Agree & Strongly Agree
I am motivated to have honest, open conversations with national, regional and local leaders to inform our decisions		
100% Agree & Strongly Agree		100% Agree & Strongly Agree

Changes in capability

The evaluation suggested that the programme improved participants' capability to make and implement effective, evidence-based policy in five broad ways:

- Improving their **knowledge** and understanding of both the science of early childhood development, and how to implement evidence-informed policy.
- Creating an **openness to new insights**, and an awareness of the diverse forms of evidence that are available to draw on when making decisions.
- Increasing **confidence** to advocate for early childhood and to use evidence in decision making.
- Improving their **communication skills** and ability to make compelling arguments.
- Strengthening **relationships and networks**, to enable them to draw on a broad range of insights and expertise.

Over the following pages we unpack these findings.



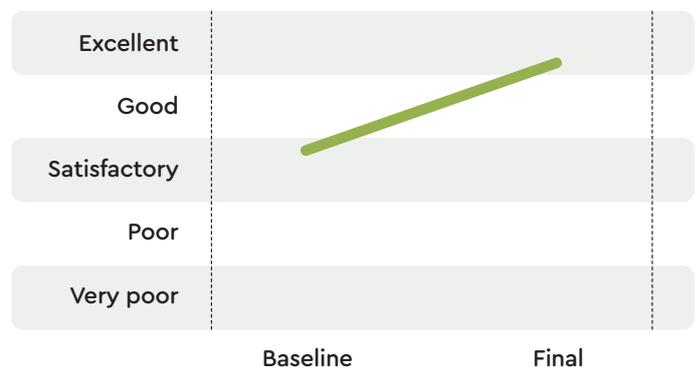
Improvements in knowledge

During the programme, we wanted to improve participants' understanding of a range of core concepts about early childhood development, implementation science, the economics of early childhood and evidence-based practice and policy making.

We asked participants at the baseline and in the final survey how their current level of knowledge on different topics compared to the level they would like to have to do their job effectively^l. Although self-rating questions of knowledge are notoriously flawed measures of actual knowledge, they do tell us something about participants' feelings about the programme, comfort with the topics and levels of self-efficacy²⁹. We also asked line managers about participants' knowledge, to corroborate the findings.

Participants ranked their level of knowledge on 17 topics^m on a 5-point scale. A single measure of knowledge, using the average of all these questions, suggested increases in knowledge across the programme. Line managers reported a similar change, which can increase our confidence that the programme did deliver a genuine improvement in knowledge.

Figure 3. Average self-reported knowledge scores, across all participants, on 17 topics.



l. The question asked participants to compare their knowledge to "the level of knowledge you would like to have to do your job effectively". We wanted to focus attention on useful knowledge, because we knew that through the programme participants might become more aware of what there is to learn about early childhood and might therefore rate their knowledge lower at the end of the programme because of awareness of what they do not know.

m. A full list of the topics included in Annex D.

Specific knowledge gained

The greatest changes were in self-reported knowledge of:

- **Cognitive development** in early childhood (13 participants rated their knowledge as satisfactory, poor or very poor, at the start, and all 15 were good or excellent at the end).
- **The economics of early childhood** (11 were satisfactory, poor or very poor at the start, 14 were good or excellent at the end).
- **Rights and participation in early childhood** (13 were satisfactory, poor or very poor at the start, 14 were good or excellent at the end).

In the evaluation some participants mentioned specific bits of knowledge they had gained through the programme and found helpful:

"I have been much more focussed on using the framework around **reducing pressures on parents and increasing capabilities**. I am always conscious of avoiding the parent blame trap and applying this framework is useful in managing that." **Participant, Final Survey**

"I have been talking more about the **importance of strong early attachment** in all meetings and documents where I talk about the best start in life... I have been talking about the dads input into development more as we look at how we support dads to give children the best start in life." **Participant, Final Survey**

"... The theories on knowledge about **emotional regulation** – using it to inform and make the case for early intervention/prevention in relation to health, wellbeing, achievement, criminal justice, vulnerable cyp etc." **Participant, Final Survey**

"I learned about the **book sharing** at Mobilise and this was very helpful when I was talking to colleagues about reading sessions in the library and the information we could give to parents as part of these." **Participant, Final Survey**

"... The sessions on **self-regulation and executive function** had a big impact and are helping me think of opportunities to promote this in our family support." **Participant, Final Survey**

"I got a better understanding of the **economics of ECD** which is helping me be clearer in the case for investment." **Participant, Final Survey**

Use of knowledge

Although participants reported gaining knowledge, and the content was co-designed to help them in their work, there were mixed messages about the extent to which knowledge gained through the programme was used. In response to the question "*Did you use any of the knowledge gained through Mobilise in your work?*", 14 out of 15 participants said they did. But when asked to comment on the statement "*Mobilise helped to equip me with knowledge on early childhood, which has helped me to be more effective in my work*" ten participants agreed, or strongly agreed, but five strongly disagreed.

The evaluation does not explain the reasons for this disagreement, but we believe it may be because some participants did not have opportunities to apply their knowledge in their work. Even when armed with strong evidence and increased motivation, it can be hard to influence policy, and participants may experience other barriers to mobilising their knowledge, reflecting the systemic challenges discussed in Section 2.

An openness to new insights and awareness of diverse forms of evidence

In qualitative feedback, participants and their colleagues noted changes in mindset as result of the programme:

"So much it's hard to explain. A change in mindset."

Participant, May Accelerator Feedback Form

"... The difference was the level, depth, breadth and pace we were working at. At times I could feel my brain architecture shifting as the learning altered the way I viewed and experienced the world..."

Participant, Final Survey

"a great opportunity to gain knowledge, test it out in discussions with really knowledgeable peers, and see how it might be applicable to my own work. Really amazing opportunity to meet other people who are passionate about the same things and have space to discuss issues with an open mind and a 'what could be possible' mindset..."

Participant, Final Survey

Participants and their colleagues reported both a greater openness to new ideas, and a greater determination to use evidence.

"... I think they are even more approachable to new ideas and innovation"

Colleague, Final Survey

"[NAME] has continually kept our Workshops focused on the evidence, and what evidence we have for the impact of different interventions which have been proposed"

Line Manager, Final Survey

Participants also reported that they were drawing on more diverse sources of evidence.

"... I will also continue to think about how we balance 'research, practice and community evidence' in developing implementable policy..." **Participant, May Accelerator Feedback form**

"I felt confident to recommend to colleagues the need to hear the voices of babies and young children and to use this to shape policy in other areas outside my bailiwick. Practical examples of how this can be done strengthened my resolve to seek to influence government to take this source of evidence seriously."

Participant, Final Survey

Increased confidence to use evidence and to advocate for children

Participants and their line managers reflected on how the programme helped them in championing support for early childhood. They told us that the content on making change happen was a vital part of the programme.

"Thank you so much for this incredible opportunity. It was a really visionary programme, which has been transformative for me in terms of knowledge on early childhood, but more specifically how systems work and can be influenced, and how I can work personally to effect change."

Participant via email

Participants and colleagues reported changes in confidence and determination.

"Greater confidence and authority in discussions with others with several years of experience of working in this field."

Line Manager, Final Survey

"I've got so much more confidence to advocate for babies, young children and nurturing, responsive care-giving. I feel its added weight and allowed me to make much fuller use of opportunities that have come my way, rather than led me to do something differently. I guess my work was already very well aligned with the goals of the programme, so the focus is on how to amplify our experience at system level."

Participant, Final Survey

"I think the biggest thing for me is increased confidence in presenting the evidence and case for change as having the content of the MOBILISE programme provides back up... Has definitely sharpened my communications." **Participant, Final Survey**

"More determination and knowledge to push the agenda further..."

Line Manager, Final Survey

Improved communication skills and the ability to make compelling arguments

At the end of the programme, participants felt better able to understand the perspectives and needs of different stakeholders they might need to win over, and better able to marshal the evidence to support their arguments.

"Since participating in the Mobilise programme, I'm more likely to consider where other stakeholders are in terms of priorities, awareness and understanding. The case for supportive and effective work from the earliest points has a lot of evidence behind it but being able to translate that in a way which works for a variety of audiences can be challenging and the Mobilise programme has supported me in becoming more skilled in doing that."

Participant, Final Survey

Participants felt the quality of their briefings and presentations had improved thanks to the programme.

"My input to briefing notes for new ministers have taken account of learning (e.g. on framing, prevention, early childhood development) and been improved as a result of knowledge and understanding I have picked up from the course." **Participant, Final Survey**

"I feel like the Mobilise programme really helped me develop the skills to be able to articulate the importance of effective early years work across a wider audience. The content and discussions touched on so many wide ranging (and crosscutting) topics that helped to articulate the need for early years to be an active consideration in so many spaces. For example, it supported me to bring the voice of infants into discussions and work across poverty, substance use, homelessness and many other areas." **Participant, Final Survey**

The session on framing specifically helped participants to improve their communications:

"I changed how I was describing early child development to help engage a group of strategic leaders following the framing session –have applied the learning in other communications too sharing it with the wider team." **Participant, Final Survey**

"I appreciated the work on framing as it really brought to life how the evidence on early years and bringing this into policy making can be affected by how it is presented. This made me stop and consider what I previously thought to be 'good' arguments and really appraise them to find their strengths and weaknesses." **Participant, Final Survey**

Wider and stronger networks

The evaluation suggested that the programme resulted in stronger relationships between participants. After the final accelerator day, 12 out of 14 participants strongly agreed with the statement that "*I have made connections with other participants.*"

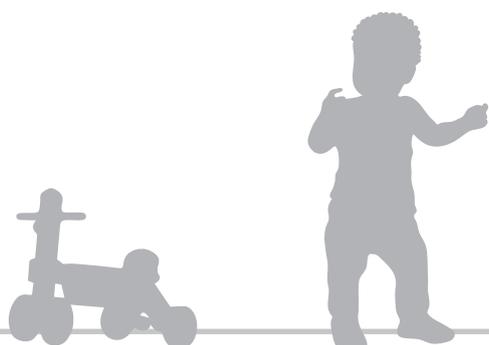
Participants reported the value of the network they had created with other participants and a feeling that this network would be useful in the future. Many expressed a desire for the network to be maintained after the programme.

"I feel wholly confident that the connections I've made during this programme will continue to be of use in the future. To have such a diverse range (including the devolved nations was a very good idea!) of knowledgeable and passionate colleagues with whom to share ideas and resources and to be able to ask advice and guidance in the future will prove invaluable, I'm sure!" **Participant, Final Survey**

"... I have made key connections across government and beyond that I will definitely use in the future, and they feel like trusted relationship, ie people I could quickly pick up the phone to to ask a question or discuss something." **Participant, Final Survey**

"I am really sad it is over; I feel like in some ways the group were on the cusp of something just as it came to an end particularly in terms of the relationships that were forming between participants – it would have been amazing if it could have been a longer programme. Maybe some ongoing connection as we move on?" **Participant, Final Survey**

Participants reported how they had used contacts with speakers on the programme and with the PEDAL team, and had been introduced to useful additional experts because of the programme. They also shared how they had passed on contacts to their colleagues. Colleagues and line managers also reported the benefits from participants' new networks. Some said they were yet to use contacts but felt they would in the future.



"I have reached out to more people to build connections and networks and ask draw on their expertise. The programme (Sal) has been great at facilitating some of these connections for participants where a 'cold call' may not have led to the opportunity for conversations, however I have also just been bolder at asking interesting people to meet with me and share their knowledge and experience." **Participant, Final Survey**

"... I have connected my Play team with PEDAL in order to seek input to our Play Vision and Action Plan. I have strengthened connections with UKG colleagues on Family Nurse Partnership, and have a list of colleagues to contact now that we have a new government, to explore how we can strengthen collaboration on areas of mutual interest." **Participant, Final Survey**

"As a result of the Mobilise sessions my colleague has set up a number of Networking opportunities for me after sharing her learning and thinking it relevant/of interest to my work programme. Specifically with Nuffield Trust, Academy of Medical Science, Blackpool Better Start." **Colleague, Final Survey**

Building capability across the system: Sharing learning

90% of line managers, and 100% of other colleagues said participants shared their learning. Participants passed content onto their colleagues and wider networks in different ways: Some regularly forwarded emails and/or enabled colleagues to directly access content on the Moodle platformⁿ. Some ran learning sessions or wrote papers to share bits of content, and many fed the content into relevant discussions. The impacts of Mobilise were spread across the system, which, we hope increases the impact of the programme and means new knowledge is not only vested in participants.

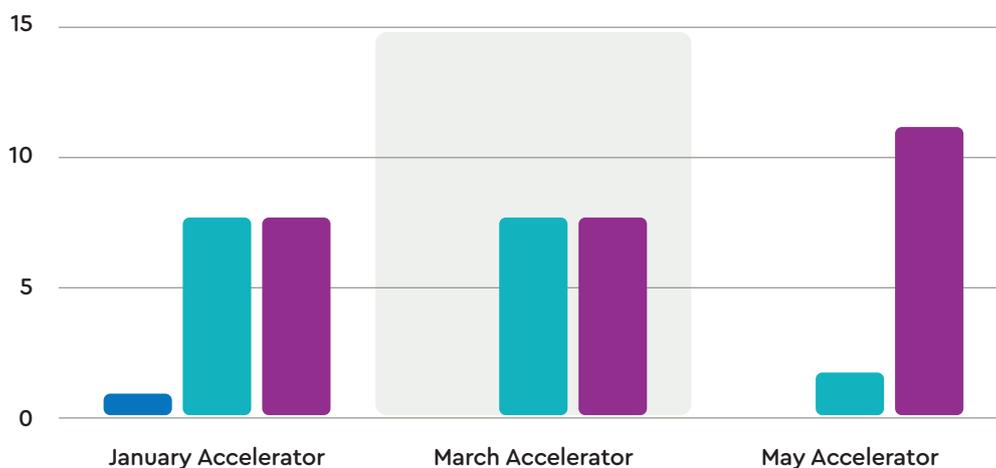
"They shared information by email on a number of occasions. They also brought up some things that were relevant in conversations and meetings." **Colleague, Final Survey**

"[Name] brought back learning and evidence on executive function and self-regulation, running a well-received policy session for colleagues across the Department to raise awareness and consider opportunities for policies to better support this area of child development." **Line Manager, Final Survey**



n. Seven people who were colleagues of the participants were added to Moodle over the programme.

Figure 4. Levels of agreement with the statement “I feel motivated to put my new learning into practice” at the end of each accelerator day.



KEY: ■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Unsure/neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

Changes in motivation and morale

There were various measures of motivation to across the evaluation. As already discussed, motivation was generally high throughout the programme, but did show a small increase.

At the end of each accelerator day, participants showed high levels of motivation to put their learning into action.

Qualitative feedback from participants and their colleagues also noted that motivation was often high but was still increased or reinvigorated by the programme.

"... It provided excellent research and information which re-invigorated my passion for the importance of the early years..."

Participant, Final Survey

"... It was an amazing opportunity which I am really grateful to have been part of. It helped improve my motivation in a job that often makes motivation challenging!"

Participant, Final Survey

"[Participant] was highly motivated before, but through Mobilise, her motivation was strengthened by having greater capacity to make the change she wants to deliver."

Line Manager, Final Survey

"... seen an increased passion for the subject and determination to speak up for the Earliest Years. Always excited when it was time to do the course." **Colleague, Final Survey**

"... I think the skills and capacities were all there I would say increased empowerment, confidence and motivation has made them challenge themselves and challenge other to push boundaries." **Colleague, Final Survey**

"I don't think it changed motivation – we are all motivated... the programme provided additional thought and challenge to our Early Child Development programme."

Colleague, Final Survey

We used the Brief Overall Job Satisfaction measure to get a picture of participants' engagement in work³⁰. In this measure, participants are asked to rate on a 5-point scale, the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements such as "I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job" and "Most days I am enthusiastic about work". This generates a score out of a maximum of 24.

The average score in the group went from 18.5 at baseline to 20 at the end of the programme. Scores improved for eight of the participants, stayed the same for five and fell for two.

Impact on opportunities

The COM-B model highlights the importance of external factors which enable the execution of a behaviour, these are captured in the concept of opportunity.

The evaluation found that, in some cases, Mobilise helped to create opportunities for participants. Some participants were given platforms and opportunities to share their learning because they had been on the Mobilise programme, and this helped them to make connections and garner support.

Although putting knowledge into action remained hard at times, the evaluation identified how the programme helped participants to address the systemic challenges that make it harder to make and implement evidence-based policy in early childhood (as discussed in Section 2). For example:

- Learning about the economic case for investment in early childhood and about how to work with Treasury helped participants think about how they could better make the case for investment within Government – overcoming the challenge of lack of resources.
- Working with others from across different government departments helped participants to understand other government departments' work and facilitated connections and joint working – overcoming the challenge of fragmented government.

Through the programme participants understood more about the challenges in making and implementing evidence-based policy and how they might be overcome.

"Mobilise has helped me to understand these barriers to implementing evidence-based interventions in a more nuanced way and has provided concrete examples of local areas/systems who have done this well to be able to use them as examples in policymaking but also to make contact with them to find out more about how they have achieved their success and how it can be replicated/cascaded." **Participant, Final Survey**

The evaluation also showed the importance of external opportunities in determining whether learning can be translated into decisions. Several participants shared how new projects, or political changes arose over the course of the programme and provided opportunities for them to apply their learning.



The UK Government election took place during the programme, which undoubtedly influenced the context and atmosphere in which many of the participants were working, as well as providing immediate opportunities to put learning into action.

"I used learning from deliverology to help inform our preparations for new ministers when the election was called"

Participant, Final Survey

"I have used the Frameworks presentation content to shape documents that we were preparing ahead of the general election."

Participant, Final Survey

"... I learnt more about approaches to delivery and how to motivate and work with the system around babies and children (from a government perspective). This is informing how I'm approaching prep for a new government." **Participant, Final Survey**

Some participants also reported that while they enjoyed the programme, they did not have opportunities to use the learning in their work.

"It's been a tricky period with the election on the horizon, and then actually being called, and then the pre-election period so it's been difficult to apply the learning so far, but I'm sure I will in future and I am already connected differently across gov as a result of being part of that cohort." **Participant, Final Survey**

THE FINDINGS: WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT IMPACT ON POLICY AND ON CHILDREN

Impact on discussions, decisions and actions

In the final survey, all 15 participants replied positively to the question "Did you do anything differently in your work as a result of Mobilise?" The evaluation suggested that the programme influenced decisions and actions in three broad ways:

- Content from the programme generated **new insights and informed policy discussions** and decisions.
- Participants are **seeking and using evidence** from a wider range of sources because of the programme.
- The programme has facilitated more **joint working across government departments**.

Over the following pages, we unpack these findings.



Content from Mobilise informed policy discussions

Participants and their colleagues reported that the programme was very helpful in policy development and in strengthening the evidence-base for decisions. They mentioned a range of ways in which content from Mobilise was used in discussions and briefings to add new perspectives and strengthen the case for action.

"The content from Mobilise has been useful in feeding into policy thinking across both perinatal and early years mental health..."

Participant, Final Survey

"I have frequently referred to Mobilise learning in meetings and discussions to shape the next phase of the Early Child Development programme and associated projects. I have also made regular references to our learning in discussions with Ministers on this topic." **Participant, Final Survey**

"[Participant] using learning in her work e.g. in an internal deep dive exercise for the OHID Board and in developing workplan objectives for the year ahead."

Line Manager, Final Survey

"I developed a slide pack on executive function using resources and evidence from the Mobilise programme and organised a presentation to raise awareness of this key skill with my senior leadership group and other from different parts of the department (attendance, behaviour and SEND teams amongst others) in readiness to make the case for bidding for funding to run/scale a pilot or test ways in which to help parents support their children to develop these crucial skills." **Participant, Final Survey**

"The presentations from Better Start Blackpool and follow up conversations with that team have helped me develop a long-term vision for how we might get to a similar place where I work."

Participant, Final Survey

Insights from the programme helped participants to raise new issues or change the focus of discussions, advocating for different approaches informed by the needs of babies and young children.

"Mobilise has helped us make the case for childcare policies which focus on supporting the relationship between parents and children in the earliest years, rather than focusing on getting parents into work."

Participant, Final Survey

"I am using the content around early social and emotional development and mental health needs to underpin work that we are engaged in around the new governments commitment to improving mental health. It has been important in highlighting the critical role of building the foundations of mental health particularly as there seems to be a bit of a gap around babies." **Participant, Final Survey**

Mobilise has helped drive a greater focus on evidence and learning

Participants and their colleagues reflected on how Mobilise increased their focus on the evidence and encouraged them to place a greater value on learning about early child development.

"I shared more of my learning with the unit than I usually would and nudged all team members to invest time in their own learning too by engaging in the weekly emails, podcasts and content on Moodle. This brought the importance of building our knowledge front and centre and enabled me to role model this within an environment that can become focussed on the multiple commissions and deadlines we get in any single day. My hope is that this will have made more of the unit – not just me – better informed about what supports improved outcomes for babies, why this matters and how best to achieve this."

Participant, Final Survey

Mobilise has led to policymakers placing greater value on children's, parents' and professionals' perspectives

Mobilise was informed by a broad view of what constitutes evidence, and participants' feedback reflected that they were using more sources of evidence and insights after the programme.

"The most notable change from my perspective has been the consistent championing of children's voices."

Colleague, Final Survey

"The trio of evidence informed practitioner feedback and parental feedback I recently used in a paper I sent to the department of Education on parental participation. I used information from all areas to inform and present a range of information."

Participant, Final Survey

"Planning a piece around family support in Sure Start – after the mobilise programme I plan to do a deep dive approach involving practitioners and parents in order to develop a way to celebrate this work across the programme. I will also utilise all of the evidence from the mobilise programme in order to inform this." **Participant, Final Survey**

Mobilise helped to facilitate joint-working

The programme helped facilitate joint working between the participants from different government departments and encouraged participants to think more holistically about how they support early childhood development, recognising synergies across different pieces of work.

"Seeking to coordinate across government in preparation for the election and post-election to ensure we have a really clear, shared understanding of the evidence base and narrative on state of play in the early years."

Participant, Final Survey

"I have recommended that we think differently about how we organise ourselves within the Family hubs division in order to be able to fund a more holistic approach to supporting parents (rather than focusing on the HLE and improvements to cognitive development separately from supporting parents to develop good attachment bonds and later socio-emotional skills)." **Participant, Final Survey**

Driving forward action

Participants reported how they used the information, motivation, confidence and knowledge gained through the programme to drive forward their work and forge wider partnerships. Many reported that they acted on recommendations that came up during the accelerator days or action learning sets.

"... I acted on some of Sal's advice and sought meetings and collaborations with other stakeholders in the sector."

Participant, Final Survey

One of the participants, a local Home-Start leader, wanted to use the programme to help her to become a more effective champion for babies, young children and the voluntary sector in her local system. She regularly discussed this with the PEDAL team and fellow participants on the programme and sought ideas and feedback. During the programme, she developed stronger connections with local leaders, hosting a visit for the Director of Children's Services, Integrated Care Director and Director of Public Health and speaking at a county-wide event on school readiness.

She has been invited to join a new local Early Years Board where she can play a role in system change in the early years in the county. She attributes some of this success to the confidence and understanding she gained from the programme, and the practical support and guidance offered through action learning sets and bespoke support.

Impact on children

We do not know if the programme has had, or will have, an impact on children. There was neither the time nor the means to capture this in this evaluation. Even with time and resources, attributing any change in children's outcomes to Mobilise would be incredibly difficult. We developed and refined a Theory of Change which describes how we believe Mobilise might improve children's lives. This is over the page.

"... I think it's going to prove to be really impactful in ways that may be tricky to measure but can't be underestimated."

Participant, via WhatsApp message



THEORY OF CHANGE



The programme...

- Is co-designed with policy actors.
- Contains up-to-date evidence of child development from research.
- Has a relational approach.
- Is delivered through high-quality, interactive and engaging learning experiences, including intensive face-to-face residential events.
- Includes meaningful opportunities to observe, engage with and learn from babies and children.
- Covers a broad range of evidence from different sources about childhood development, what works, how to make the case and how to deliver results.
- Uses an action learning approach with a focus on applying learning and reflection.
- Is delivered to a diverse cohort of policy actors with different perspectives.
- Is for 'changemakers' – those with internal capacity and external opportunity to drive change, including senior buy-in.
- Enables participants to share learning with colleagues.
- Is high quality and has credibility afforded by Cambridge University.

So that, on completion, policy actors have...

- Deeper and broader understanding of early childhood development.
- Tools and strategies to win hearts and minds and deliver results.
- New actionable insights and ideas.
- An openness to new insights and an awareness of the diverse forms of evidence available.
- Increased confidence and opportunity to use evidence and to advocate for babies and young children.
- Improved communication skills and the ability to make compelling arguments.
- Increased morale and motivation to drive evidence-informed change.
- New networks and relationships that support future learning and collaboration.

These impacts are not limited only to programme participants, but we see some ripple effects across teams.

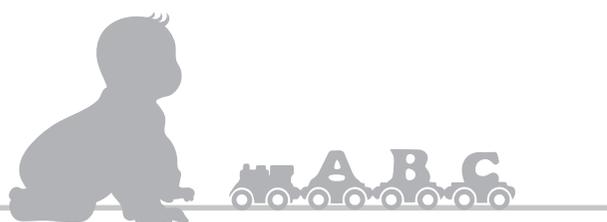
As a result...

- Policy actors are better able to make the case for action and investment to a range of decision makers – securing support and resources for early childhood policies and services.
- Policy actors are better able to draw on a range of evidence to improve policy development and implementation and help find new solutions to address policy challenges.
- There is improved collaboration across government departments which supports integration in policy making and more effective use of resources.

So that...

Government policy is more effective in improving experiences and outcomes in early childhood.

Ultimately, more children in the UK thrive in childhood and have foundations for a happy and healthy life.



IMPACT ON ACADEMICS

As part of the evaluation, we were keen to learn whether the Mobilise programme brought benefits for the academics involved. Throughout the programme, members of the PEDAL team including professors, researchers and students interacted with the cohort in different ways – presenting to the group, attending dinners, sitting in on learning sessions and joining in activities. Qualitative feedback suggested that the team had found it helpful to be involved with the programme. Participation varied and the value of the programme to team members reflected the extent of their involvement.

Researchers^o reported gaining a better understanding of policy actors and their work:

“Gained a greater understanding of: both the potential and challenges of making tangible policy changes; the differences in provision across different sectors/regions; the appetite and need for research to bring implications for practice as a core feature from the outset; the learning that can occur across teams (i.e., the learning that was happening in the room between Mobilise participants, not just between researchers and policymakers)...” **PEDAL researcher, Final Survey**

“It was helpful to hear from some of the participants working in government, what their preoccupations were and how they approached their work.” **PEDAL researcher, Final Survey**

“It was powerful having the opportunity to work alongside people who make a real tangible difference to the lives and support of families on a day-to-day basis. It was humbling taking stock of the challenges that are facing policy at present, and there was also a good dose of moments of inspiration where we learnt about really good work happening!” **PEDAL researcher, Final Survey**

“It was useful to compare and contrast the approach for people in different roles – this will be helpful for tailoring future collaborations or interactions.” **PEDAL researcher, Final Survey**

PEDAL staff valued the opportunity to share both their own research and their wider expertise:

“The chance to think about how to present work to this audience and the chance to meet and talk with people making active policy decisions in their everyday work. I think, and hope it was also helpful for students and others in the PEDAL team to get that kind of exposure.” **PEDAL researcher, Final Survey**

The team developed useful contacts and relationships through the programme:

“... I think the dinners and social aspects were essential ‘glue’ for relationship building. The discussion over dinner provided a fascinating insight into people’s perspectives and preoccupations. For me, the highest value was in building those personal connections and insights...” **PEDAL researcher, Final Survey**

The PEDAL team did report that, despite this programme being organised to facilitate their engagement many still did not have the time they would have liked to engage with participants.

“Definitely saw opportunities out there, but unfortunately, I did not manage to engage with the participants as much as I would like to, mostly due to other commitments...”

PEDAL researcher, Final Survey

^o. Findings were anonymised so we cannot give specific roles. This might be a professor, research associate, research assistant or PhD student.

LESSONS LEARNED: TRANSFERABLE LESSONS ABOUT KNOWLEDGE MOBILISATION

We set out to improve communication and collaboration between academics and policymakers, so that policies for babies and young children in the UK could be better informed by the evidence. In developing the Mobilise programme, our goal was to develop a model which could be used to improve policymakers' understanding of the evidence, and to work with them to mobilise this knowledge in their areas of responsibility.

The programme was different to other models and did not fit into a neat box – it blended aspects of training, networking, action learning and consultancy support. Our focus was on knowledge mobilisation – not just telling people what we know but designing activities to support the application of that knowledge in useful ways.

Mobilise embodied a paradigm shift in our engagement with policymakers. In delivering the programme, we moved from being a research centre focussed on sharing the findings of our latest studies, to being more like teachers, convening and curating information from different sources to support policymakers in their work.

This evaluation suggests that the approach worked. Mobilise was enjoyable and engaging for the policy actors involved. They report that it has led to improvements in their knowledge, capabilities, motivation and networks, in ways that are supporting them in policy development and implementation.



Transferable lessons and next steps

Future programmes

We hope that the Mobilise programme will be developed and there will be future Mobilise cohorts in future so more people can benefit, and there can be a growing network of early childhood champions. We encourage others to develop similar programmes on other issues.

Transferable lessons

Importantly, this project generates transferable lessons for those without the opportunity to run a programme of this kind, but are still keen to support evidence-based policy making in different ways. We demonstrate the benefit of interactive, relational and responsive approaches to knowledge mobilisation.

The box over the page contains principles which, we hope, will be helpful to academics and others designing and delivering any activities to support evidence-informed policy making on any social policy issues.

The need for fundamental change?

This project shows how a thoughtfully designed programme, dedicated funding and specialist expertise can overcome the systemic challenges that make it hard for academics and policymakers to collaborate. Mobilise temporarily bridged the gap between two worlds – the university and the civil service. Significant changes in culture and ways of working are needed in both these institutions to address the fundamental challenges set out in Section 2. Only with such changes can there be meaningful sustained collaboration between researchers and policymakers to help all civil servants to mobilise the best evidence to drive change for babies, children and their families.



Lessons for academics and others who wish to support evidence-based policy making

- **Start with policymakers' needs**

Before planning any engagement, understand what policymakers are currently working on and what they need to know to help them with current issues and priorities.

- **Target changemakers**

Identify the people within and across the system who have the opportunity and appetite to use evidence in the months and years ahead.

- **Invest in relationships**

Build trust and mutual understanding as the foundations for meaningful conversations now, and so that policymakers can call on your support when opportunities arise in future.

- **Use a range of learning activities to support action**

Share information in different ways to accommodate different styles, preferences and time constraints, but keep a focus on what will support policymakers in their work.

- **Value informal connections**

Face-to-face meetings and informal conversations often lead to the most meaningful exchanges and insights.

- **Be playful**

Design activities that are joyful, socially interactive, engaging, iterative and meaningful.

- **Convene a range of evidence**

Your research is just one piece of the puzzle. As an expert, you have a wealth of other knowledge that is also useful to policymakers. Consider if you can share other relevant research or other sources of information such as insights from families and professionals.

- **Think long-term**

Recognise the limitations of piecemeal activities (e.g. events about specific studies). Ideally, incorporate these into a longer-term programme of work to help policymakers to develop and utilise a broad and deep understanding of the evidence.

TOPICS COVERED IN WEEKLY EMAILS

- Early caregiver-child interactions
- Poverty and early childhood development
- Poverty and early language development
- Poverty and executive function
- Social development and adversity
- The impact of improving income on early childhood development
- Gender differences in early childhood development
- Dads and early childhood experiences
- Different family forms
- Public awareness campaigns
- Identifying need
- Neurodiversity
- Cultural differences
- Co-production with families
- Babies and young children's voices
- How services for parents can be informed by an understanding of early trauma
- The use of digital technology in service delivery
- Sharing the science
- Supporting relational and trauma-informed practice
- Grandparents and intergenerational interventions
- Today's challenges: the cost-of-living crisis, COVID and new technology



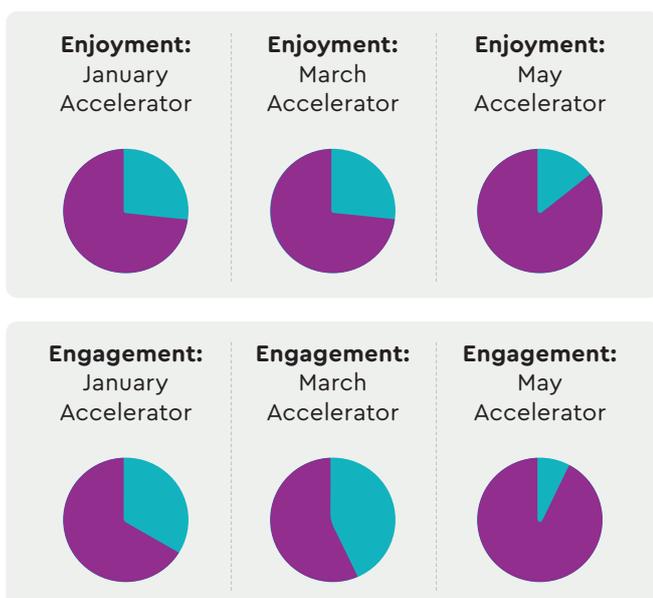
ENJOYMENT AND ENGAGEMENT ON THE ACCELERATOR DAYS

All participants attended the first accelerator day, 14 attended the second, and 14 attended the third. When one participant couldn't make it, we attempted to facilitate online access, but this did not work due to the flexible and interactive nature of the day.

Participant ratings of the accelerator days were very positive – they were generally rated excellent, with a handful of participants rating the days as “good” and no neutral or negative feedback. Levels of engagement and enjoyment were high and increased over the programme.

Figure 5. Participant levels of enjoyment and engagement

Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statements, “I enjoyed myself” and “I have found the content engaging” after each Accelerator event (January, March and May).



KEY:
■ Strongly disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral
■ Agree ■ Strongly agree

Participants were asked to give one word to describe each of the accelerator days. Most common responses are shown in the word cloud below.



We asked participants to complete a measure of engagement developed by Faculty of Education researcher Julie Bailey³¹. The measure captures four elements of student engagement³²: Behavioural (participation and performance), affective (feeling positive emotions), social engagement (feelings of belonging) and cognitive (levels of attention and interest). Results found that all these dimensions of engagement were achieved through Mobilise.

Some participants did find the “accelerator” nature of the events too intense. Two or three participants reported feelings of overwhelm at times, and in their one-word summary, one said the event was “full-on”. When asked what could have improved the programme, three participants suggested that more briefing about each accelerator day in advance would have been helpful. In the feedback many of the participants stated that they would have appreciated the accelerator days being longer (e.g. two days), or having more sessions, although they also acknowledged that this could have been hard to achieve.

LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

As a research centre focussed on early childhood, play is a big part of our work at PEDAL. We know that playful learning can be more impactful and enjoyable than passive learning. This understanding informed the design of the Mobilise programme.

The Mobilise programme was informed by a playful mindset. We used the Lego Foundation's definition of playful learning in the design of the programme, which defines it as learning experiences which are joyful, socially interactive, actively engaging, iterative and meaningful³³. These facets of playful learning aligned well with the programme values.

Alongside embodying playfulness as a mindset, we also incorporated play as an activity in the programme – such as playing “Just a Minute”^p with participants – but these activities were relatively rare and scored poorly compared to other activities on feedback forms.

Participants had different views about the extent to which they learned through play during the accelerator days, as shown in the table below.

Figure 6. Participants' responses to the statement “I have learned through play”

Event	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
January Accelerator	0	1	5	8	1
March Accelerator	2	1	6	4	1
May Accelerator	0	2	4	7	1

In the evaluation, we asked participants two questions about playfulness. There were some changes in both participants' understanding of the value of being playful, and their self-reported playfulness between the start and end of the programme.

p. Just a minute is based on a radio four panel game. Participants were in small groups and had to talk for a minute “The object of the game is for panellists to talk for sixty seconds on a given subject, “without hesitation, repetition or deviation” about topics from the programme.



Figure 7. Answers to the question: "I understand how being playful can support me in my work"

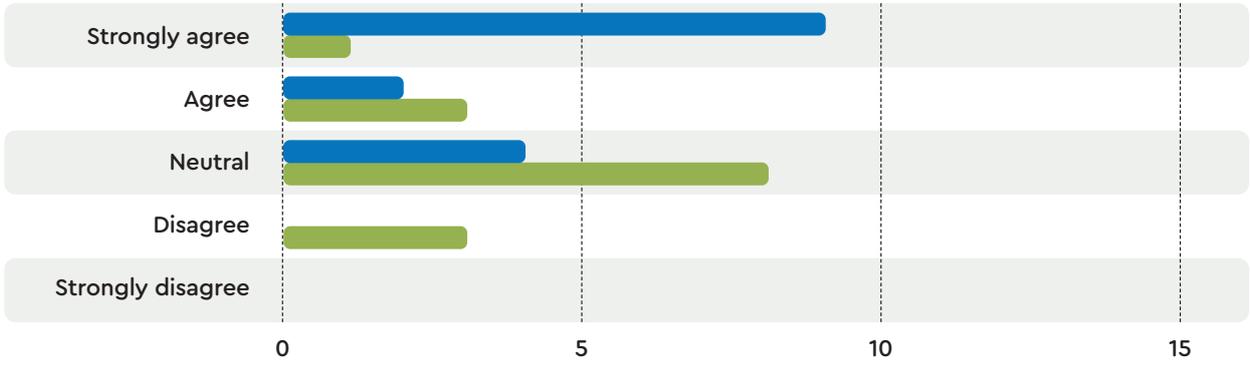
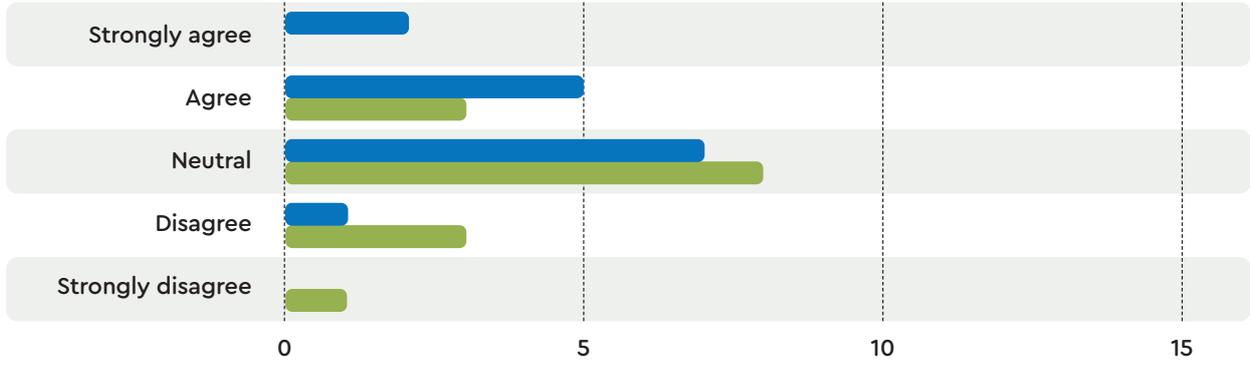


Figure 8. Answers to the question: "I am playful in how I approach my work"



KEY: ■ Baseline data ■ Final survey

QUESTIONS ON KNOWLEDGE IN THE EVALUATION



These are the issues on which we asked participants to rate their knowledge at the start and end of the programme. Average answers to these questions were used to create the overall measure for knowledge acquisition.

Question

How does your current level of knowledge of these topics compare to the level of knowledge you would like to have to do your job effectively?

- Cognitive development in early childhood
- Social development in early childhood
- Language and communication in early childhood
- Mental health and emotional development in early childhood
- Developmental psychology
- The role of parent-child relationships in infancy and early childhood
- The role of early education in early childhood development
- Social determinants of early childhood development
- The impact of poverty on early childhood development
- Effective policies and interventions in early childhood
- The economics of early childhood development
- Rights and participation in early childhood development
- The role of play in early childhood development
- Neurodiversity, developmental delay and disability
- How to critically appraise research
- Implementation Science

PARTICIPANTS' AND LINE MANAGERS' GOALS FOR THE PROGRAMME

We were keen to understand participants' and line managers' goals for the programme, both to influence programme design and to inform our evaluation.

At the beginning of the Mobilise programme, participants and line managers wrote down their three goals for the programme. At the end of the programme, they rated the extent to which they achieved each goal, on a 5-point scale^P.

14 participants reported they had completely or mostly achieved two or more of their goals. All line managers reported that their goals for the programme had been mostly or completely achieved.

The goals that participants reported not achieving generally related to specific pieces of work. It may have been that participants had restricted opportunities to put learning into practice on these projects, or because learning was not specifically related to the particular challenge the participant had.

The table on the next page shows some of the common themes seen across participants' and line managers' goals for the programme with some examples for each.



<p>Increasing knowledge (particularly on the research of early childhood development)</p>	<p>"Increase and update my awareness and understanding of play, attachment, infant mental health and early childhood development." Participant - mostly achieved</p> <p>"To increase my understanding of the latest evidence on early child development what this should mean for policy and practice." Participant - mostly achieved</p> <p>"Widen our knowledge of early childhood research." Line Manager - completely achieved</p>
<p>Networking and building connections with other professionals in the early childhood space</p>	<p>"To build relationships with a group of people who are engaged in and committed to improving the lives of children." Participant - completely achieved</p> <p>"To provide useful networking opportunities with both OGD^r cohort participants and academics that can benefit [Name]'s career development, and also make for better (i.e., more joined-up) policy development." Line Manager - mostly achieved</p>
<p>Fostering an evidence-based mindset and better use of evidence in policy</p>	<p>"To develop a richer understanding of the evidence base." Participant - completely achieved</p> <p>"Help our team use research to better implement policy change in our work area." Line Manager - completely achieved</p>
<p>Translating evidence into practice/policy that can positively impact families and children</p>	<p>"I'd like to increase my understanding of how to overcome challenges to help get evidence in to practice reliably and consistently, while building a broader Network." Participant - mostly achieved</p> <p>"To improve my evidence-based policy making skills." Participant - mostly achieved</p>
<p>Developing leadership and influencing skills</p>	<p>"Increase [NAME]'s profile as a system leader in this area." Line Manager, Final Survey, completely achieved</p> <p>"To be clear on the tactics I need to use to have greatest influence, to achieve more investment and effective working for early childhood." Participant - completely achieved</p>
<p>Strengthening strategic thinking</p>	<p>"Provide our Head Teacher with time and space to think strategically about our setting." Line Manager - completely achieved</p> <p>"Improve the quality of my thinking, strategy and action in working to improve outcomes for babies and children." Participants - mostly achieved</p>
<p>Engaging with the perspectives of families/parents</p>	<p>"Explore ways of empowering parents to share their voice and to use their experiences in the debate." Line Manager - mostly achieved</p>
<p>To commission better services for families</p>	<p>"Enable us to better commission services to support parents to maximise their impact on children's development." Line manager - completely achieved</p>

q. The options were: did not achieve at all, mostly did not achieve, neutral, mostly achieved and completely achieved.

r. Other Government Departments.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Brian Croxford is a Research Assistant at the Centre for Research on Play in Education, Development and Learning (PEDAL). Brian has a background in developmental psychology and a master's degree in psychology.

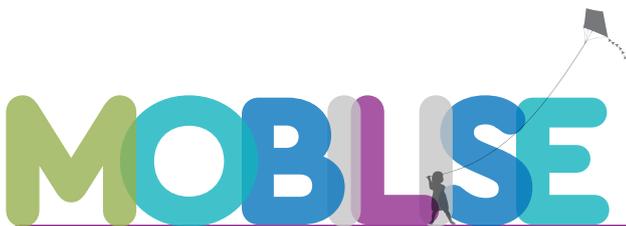
Previously he has studied how fathers' characteristics influence child development, and how the OXTR gene influences altruism and ingroup biases in children.

Brian helped plan and deliver the Mobilise accelerator days and action learning sets, and to source and screen content for the weekly emails. He collected and analysed all the evaluation data and wrote it up for this report.

Sally Hogg is the Senior Policy Fellow in PEDAL and a specialist in early childhood. Sally has had a varied career in charities and national and local governments, leading teams to develop and implement interventions for families in the early years, and campaigning successfully to drive policy change. She has authored a range of influential policy reports relating to the importance of the pregnancy and the earliest years of life, and issues affecting families during that time.

Sally has a degree in Psychology and Philosophy from Oxford, and a masters in Developmental Sciences from Birkbeck, University of London. She started her career as a civil servant working on children's policy in Westminster and, for a short time, in New South Wales, Australia. These early experiences inspired Sally's interest in improving the use of developmental sciences in policy making.

Sally conceived of, researched, designed, developed and ran Mobilise and wrote this report.



THANK YOU

We want to thank all those who shared their insights and expertise when we were developing the Mobilise programme, including Ian Knowles, Phil Worsfold, Jocelyn Bailey, Ben Lewing, Irina Ivan, Andrea Torres and Charlotte Sausman.

Thanks to all the PEDAL team who contributed brilliant ideas, content and time to the programme and supported us with this evaluation.

Thanks to all the children and parents in Cambridge who spent time with the Mobilise participants, and to the practitioners who facilitated our visits, in particular Gill Learmond, Alex Pearson, Harriet Lovegrove, Sally McGivern and Rachel Bennett.

Thank you to all the speakers who shared their time, wisdom and insights during the Mobilise accelerator days, our online events and our podcasts: Aida Cable, Alex Hendry, Beverley Hughes, Carey Oppenheim, Elian Fink, Harry Burns, Kate Stanley, Lisa Marsland, Michelle Deans, Nick Donlevy, Peter Wanless, Sarah Carter, Sarah Cattan, Simon Day and Tim Loughton.

Thank you to the Lego Foundation for funding this project.

And finally, thanks to our expert advisors particularly Anna Vignoles, Chris Cuthbert, Clare Law, David Bell, Felicity Gillespie, Jon Coles and Julian Grenier for taking the time out of their busy schedules to be wonderful "critical friends" to this project.

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