Evaluation of the Early Years Transformation Academy

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About CEI

The Centre for Evidence and Implementation (CEI) is a global, not-for-profit evidence intermediary dedicated to using the best evidence in practice and policy to improve the lives of children, families, and communities facing adversity. Established in Australia in late 2015, CEI is a multi-disciplinary team across four offices in Singapore, Melbourne, Sydney and London. We work with our clients, including policymakers, governments, practitioners, program providers, organization leaders, philanthropists and funders in three key areas of work:

- Understand the evidence base

- Develop methods and processes to put the evidence into practice

- Trial, test and evaluate policies and programs to drive more effective decisions and deliver better outcomes

Committing ourselves to the test and learn ethos
Foreword by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF)

Ben Lewing
Assistant Director, Policy & Practice, EIF

Our mission at the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) is to ensure that effective early intervention is available and is used to improve the lives of children and young people at risk of poor outcomes.

As a What Works Centre, we know that better use of evidence will lead to improved services for children and families, and ultimately to better outcomes for children. Our focus is on generating relevant evidence and ensuring the use of this evidence in policy and practice decisions both locally and nationally. When we talk about evidence, we mean child development studies and intervention impact evaluation, but also other forms of evidence, such as organisational data, community values and concerns and professional expertise, which are particularly important for understanding the local context.

This formative evaluation report of the Early Years Transformation Academy (EYTA) is an important step in our experimentation on how to get evidence used. We know that evidence-use activities are generally not well documented or evaluated. What Works Centres have an important role to play in contributing to the evidence on evidence-use, by taking a 'test and learn' approach, investing in evaluation and sharing the results with others.

The Early Years Transformation Academy, which ran between April 2019 to March 2020, was one of EIF's most ambitious and intensive approaches to engaging with local areas on evidence-use and system planning. The active ingredients were: five teams, from Norfolk, Sandwell, Dudley, Barking and Dagenham, Westminster, and Kensington and Chelsea; a structured programme of residential workshops, online learning and local delivery; a new set of partners leading the programme content, known as the EYTA design partners; and an independent formative evaluation to capture learning.

The design of the Academy was built around some key principles for supporting the use of evidence:

- **Understanding context:** The five participating areas started the process by focusing on the context that they were operating in, setting their own goals for change, conducting an initial system assessment, and using their population data to tell a story of place.

- **Engaging end-user audiences:** the participating local area teams were 'EYTA partners,' guiding the content and pace of the Academy, and deciding on steps needed for deployment in the local context.

- **Sequencing knowledge mobilisation activities:** the Academy was built around a series of interactive workshops, online learning and staged application in the local context, which were part of an EYTA theory of change. The goals were to build motivation to use evidence, develop evidence-use skills, and find ways to embed evidence use within structures and processes.

- **Building the evidence ecosystem:** we created a delivery team, the EYTA design partners, partnering with the Staff College to support leadership skills and knowledge, and with Better Start Bradford and Born in Bradford to support evidence use in context.

- **Testing and learning:** we modelled a stage 'plan, do, review' approach, both with the local areas and with our design partners, adapting the delivery of the Academy as we went. And crucially we recruited the Centre for Evidence and Implementation to carry out this independent evaluation to make sure that we captured and shared the learning in a proportionate way.

This evaluation offers us some important findings and questions. The theoretical design of the Transformation Academy receives a strong endorsement, based on the literature on evidence use, implementation and systems. It was a good fit with the system-level challenges which local areas were seeking to tackle, including capacity for improvement, prioritisation of early intervention, and understanding of evidence and how to apply it.

Participants strongly valued the impact of the Academy on quality of relationships, and this was seen as important in supporting initial planning and delivery in response to the pandemic which followed. In fact, some of the original practical goals such as producing an implementation plan appeared to be less valued than relationship quality and trust in the wider context of 2020.

This evaluation offers learning on the practical delivery of the Academy, particularly on sufficient time, engagement, and sequencing. It probes the fit between the programme pace, and team and individual needs. It explores the strengths and areas for development in the programme content, including: whether the balance was right between practical tools and challenging mindsets; whether the contextual analysis should take greater account of community factors such as housing, transport or employment; and the need for a greater focus on community involvement in the programme design. There were also messages about the theory of change being more explicit about the challenges of sustaining the gains achieved by Academy teams in a context affected by competing visions, priorities and capacity demands, and changes in staffing and leadership.

Crucially on evidence-use, the evaluation questions the clarity of the programme in emphasising evidence-use or system change, which had been interpreted differently by design partners and participants. It reinforces the importance of a broad understanding of evidence which reaches beyond the reassuring 'proof' of high-quality intervention impact evaluation into the world of evidence about community needs, family experience, workforce skills, intervention implementation quality, and practitioner knowledge. Although these forms of evidence do not provide causal evidence of impact, they are critical to intervention improvement and how resources are deployed. They are also particularly important ways of understanding real-world and complex system effectiveness — the conditions in which it is more challenging to use impact studies.

This evaluation puts EIF in a much stronger position to move forward on supporting evidence use as part of local work on the system challenges facing public services. We are already using the learning as part of our work programme, including refining our advice and support, developing clear knowledge mobilisation plans and making evaluation a routine part of our programmes. We look forward to going further still.

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Introduction

- The Early Years Transformation Academy (EYTA) was an intensive 12-month programme to support the development of integrated maternity and early years systems in which the latest evidence on early intervention and early childhood development was applied. It was set up by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) with its design partners Better Start Bradford, Born in Bradford and the Staff College. It was designed as an opportunity for local leaders to come together to review their local system, identify areas for development, and create a plan for transformation ('implementation plan').

- Modules focusing on preparing for change, identifying vulnerable populations, system planning and measuring impact were delivered through workshops, online learning, structured activities to apply learning to the local context, and direct support from the EYTA partners. Five local areas took part. The EYTA was delivered from April 2019 to March 2020, when Covid disrupted the final planned stages of work.

- This formative evaluation was intended to capture early learning about the development of the EYTA, recruitment and retention of local areas, delivery of and participation in the programme, and the overall value of the EYTA. It involved qualitative interviews with the design partners and with local team members and senior sponsors in each of the five participating areas, and also used programme data on attendance at and satisfaction with the design workshops. In total nine representatives of the design partners and 28 local area participants were interviewed.

- The EYTA addressed a challenging and developing area of practice, in aiming to support the utilisation of evidence in systems at scale. Learning from the field of implementation science highlights that the application of evidence in practice is not a linear approach, and requires 'zooming in' (looking at aspects of the system in detail) and 'zooming out' (looking from a strategic perspective across the system). It requires shared vision and coordination between local agencies, a positive organisational climate and culture, and engaged leaders. Community involvement and collaboration is also important. Learning from systems change initiatives also highlights the importance of creating the conditions in which change can happen, which

involves deep understanding of systems and of the aspects of systems that have led to, and that sustain, shortcomings, such as power structures, mindsets and values.

Getting started

- There was consistency in design partners' understanding of the overarching EYTA aims, as set out in the programme's theory of change. There were, however, some differences between EIF and design partners in terms of the relative emphasis placed on system change and evidence utilisation, and how they were meant to come together in the programme.
- Implicit in the EYTA's 'test and learn' approach was flexibility to adapt the programme as it developed, making the programme responsive to the needs of participating areas. However, more clarity about the over-arching aims of the EYTA and how they are connected could have aided the design process.
- The design of the programme involved considerably more resources than planned, reflecting the complexities of what was an ambitious programme.
- The EYTA was developed with input and challenge from some external EIF stakeholders, which was described as helpful, and some design partners suggested that if EYTA were to be repeated, more external involvement would be helpful.
- There was a good fit between participating areas' expectations from EYTA and the programme's purpose and aims, Local areas' reasons for participating reflected the systems-level issues noted in the EYTA programme theory of change as areas to attend to i.e. partnership working, understanding and use of evidence, and understanding the needs of local populations. Local areas' expectations of how the programme would support them to address these issues were also broadly in line with the goals outlined in the EYTA's theory of change.
- It did not prove possible during the application process to ensure that all areas had the capacity and capability to participate in what was a demanding programme. In practice, one area was felt by some design partners not to have been sufficiently well advanced in strategic planning for transformation to benefit fully from the programme, and one was felt to have had already developed specific plans which made it less possible to benefit fully.
- More clarity about requirements (e.g. the area team's composition, the role of senior sponsors, technical and specialist support required) would be helpful if the programme were to be repeated.

Participating in the programme

- The local area teams included a good mix of people, with representation from across early years and maternity services. Overall, it was felt that most local team members were in positions that provided oversight of the whole system and a mandate to drive change. Some areas felt an operational perspective was needed (to add capacity and bring different insights from being closer to the ground) and two areas had set up an operational team alongside the EYTA team.
- Each local area identified a single lead senior sponsor, and a wider group of senior sponsors. In most areas the lead senior sponsor was seen as a strong champion for change, very supportive and engaged with EYTA, although engagement was not consistently maintained throughout the programme in all areas. Engagement also appeared to be more patchy among the wider groups of senior sponsors.
- EYTA team members had not been involved in the application, and they needed to take ownership of the proposed work to 'hit the ground running' and work at pace. Time and input at the start of the programme to learn to work as a team and senior sponsors' support were also important facilitators.
- The time and resources to do the EYTA work varied across the teams but had generally been underestimated by local areas.

- At the start of the programme some teams were more advanced than others in terms of strategic thinking about transformation. The EYTA approach made all teams reflect on whether the transformation planning previously undertaken reflected the needs of their local population, the roles of different agencies in meeting these needs, and evidence of what works in supporting children and families.
- The learning programme was viewed as having covered relevant and important topics, which helped teams to find a focus for their work and develop an implementation plan. Some would have valued a wider and deeper examination of the local system and more focus on strategies for system change. It was also felt that there was too narrow a focus on 'gold standard' programmes, which do not cover the wide range problems teams had to tackle or might not be appropriate.
- While the pace of the work was challenging for local teams, participation in the design workshops was high and these events were described as informative, engaging, relevant and high quality. The online learning was valuable, although teams faced time constraints and difficulties in accessing Microsoft Teams.
- Some participants thought learning from other areas had been a very valuable part of the programme. For others, opportunities for peer-to-peer learning had been more limited than expected.
- Tailored support was described as very useful and participants would have liked more help from the EYTA programme team or the experts involved in the 'Dragon Den' session to support the refinement of their local area plans, move to implementation and develop evaluation plans.

Achievements and impacts

- Teams were at different stages in the development of implementation plans when the evaluation fieldwork was conducted. In two areas, the plan had been accepted by the relevant local governance boards. All areas recognised that there was substantial work still to do to develop plans further for implementation. Although less progress had been made than representatives of local area teams and design partners had expected, and work had been abruptly halted by Covid, the local areas saw their work as a strong foundation for moving forward.
- In three areas the focus of the implementation plan was reasonably clear, and described consistently between participants and in the implementation plan. In two areas there were more inconsistencies. Some local team members felt that it would have been helpful to have spent more time, during the EYTA programme and within the team, developing a shared higher-level vision for support for families before moving into further planning.
- The local areas were generally confident that the work would be taken forward, because of the commitment of the lead senior sponsor and team, the high profile of the work, alignment with other transformation work, and the scrutiny of governance boards. They also recognised challenges: that the work was at an early stage and could become fragmented, that other transformation work might cut across it, that plans held significant workforce and funding implications had not been worked through and financial pressures could work against plans, and that the work was vulnerable to changes in key personnel.
- Covid-19 had been a major disruptor of local areas' work on implementation plans, and there were concerns that Covid-recovery plans might divert capacity from transformation activity. However, alongside this, the EYTA work undertaken had strengthened the ability of local agencies to respond to Covid collectively, and their response to Covid had itself taken forward some aspects of the EYTA implementation plans, including rapid progress on data sharing, joint risk assessments, adaptation of service offers and joint communication with families.
- The key areas where impacts had already been experienced were in the development of stronger relationships and partnerships between local EYTA participants, and in systems

thinking – particularly the recognition of shared goals that can only be achieved through working together across the system.

- Impacts relating to the use of evidence were more disparate and less obvious. They tended to be talked about as gains or insights for individual team members rather than agreed collective changes. Participants particularly took from EYTA an appreciation of the value of local data in understanding need, and of a shared understanding of evidence on child development.
- EYTA programme content on leadership had been valued and some participants felt their leadership skills had developed, particularly with regard to systems leadership. Systems leaders now had more sense of a shared agenda and shared purpose.
- Some changes to services and provision as a result of the EYTA had already been made, and implementation plans set out significant changes to pathways, joint work and provision.
- The almost universal view was that EYTA had been very valuable, and participants were very positive about this. Even where they felt aspects of the work undertaken would have been done anyway without the EYTA, they felt it had been done better, more quickly and with a wider focus across the system because of EYTA.

Conclusions

- Overall it is clear the EYTA has been a very rich learning opportunity, and the evaluation points to clear strengths in the overall approach, content and delivery of the EYTA.
- *Evaluation Question 1: How successful was the academy in recruiting its target audience and retaining its participants?*
  The design partners were able to recruit and retain the target audience. Teams were set up broadly as envisaged by EIF, and membership was viewed as generally stable although there were some changes because of job moves. Lead senior sponsors were mainly actively involved throughout, although the direct engagement of other senior sponsors appeared to be limited.
- *Evaluation Question 2: Was the programme delivered as planned? And what were the planned and actual resources required to develop, deliver and participate in the EYTA?*
  The programme was delivered largely as planned. The resources required were not systematically mapped as part of the programme development and delivery. However, the clear message was that more resources had been needed for the development of the programme, and EYTA teams and senior sponsors consistently reported challenges in finding the necessary time and capacity to participate fully.
- *Evaluation Question 3: How satisfied were participants with the content and programme overall? What were the barriers and enablers to successful delivery?*
  Participants were very positive overall about the programme and all the subject matter was viewed as relevant and high priority. There were suggestions for expanding coverage of understanding the system, designing and leading systems change, how to apply evidence where evidence-based programmes are not feasible or sufficient, community engagement, and evaluation. Participants would also have valued more tailored support from design partners. The ambition for the EYTA was very wide-ranging. Some participants would have valued more time developing a high level vision and identifying the specific areas of work needed to achieve it. The consensus was that the programme needed to be more than a year long.
- *Evaluation Question 4: What was the perceived value for participants in terms of outputs and outcomes of the programme, including what was useful and how learning was used? How did this differ from those anticipated and those set out in the theory of change and logic model?*
  There was clear value for participants in having taken part. The clearest impacts were the development of stronger relationships and partnerships, and systems thinking – particularly the understanding of shared goals and interdependencies. There was also some evidence of renewed recognition of the importance of evidence. There was some evidence of leadership capacity development and a new shared purpose among team members. If implementation plans are implemented as set out they will lead to significant changes in provision and pathways, and in commissioning. These points indicate that most of the short term goals set out in the theory of change were achieved, although medium and longer term goals (as expected at

this stage) were not yet seen.

- The following recommendations are made for strengthening the EYTA programme and future work in this area based on the interview data and on the wider emergent evidence about effective approaches to evidence mobilisation and systems change.

The focus of the programme
Clarify the programme intentions, focus, content and capacity requirements. Develop a stronger framework which clarifies the logic and particularly the relationship between systems change and evidence. Use this to develop the programme and provide more clarity to participants about what is required

The structure of the programme
Plan for a longer and more flexible programme, given that the pace was a challenge for local areas and they achieved less than had been expected. Allow longer for the application and initiation stages: to allow for wider engagement of stakeholders and the initial development of relationships and systems leadership. More time is also needed to allow for the non-linear nature of work in this area and for iterating between different levels of systems analysis (zooming in and out) to enable the development of a shared high level vision, agreement about the dimensions or components of the system were change is needed, and to develop operational plans. This also suggests a need for more flexibility in the programme structure since participating areas will not necessarily move in concert, and may need more time to complete one stage of work before moving on to the next.

Plan for the active involvement in the programme of teams working at different levels, and for alignment in their work. The evaluation data suggests that there is a need for active work with senior sponsors; systems leaders at the level of the EYTA team, and operational groups. This would be consistent with the evidence about the importance of multi-level and aligned teams.

The content of the programme
Widen the lens on evidence and data and ensure that the programme does not focus too narrowly on evidence-based programmes. Interview data suggests that important elements are the use of local data, local evaluation, and effective non-programmatic practices and service approaches.

Widen and deepen coverage of systems change: looking beyond maternity and early years services, at the causes of poor outcomes, and at what holds the current system in place – including power structures, mindsets and values. This reflects both the interview data and the wider literature on systems change

Strengthen the coverage of co-creation with local communities and staff, hearing diverse voices, and peer to peer support, which were seen by participants as too light in their coverage. Again this would be consistent with the literature on systems change which emphasises the value of hearing divergent voices from the periphery of systems rather than 'the usual suspects'.

Provide more technical assistance and tailored support since these were highly valued and seen as insufficient inputs. Again this would be consistent with the wider evidence about the value of technical assistance and intermediary support.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings from a formative evaluation of the Early Years Transformation Academy (EYTA). As a formative evaluation, it was undertaken during programme implementation (in the last phase of programme delivery) to provide early insight into design and delivery.

This first chapter provides an outline of the EYTA. It also sets the wider context with a brief review of evidence on early intervention, evidence take up and implementation, and place-based systems change. It concludes with a brief summary of relevant current national policy initiatives.

Key findings

- The Early Years Transformation Academy (EYTA) was an intensive 12-month programme to support the development of integrated maternity and early years systems in which the latest evidence on early intervention and early childhood development is applied. It was set up by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) with its design partners Better Start Bradford, Born in Bradford and the Staff College. It was designed as an opportunity for local leaders to come together to review their local system, identify areas for development, and create a plan for transformation ('implementation plan').
- Modules focusing on preparing for change, identifying vulnerable populations, system planning and measuring impact were delivered through workshops, online learning, structured activities to apply learning to the local context, and direct support from the EYTA partners. Five local areas took part. The EYTA was delivered from April 2019 to March 2020, when Covid disrupted the final planned stages of work.
- This formative evaluation was intended to capture early learning about the development of the EYTA, recruitment and retention of local areas, delivery of and participation in the programme, and the overall value of the EYTA. It involved qualitative interviews with the design partners and with local team members and senior sponsors in each of the five areas. In total nine representatives of the design partners and 28 local area participants were interviewed.
- Supporting utilisation of evidence in systems at scale is a longstanding challenge. Learning from the field of implementation science highlights that the application of evidence in practice is a staged but non-linear approach. It requires shared vision and coordination between local agencies, positive organisational climate and culture, and engaged leaders. Community involvement and collaboration is also important. Strategies for implementation of transformation need to be designed purposefully with regard to anticipated barriers and facilitators.
- Learning from systems change initiatives also highlights the importance of creating the conditions in which change can happen, which involves deep understanding of systems and of the aspects of systems that have led to, and that sustain, problems and shortcomings.
- The EYTA took place at a time of other significant national policy change including the national Maternity Transformation Programme, modernisation of the Healthy Child Programme, the NHS Long Term Plan, and the creation of Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships and Integrated Care Systems.

1.1. The Early Years Transformation Academy

1.1.1 The EYTA ambition and approach

The EYTA was set up by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), working with their design partners Better Start Bradford, Born In Bradford, and The Staff College. Better Start Bradford is a local coalition funded by the Big Lottery as part of the A Better Start initiative (see below) to improve the life chances of children aged 0-3. Their key role in the EYTA was around lived experience, practical implementation and sharing learning from A Better Start. Born In Bradford is a major cohort study exploring the influences on the health and wellbeing of families and developing new interventions to improve outcomes, and hosts the evaluation hub for Better Start Bradford. Their role centred on measuring impact and evaluation design. The Staff College an independent leadership development organisation, closely affiliated to the Association of Directors of Children's Services, supporting the development of leadership capacity and capabilities. Their role centred on personal and team leadership development and systems leadership.

The EYTA was an intensive 12-month programme intended to be 'an innovative and strengths-based approach to planning the local maternity and early years system which applies the latest evidence'[1]. The rationale for the EYTA was that:
- The early years are critical to children's development
- Effective early intervention is not available to every child and family that needs it
- The current system holds back early intervention through a combination of funding pressures, short-term planning, fragmented responsibilities, evidence not being used in decision-making, and gaps in understanding 'what works'[2].

The EYTA was designed as an opportunity for local systems leaders across maternity and early years to come together to review their local system in the light of the latest evidence on early intervention and early childhood development. The aim was that local teams would identify areas for development and create an implementation plan. Guidance from EIF was that implementation plans should set out the vision, population needs, a theory of change, plans for services and for the workforce, resource prioritisation, demonstrate that current interventions have been assessed against evidence and plans for improvement, set out evaluation plans, and set out plans for governance and partnership arrangements. These implementation plans were developed in each area in the last phase of the programme, and set out the aims of and local context for transformation activity, the vision and key elements, and areas for further work [3].

The EYTA content was developed initially through evidence reviews commissioned by EIF from internal staff or consultants. These covered six topics:
- System planning: effective approaches to system planning, the scope of maternity and early years systems, enablers of systems change, resource mapping and workforce planning
- Identifying vulnerable populations: effective approaches addressing population needs assessment, population screening tools, children's outcomes frameworks, and using data and targets
- Implementation of systems change: effective approaches to enabling local leadership teams to plan and establish coherent systemic approaches to maternity and early years

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[1] EIF (2019) Early Years Transformation Academy Prospectus 2019/20 https://www.eif.org.uk/resource/early-years-transformation-academy-prospectus-201920
[2] EIF (2018) Realising the Potential of Early Intervention https://www.eif.org.uk/report/realising-the-potential-of-early-intervention
[3] The implementation plans do not set out detailed implementation activity and could also be described as 'transformation plans' which is the term used in the prospectus. However the term 'implementation plan' is used in the theory of change and was the term used by design partners and local areas.

- Assessing individual needs: effective approaches to assessing the needs of vulnerable children and families including assessment processes, psychometric tools and information sharing
- Support for families: effective ways of supporting vulnerable families including programmes, practices, trusted relationships and information services
- Measuring impact: effective approaches to measuring the impact of change, including evaluation approaches and culture.

The EYTA programme was then developed from these reviews and focused on four 'modules':
- Preparing for change: establishing the personal and collaborative leadership need for transformative change
- Identifying vulnerable populations: enhancing work on measuring local needs and setting goals, using the latest evidence on risk and protective factors in key domains of child development
- System planning: understanding how to apply systems thinking to local delivery and developing future pathways of support rooted in evidence
- Measuring impact: using evaluation to support systems change and to build the UK evidence base.

These modules were delivered through four streams of activity:
- Interactive face-to-face events: following an initial launch in April 2019, there were four 'design workshops', with a fifth graduation event planned but cancelled because of Covid-19
- Online learning: webinars and other learning resources
- Application to the local context: through activity such as developing an outcomes framework, theory of change, mapping current system pathways, and developing an implementation plan
- Academy support: access to independent specialists, support and challenge in applying learning, and working with a network of peers across local areas.

An overview of the EYTA 'journey' is set out in Table 1.1 below.

1.1.2 Programme theory of change
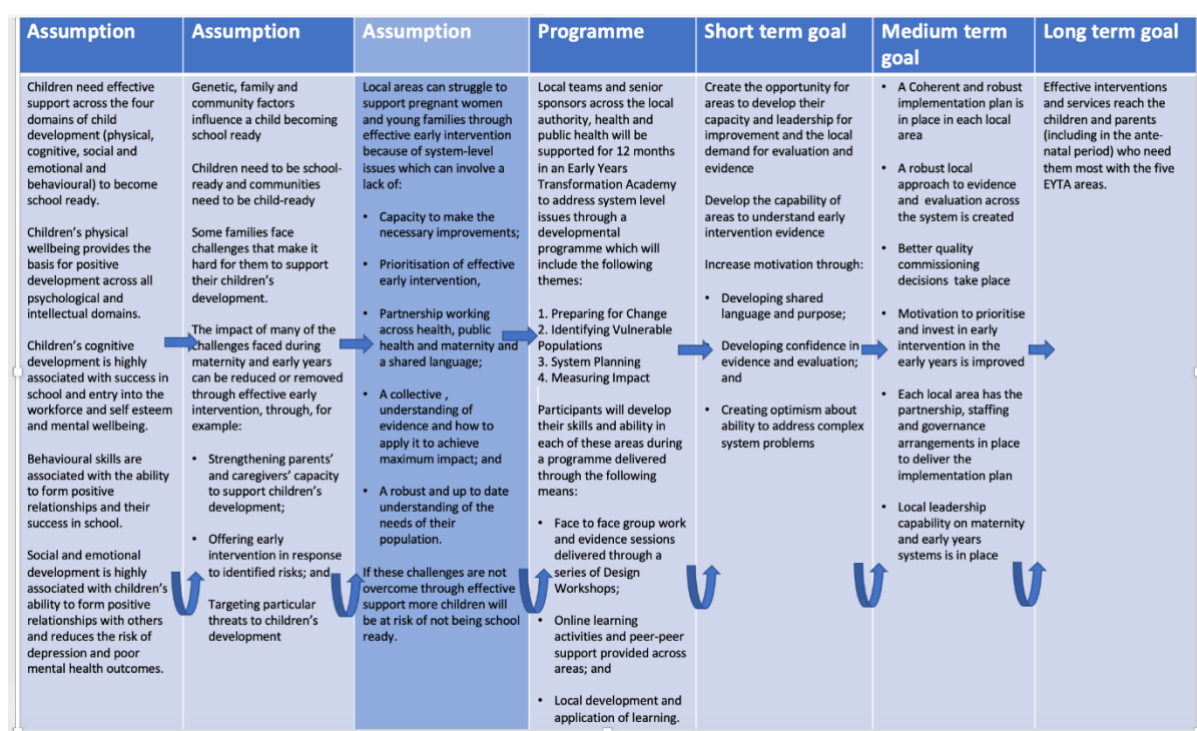
EIF and design partners intended that the programme would be a 'test and learn' approach, with flexibility in the content of sessions and the approach to allow responsiveness to feedback, and with this formative evaluation commissioned in January 2020. The approach was informed by a programme theory of change, shown in Figure 1.1 below. A more detailed logic model was also developed.

Table 1.1 Early Years Transformation Academy (EYTA) journey

Online learning	Events	What local teams were expected to deliver
Register with online learning and join the EYTA Hub	**Launch event** London April 2019 Bringing together senior sponsors and academy leadership teams to reinforce mandate and introduce the journey	
Phase 1		
10 steps for evaluation success: an introduction - Leadership videos - Outcomes Framework: a briefing - Key competencies in child development: an introduction - Population Needs Assessment: a brief overview - Values: what is important to you?	**Design workshop 1** Watford 2 days, June 2019 - Visual stock take: progress and learning - Team morale, values, purpose and behaviour - Developing common values on evidence and evaluation - Leadership in the moment - Adaptive leadership and systems - Outcome frameworks - Population needs assessment - Team planning	- Complete maturity matrix and readiness for change tools and EIF to provide a report with responses 360 degree feedback - Local stakeholder workshops to identify areas of strength and development, priorities and build momentum for change - Survey Monkey Learning Log
Phase 2		
- Ensure effective communications with senior sponsors - Q&A with Dr Kirsten Asmussen on child development	**Design workshop 2** London July 2019 - Co-production - Evidence and population needs assessments and outcomes frameworks - Theory of change	- Reflection on personal leadership role (relation to 360) - Reflection on team and governance arrangements and develop a statement on ways of working - Plan a 'go-see' activity for September - Pull together and develop existing outcomes frameworks and population needs assessments
Phase 3		
Theory of change webinar	**Design workshop 3** Birmingham October 2019 - From theory (of change) to logic model - The leadership ask: working together better - Improving the quality of local interventions	- Population needs assessment and outcomes framework - Blog - Mapping local service pathways - Theory of change 'Go-see' activity
Phase 4		
	Design workshop 4 London January 2020 - Review progress - Dragon's Den - Evaluation (optional workshop)	Finalise outputs below with bespoke support: - Service intervention mapping - Population needs assessment and outcomes framework - Theory of change - Logic model - Preparing presentation for Dragon's Den
Phase 5		
	Design workshop 5 London March 2020 - cancelled - Review maturity matrix and readiness for change - Peer to peer conversation - Workshop (evaluation or hub) - Celebration	- Complete maturity matrix and readiness for change (undertaken) - Finalising Implementation Plan (17 March) - Developing EYTA evaluation strategy 360 degree – self assessment - Developing materials for EYTA hub (no date set)

Figure 1.1 EYTA Theory of change

Assumption	Assumption	Assumption	Programme	Short term goal	Medium term goal	Long term goal
Children need effective support across the four domains of child development (physical, cognitive, social and emotional and behavioural) to become school ready. Children's physical wellbeing provides the basis for positive development across all psychological and intellectual domains. Children's cognitive development is highly associated with success in school and entry into the workforce and self esteem and mental wellbeing. Behavioural skills are associated with the ability to form positive relationships and their success in school. Social and emotional development is highly associated with children's ability to form positive relationships with others and reduces the risk of depression and poor mental health outcomes.	Genetic, family and community factors influence a child becoming school ready Children need to be school-ready and communities need to be child-ready Some families face challenges that make it hard for them to support their children's development. The impact of many of the challenges faced during maternity and early years can be reduced or removed through effective early intervention, through, for example: • Strengthening parents' and caregivers' capacity to support children's development; • Offering early intervention in response to identified risks; and Targeting particular threats to children's development	Local areas can struggle to support pregnant women and young families through effective early intervention because of system-level issues which can involve a lack of: • Capacity to make the necessary improvements; • Prioritisation of effective early intervention, • Partnership working across health, public health and maternity and a shared language; • A collective , understanding of evidence and how to apply it to achieve maximum impact; and • A robust and up to date understanding of the needs of their population. If these challenges are not overcome through effective support more children will be at risk of not being school ready.	Local teams and senior sponsors across the local authority, health and public health will be supported for 12 months in an Early Years Transformation Academy to address system level issues through a developmental programme which will include the following themes: 1. Preparing for Change 2. Identifying Vulnerable Populations 3. System Planning 4. Measuring Impact Participants will develop their skills and ability in each of these areas during a programme delivered through the following means: • Face to face group work and evidence sessions delivered through a series of Design Workshops; • Online learning activities and peer-peer support provided across areas; and • Local development and application of learning.	Create the opportunity for areas to develop their capacity and leadership for improvement and the local demand for evaluation and evidence Develop the capability of areas to understand early intervention evidence Increase motivation through: • Developing shared language and purpose; • Developing confidence in evidence and evaluation; and • Creating optimism about ability to address complex system problems	• A Coherent and robust implementation plan is in place in each local area • A robust local approach to evidence and evaluation across the system is created • Better quality commissioning decisions take place • Motivation to prioritise and invest in early intervention in the early years is improved • Each local area has the partnership, staffing and governance arrangements in place to deliver the implementation plan • Local leadership capability on maternity and early years systems is in place	Effective interventions and services reach the children and parents (including in the ante-natal period) who need them most with the five EYTA areas.

1.1.3 The five local areas

Five local areas participated in the EYTA. The recruitment process was intended to identify local areas with whom the programme would be a good fit, that is:

- With a commitment to using evidence in the design and delivery of maternity and early years services,
- Ready for innovation and not already using a system focused programme,
- Able to bring together senior people who could think strategically and with capacity to engage, with long term ambitions, and where senior champions would give a mandate for transformation.

The initial plan was to identify four local areas within a single geographic region to facilitate local collaboration, although, as described later, this aspect of the design was changed. There was a prospectus and webinar to introduce the programme, and the application process involved submission of expressions of interest (February 2019), discussions between EIF and senior sponsors to explore fit, a full application by those invited to proceed, and final selection by EIF and partners (March 2019). Eighteen areas submitted expressions of interest, eight submitted full applications and five were selected.

The expectation was that each area would set up a local team of 6-8 people including strategic commissioners (local authority commissioners, Clinical Commissioning Group commissioners and public health consultants), local service leaders, and a voluntary and community service lead. Between them, the team would have responsibility for areas including children's centres, special education needs and disability (SEND) services, education services, early help, maternity and neonatal services, Healthy Child Programme and mental health services. The team was expected to be supported by two further sets of stakeholders: senior sponsors (that is, strategic leaders who

could give a mandate for transformation work to happen and actively champion it), and wider stakeholders who would be engaged in local work.

1.2. Evaluation objectives and methods

1.2.1 Evaluation objectives and questions

The formative evaluation was commissioned in the last phase of delivery of the EYTA programme. It was intended to capture early learning, views on the perceived value of the programme, whether the intended outputs have been created and assess whether it has begun to catalyse the types of changes needed for it to achieve its long term goals. The key objectives were:
- To understand whether EYTA was delivered as planned
- To understand participants' views of the programme, its value and perceived impacts
- To review and refine the draft theory of change
- To inform EIF's further development of methods to support local areas to apply evidence.

The evaluation questions were:
- How successful was the academy in recruiting its target audience and retaining its participants?
- Was the programme delivered as planned? And what were the planned and actual resources required to develop, deliver, and participate in EYTA?
- How satisfied were participants with the content and programme overall? What were the barriers and enablers to successful delivery?
- What was the perceived value for participants in terms of outputs and outcomes of the programme, including what was useful and how learning was used? How did this differ from those anticipated and those set out in the theory of change and logic model?
- What can be learnt to inform future activities to apply evidence to early years systems and evaluate these activities?

1.2.2 Evaluation design and sample

The evaluation was a qualitative design and involved:
- In-depth interviews with the four design partners to explore their perspectives and assessments. Nine representatives were interviewed, in February and March 2020
- An initial workshop with the design partners to review the theory of change and identify areas for refinement, held in March 2020
- In-depth interviews with the five participating local areas. The initial intention was to undertake interviews with two senior sponsors (see above – senior leaders who would provide a mandate for transformation and act as senior champions the EYTA work) and four team members (including the team co-ordinator) in each local area. However, the Covid-19 virus erupted while recruiting study participants and severely impacted on their availability to take part, as well as extending the study fieldwork period considerably. Interviews took place between the end of April and early July 2020. Overall 25 interviews were undertaken involving 28 participants, as shown in Table 1.2. Participants were selected to ensure diversity in agency and area of responsibility, and to include one team member who had been less involved in the academy. It was particularly difficult for senior sponsors to engage in the research, and in total eight took part.

Table 1.2 EYTA evaluation local area interviews

Area	No. of interviews	No. of participants	Participants' agency			
			LA children's services	LA public health	CCG or NHS Trust	Other
Area 1	6	7	3	1	1	2
Area 2	7	7	2	1	4	0
Area 3	3	4	2	1	1	0
Area 4	6	7	3	2	2	0
Area 5	3	3	2	0	1	0
Total	25	28	12	5	9	2

A brief description of each of the five participating local areas is shown in the Appendix. This includes a description of each area and their local team, and a summary of their implementation plan. The five areas are not distinguished in the chapters of this report, both to focus on learning from across their experiences and to avoid indirect attribution of views to participants which would breach assurances of anonymity.

1.3. Evidence context

This section provides an overview of evidence about the importance of the early years, and about effective approaches to supporting evidence utilisation, implementation, and systems change. It highlights common messages across these bodies of evidence.

The key terms used in this section are:

- **System:** A system is 'an interconnected and interdependent series of entities, where decisions and actions in one entity are consequential to other entities'[4]. In the context of EYTA it was intended to cover the collection of agencies and organisations (particularly including health, social care, early years and education services and the voluntary sector) and wider communities that together support children's early development, recognising that families and children are themselves also part of the system.
- **Knowledge mobilisation/utilisation:** the meaningful use of evidence and expertise in policy and practice. The term 'mobilisation' particularly emphasises that this is not a one-directional flow of information but involves active participation and engagement
- **Implementation science:** 'the scientific study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice, and hence, to improve the quality and effectiveness of health services and care'[5].
- **Systems change:** 'an intentional process, designed to alter the status quo by shifting and realigning the form and function of a targeted system'[6]. This often involves addressing the underlying structures and supporting mechanisms such as policies, relationships, resources, power structures and values.

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[4] Welbourn D, Warwick R, Carnall C and Fathers D (2012) *Leadership of whole systems* London: King's Fund
[5] Eccles M and Mittman B (2006) 'Welcome to implementation science' *Implementation Science 1(1) 89-93*
[6] Foster-Fishmann P, Nowell B and Yang H (2007) 'Putting the system back into systems change: A framework for understanding and changing organizational and community systems' *American Journal of Community Psychology, 39, 197-215*

1.3.1 Importance of the early years

There is a wealth of evidence that the first years of life are a foundational period in children's physical, cognitive, behavioural and socio-emotional development.[7] Yet a large number of risk factors can disrupt early developmental trajectories[8] and have a substantial long-term impact[9]. An extensive body of evidence demonstrates that effective maternity and early years interventions, services and practice can reduce the likelihood of children falling behind and have a significant impact on a child's development[10]. However, there are still clearly gaps between disadvantaged children and those not facing disadvantage by the time children enter school[11], highlighting that the current system is not providing the support all children need.

1.3.2 Knowledge mobilisation and implementation science

Despite the wealth of evidence about how to support children's development, the challenge of how to put this evidence into practice, particularly across a geographic area or system, is a very longstanding one. Under the various terms of research utilisation, knowledge translation, knowledge mobilisation (and others), there has been a growth in initiatives to support the use of evidence in policy and practice, including for example communities of practice, embedded researchers, evidence-synthesis centres, knowledge brokers, evidence intermediaries and research networks[12]. Progress in thinking about how to support knowledge mobilisation has been described as involving three generations of thinking[13]:

- Linear models, framing the issue as a one-way process of evidence being disseminated by researchers and incorporated into policy and practice
- Relationship models, which focus on the interactions between people using evidence and wider knowledge with an emphasis on fostering partnerships, networks collaboration and shared learning
- Systems models, which recognise that knowledge and its mobilisation is an aspect of systems and of how they change and develop, and so needs to be understood in relation to the operation of the system as a whole.

Knowledge mobilisation in complex systems has been described as requiring approaches such as co-producing knowledge, establishing shared goals and measures, enabling leadership, ensuring adequate resourcing, and communicating strategically[14].

The last three decades have also seen the emergence of implementation science, 'the scientific study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice, and hence, to improve the quality and effectiveness of health

[7] Asmussen, K., Feinstein, L. Martin, J., Haroon, C. (2016) *Foundations for Life: What works to support parent-child interaction in the early years?* Early Intervention Foundation

[8] Early Intervention Foundation (2018). *Realising the potential of Early Intervention*.

[9] Law, J., Rush, R., Parsons, S., and Schoon, I. (2009). 'Modelling developmental language difficulties from school entry into adulthood: Literacy, mental health and employment outcomes' *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research, 52, 1401–1416*.; Goodman, A., Joshi, H. Nasim, H. and Tyler, C. (2015) *Social and emotional skills in childhood and their long-term effects on adult life.* Early Intervention Foundation

[10] Kirsten Asmussen et al. (2016) Foundations for Life; Asmussen, K. and Brims, L. (2018) *What works to enhance the effectiveness of the Healthy Child Programme: An evidence update.* Early Intervention Foundation; Asmussen, K. Law, J, Charlton, J. Acquah, D., Brims, L., Pote, I., McBride, T. (2018) *Key competencies in early cognitive development Things, people, numbers and words*. Early Intervention Foundation.

[11] Education Policy Institute (2016) Divergent Pathways: *The disadvantage gap, accountability and the pupils premium* Department for Education (2019) *Early years foundation stage profile results: 2018 to 2019*.

[12] Boaz A and Nutley S (2019) 'Using evidence' in Boaz A, Davies H, Fraser A and Nutley S (eds) *What Works Now? Evidence-informed policy and practice.* Bristol: Policy Press

[13] Best A and Holmes B (2010) 'Systems thinking, knowledge and action: Towards better models and methods' *Evidence & Policy 6, 2, 145-59*

[14] Holmes B, Best A, Davies H, Hunter D, Kelly M, Marshall M and Rycroft-Malone J (2017) 'Mobilising knowledge in complex health systems: a call to action' in *Evidence & Policy 13, 3, 539-560*

services and care'[15]. Based on studies of the effectiveness of implementation and scale-up, this literature[16] highlights a number of relevant themes:

- Effective change happens in stages (e.g. exploration, preparation, implementation, scaling and sustaining) but is not a linear process
- It requires a shared vision, shared decision-making and coordination
- Positive organisational culture and climate (high morale, trust and collegiality; openness to change and innovation) contribute to effective implementation
- The role of leaders in setting priorities, building consensus, offering incentives for implementation and making resources available is crucial
- Community engagement and collaboration in the selection or design of agreed changes is key
- Effective implementation needs clarity about precisely what is to be implemented, with clearly formulated interventions and activities
- It involves aligned changes at multiple levels and across systems
- It requires purposeful implementation strategies, selected through systematic assessment of the potential enablers and obstacles to change
- Monitoring implementation progress is itself a powerful implementation strategy
- It is supported by implementation teams, and complex implementation efforts require implementation teams operating in synergy at multiple levels. The value of technical assistance and support from intermediary organisations is also highlighted.

1.3.3 Systems change

As noted at the start of Section 1.3, systems change is 'an intentional process, designed to alter the status quo by shifting and realigning the form and function of a targeted system[6]'. There is a growing body of literature that makes the case that even the most effective programmes, on their own, will not be sufficient to achieve changes for whole local populations, and that systems-wide efforts are therefore also needed. The assumption here is that if the reach, resources and relationships across systems can be brought together with a shared vision that is rooted in the use of evidence, the results will out-strip those that could be obtained through individual programmes or services.

A number of approaches to supporting local systems change have emerged internationally in recent years, often informed by the concept of collective impact - a 'systemic approach to social impact that focuses on the relationships between organisations and progress towards shared objectives'[17]. Some examples are set out in Table 1.3 below.

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[15]Eccles M and Mittman B (2006) 'Welcome to implementation science' *Implementation Science 1(1) 89-93*

[16]Aarons G, Hurlburt M and Horwitz S (2011) 'Advancing a Conceptual Model of Evidence-Based Practice Implementation in Public Service Sectors' *Adm Policy Ment Health 38: 4-23.* Damschroder L, Aron D, Keith R, Kirsh S, Alexander J and Lowery J (2009) 'Fostering implementation of health services research findings into practice: a consolidated framework for advancing implementation science. Meyers D, Durlak J and Wandersman A (2012) 'The Quality Implementation Framework: A Synthesis of Critical Steps in the Implementation Process' *Am J Community Psychol 50: 462-480.* Supplee L and Metz A (2015) Opportunities and Challenges in Evidence-based Social Policy *Society for Research in Child Development 28 (4)* Wandersman A, Duffy J, Flaspohler P, Noonan R, Lubell K, Stillman L, Blachman M, Dunville R and Saul J (2008) 'Bridging the Gap Between Prevention Research and Practice: The Interactive Systems Framework for Dissemination and Implementation' *Am J Community Psychol 41: 171-181*

[17]Kania J and Kramer M (2011) 'Collective Impact' *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 36–41

Table 1.3 Examples of place-based systems change initiatives

Systems of Care	A service delivery approach developed in the US involving a coordinated network of community-based wraparound services and supports for families with multiple needs. It aims to improve outcomes for young people with severe emotional disorders by expanding the availability of appropriate high quality support in the local service system. It is based around a set of guiding principles including interagency collaboration, individualised strengths-based care, family-driven and youth-guided care, and working effectively across cultures. Evaluation has found promising evidence of impacts on systems- and youth-level outcomes. For more information see https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/ntaec/
Communities that Care	A strategy development process originating in the US and trialled in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, that empowers local communities to use robust evidence of 'what works' in prevention and early intervention to prevent youth problem behaviours. The approach involves population research on risk and protective factors, effective prevention programmes, community ownership of local implementation, and technical assistance and evaluation. Evaluation has found that it can reduce problematic youth behaviour. For more information see https://www.communitiesthatcare.net/
PROSPER	A community resilience model that uses a three-tiered community partnership involving schools, community teams and universities, to support large-scale implementation of evidence-based programmes. Evaluation has found promising impacts on problematic youth behaviours. For more information see http://helpingkidsprosper.org/what-is-prosper
National Lottery A Better Start	This ten-year programme funds five local public and voluntary sector partnerships in the UK to test new ways of improving support and services for families, with a focus on diet and nutrition, social and emotional development, and speech, language and communication. It aims to support systems change, improving the way that local health, public services and the voluntary and community sector work together with parents to improve outcomes for children. For more information see https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/strategic-investments/a-better-start
Making Every Adult Matter	The MEAM Approach is developed by Clinks, Homeless Link, Mind and Collective Voice and aims to help local areas design and deliver better coordinated services for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. It is currently being used by partnerships of statutory and voluntary agencies in 31 local areas across England. It is a 'non prescriptive' framework involving seven elements including building partnerships, coordinating services, service improvement and workforce development, and systems change. Early evaluation evidence is promising in terms of impacts on service coordination and outcomes for adults. For more information see http://meam.org.uk/

These initiatives vary in how far they are focused on service coordination or on deeper local systems change, the degree of emphasis on implementation of evidence-based programmes or on wider service improvement, and in whether the focus is on pre-determined outcomes for children and families or on priorities that emerge as work is undertaken. Duration varies but all are multi-year programmes, with A Better Start a ten-year programme.

These and other systems change initiatives are generating evidence of promising results[18] as well as a about the challenges of systems change endeavours[19]. However, there is not yet a body of high-quality evaluation evidence that provides clear guidance on how to achieve population level

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[18] For an overview see Crimeen A, Bernstein B, Zapart S and Haigh F (2017) *Place-based Interventions: A Realist Informed Literature Review* Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation, South Western Sydney Local Health District and UNSW Australia: Liverpool

[19] For an overview see Mechur Karp M and Lundy-Wagner V (2016) *Collective Impact: Theory Versus Reality CCRC Brief No. 61*

outcomes through systems change approaches, and how systems integration should be measured[20]. It is recognised that this work is much more challenging than working at the level of single programmes, or single agencies, and that it involves attending to the underlying dynamics, culture and infrastructure of local systems[21] addressing the dimensions or conditions that hold the social problem in place[22]. These include policies, regulations and priorities; practices; how resources (money, people, knowledge) are allocated; relationships and connections; how formal and informal power is allocated, and mental models (deeply-held beliefs, taken-for-granted framings and assumptions).

The particular requirements of systems leadership and of creating a supportive climate and culture for transformation and evidence use are also emphasised[23]. Writers also describe the need to 'zoom in and out', looking at the whole system or at the causes in shortcomings from a distance, and looking in detail at specific aspects of the system and its functioning[24].

Because systems, and systems change, result from the dynamic interactions between individual parts of the system which cannot be predicted and controlled, commentators argue that systems-level change initiatives need to operate at multiple levels and to focus not only on pre-determined interventions, but also on creating the conditions in which continued change can happen. For example the organisation Collaborate[25], drawing on their place-based systems change programmes and on wider literature, identify nine pre-conditions for systems change including citizen-centredness; recognising issues as systemic; honesty, trust and shared values; strengths-based work that views people and place as assets; distributed leadership, and embracing risk. The ABLe Change Framework[26], developed from a review of the published evidence and analysis of case studies, outlines the importance of approaches such as engaging diverse perspectives and thinking systemically, and of processes such as defining a targeted problem, understanding the local system and adopting a shared agenda.

There is clearly much shared territory between evidence utilisation, implementation and systems change, and the approaches described are clearly visible in the EYTA ambitions and design. Chapter 5 summarises key insights from across these bodies of literature and uses these to inform the conclusions drawn from across the evaluation.

1.4. Policy context

Finally in this chapter, we briefly summarise the national policy context within which EYTA took place. Key recent or ongoing policy initiatives include:

- A sustained period of dramatic reduction in local authority funding for children's services since 2010[27], prompting significant remodelling and reduction in provision

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[20] Kelly L, Harlock J, Peters M, Fitzpatrick R and Crocker H (2020) Measures for the integration of health and social care services for long-term health conditions: a systematic review of reviews. *BMC Health Services Research 20:358*

[21] Conway R, Masters J and Thorold J (2016) *From Design Thinking to Systems Change: how to invest in innovation for social impact* RSA: London

[22] Kania J, Kramer M and Senge P (2018) *The Water of Systems Change* FSG

[23] See for example Ghate D, Lewis J and Welbourn D (2013) *Systems Leadership: Exceptional leadership for exceptional time Synthesis Paper* Nottingham: Staff College

[24] Kanter R (2011) 'Zoom In, Zoom Out' *Harvard Business Review March 2011*

[25] Billiald S and McAllister-Jones LT (2015) *Behaving Like a System? The pre-conditions for place-based systems change* London: Collaborate

[26] Foster-Fisherman P and Watson E (2012) 'The ABLe Change Framework: A conceptual and methodological tool for promoting systems change' in *Am J Community Psychol 49 (3-4): 503-516*

[27] Kelly E, Lee T, Sibiek L and Waters T (2018) *Public Spending on Children in England: 2000 to 2020* London: Children's Commissioner for England

- The Troubled Families programme which since 2011 has provided a family worker as a single point of contact to families facing multiple challenges, with a view to addressing school attendance, youth crime, unemployment and other costs to public services

- Provision of free early education and childcare, initially 15 hours per week for all 3-4 year olds, expanded to disadvantaged two year olds from 2013, and to 30 hours of free provision for working parents of 3-4 year olds from 2017[28].

- The national Maternity Transformation Programme, launched in 2016 and implementing a vision for safer and more personalised care and deliver the national ambition to halve the rates of stillbirths, neonatal mortality, maternal mortality and brain injury by 2025.

- Plans for modernisation of the Healthy Child Programme by Public Health England including producing a pre-conception and maternity pathway to reduce risk and improve wellbeing, and publishing a speech, language and communication pathway to improve outcomes for children and reduce inequality in school readiness.

- The NHS Long Term Plan, published in 2019 and based around three aims: ensuring that everyone gets the best start in life, world class care for major health conditions, and supporting people to age well. It is now being taken forward in local strategies setting out how the ambitions will be turned into local action to improve services, health and wellbeing.

- Creation of Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs) from 2016 to bring local health and care leaders together to plan around the long-term needs of local communities. STPs are evolving into Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) taking collective responsibility for managing resources, delivering NHS standards, and improving the health of the population they serve including through local NHS Long Term Plans

- Continued local area planning and implementation of transformation in CAMHS provision, with local professionals from across the NHS, public health, children's services in local authorities, education and youth justice working together with children, young people and their families to improve services for their locality. Local transformation plans set out how local services will invest resources to improve children and young people's mental health across the whole system, and provide information used by STPs and ICSs in developing their NHS Long Term Plan.

[28]Paull G and La Valle I (2018) *Evaluation of the first year of the national rollout of 30 hours free childcare: Research Report* London: Department for Education

Evaluation of the Early Years Transformation Academy

2. Getting started

This chapter explores what motivated EIF to set up EYTA and the other design partners to support the programme, design partners' understanding of the EYTA aims, and what influenced its design. It then considers the EYTA application process and whether the participating areas were the 'right fit' for the programme. It concludes by exploring to what extent decisions to sign up for EYTA reflected the programme's theory of change assumptions in relation to the systems level issues areas wanted to address, and expectations of how the programme would help to tackle these.

Key findings

- There was consistency in design partners' understanding of the overarching EYTA aims set out in the programme's theory of change. There were, however, some differences between EIF and other design partners in terms of the relative emphasis placed on system change and evidence utilisation, and how they were meant to come together in the programme.
- Implicit in the EYTA's 'test and learn' approach was flexibility to adapt the programme as it developed, making the programme responsive to the needs of participating areas. However, more clarity about the over-arching aims of the EYTA and how they are connected could have aided the design process.
- The design of the programme involved considerably more resources than planned, reflecting the complexities of what was an ambitious programme.
- The EYTA was developed with input and challenge from some external EIF stakeholders, which was described as helpful, and some design partners suggested that if EYTA were to be repeated, there could be even greater external involvement.
- EIF partners were pleased with the local area response to the invitation to take part in the EYTA and felt it met their ambition to reach local areas to help them to put evidence at the heart of their work.
- There was a good fit between the EYTA assumptions, set out in the programme theory of change, and the system-level problems participating areas wanted to address i.e. poor partnership working, understanding and use of evidence and the needs of local populations.
- Local areas' expectations of how the programme would support them to deal with system-level problems were also broadly in line with the goals outlined in the EYTA's theory of change.
- While there was a good fit between participating areas' expectations from EYTA and the programme's purpose and aims, it did not prove possible through the application process to ensure that all areas had the capacity and capability to participate in what was a demanding programme. In practice, one area was felt by some design partners not to have been sufficiently well advanced in strategic planning for transformation to benefit fully from the programme, and one was felt to have had already developed specific plans which made it less possible to benefit fully.
- If the programme were to be repeated, learning from this experience could enable EIF to be clearer about EYTA requirements (e.g. the area team's composition, the role of senior sponsors, technical and specialist support required).

2.1. Why EYTA

The findings on what motivated EIF to set up the EYTA, and external design partners to support it reflected the different organisational aims and priorities of the respective partners. The EYTA was also seen as a learning opportunity about effective ways of working in this ambitious area.

For EIF the key driver for setting up the EYTA was to develop an approach for establishing collaborative working relationships with local areas to support them to put evidence at the heart of their work, with the ultimate aim of improving outcomes for children and their families. While EIF plays a key role in reviewing and disseminating research evidence, EIF partners reported that its role in evidence mobilisation has been more limited:

'… there's a kind of worry that we produce it all, but actually, are people using it, is it accessible enough, do they need a bit more support around the edges, along the journey?' (Design partner)

Through the EYTA, EIF wanted to explore how it can support the use of evidence for local transformation, and where it can particularly add value. It was also seen as providing an opportunity to understand the obstacles to evidence utilisation and how they can be overcome.

The Staff College's decision to contribute to the EYTA was driven by the opportunity to support service transformation locally through building systems leadership capacity:

'To see where that got people to in terms of addressing quite significant transformational change that is both needed but also wanted in relation to early years and maternity. We were interested, as well, in terms of what we could contribute around leadership development and, because of our particular interest in systems leadership, that obviously fell very squarely into that as well.' (Design partner)

Better Start Bradford's engagement with the EYTA reflected its core aim to promote the improvement of early years services through system change. The EYTA was seen as an opportunity to share learning from the Better Start Bradford experience. It was also seen as an opportunity to explore how to extend the transformation of early years systems to areas of Bradford not currently covered by the Better Start programme, which has been implemented only in part of the city.

For Born in Bradford, the EYTA provided an opportunity to share learning about embedding research into practice, and to test and further develop the evaluation tools and processes used for the Better Start Bradford programme.

2.2. The aims of the EYTA

The design partners' understanding of the EYTA aims and how they shaped its development reflect the systems-level challenges outlined in the programme theory of change (outlined in Chapter 1). EYTA's overarching aims were described as:

- Supporting partnership working across key stakeholders, as the EYTA required strategic endorsement from all key agencies and multi-agency academy teams.
- Supporting better use of evidence by providing tools and processes for understanding and prioritising local population needs; targeting early intervention; implementing evidence-based interventions; and evaluating programmes and services. There was an ambition that academy participants would become champions in generation and use of evidence in public services.

While there was consistency among design partners' understanding of the overarching EYTA aims, there were differences in terms of the emphasis placed on system change and evidence utilisation, and how they came together in the programme. External design partners mainly saw the EYTA as a system change initiative. For example, one partner thought the EYTA was similar to A Better Start, which aims to improve the way organisations work together and with families to shift attitudes and funding towards preventing problems that can start in early life (see Chapter 1). For EIF, the EYTA was primarily about evidence mobilisation, with less clarity of how this fits with system change, particularly given the limited evidence base for systems change.

'… [We] would struggle to recognise what an EIF voice would look like on evidence to do with systems and systemic approaches. That is partly to do with the quality of evidence and fears that a lot of the evidence wouldn't be considered good evidence against our evidence standards, and what that would mean for … how we use it' (Design partner)

There were also some differences, beneath these overarching objectives, in the aspects of evidence mobilisation and of systems change described by different partners, as well as in the relative emphasis placed on other aims such as leadership, shifting local priorities to early years and early intervention, influencing service provision, and the development of technical skills.

The general message was a need for more clarity about the intended goals of EYTA and what success would look like. There was uncertainty among design partners on how one would assess whether the EYTA had met its goals (as set out in the theory of change, see Chapter 1), such as helping to develop a shared language and purpose, confidence in using evidence, and optimism in ability to address complex system problems. A key EYTA deliverable for each local area was a 'high quality implementation plan'. However, design partners argued that high quality was not defined nor was the scope of the plan, and it was never clearly articulated how the EYTA goals should be reflected in these plans.

The difficulties in pinpointing what success would look like reflected the large scale and ambitious as well as fluid and experimental nature of the programme:

'Right from the beginning, we've treated this as though it's been a learning process for all of us, rather than it's an established programme and by the end of it you can have 16 widgets that will be in blue and round.' (Design partner)

Implicit in this 'test and learn' approach was a flexibility to adapt the programme as it developed, making it difficult to determine at the start what the programme deliverables should be. For example, a design partner said there was an initial expectation that the implementation plan should cover the whole early years system, but it quickly became apparent that this was not realistic, and focusing on an element of the system may be a more realistic goal for a 12-month programme. Furthermore, as discussed later, the five participating areas were at different starting points. This diversity made it difficult to define consistent measures of success across all participating areas.

Design partners thought the EYTA experience could now be used to define more clearly the stages and outcomes for each stage and how the stages of work come together, with clear goals for different project activities.

2.3. Designing the EYTA

The development and design of the EYTA was a three-year project. In the first year, the key elements of the curriculum outlined in Chapter 1 were identified and relevant evidence was reviewed to inform the development of the learning modules. The reviews considered the research

evidence about relevant topics, the extent to which local practice reflects the evidence base and what is known about the challenges of translating evidence into practice. EIF staff reported that the evidence on some of the topics was patchy (e.g. systemic issues) and the quality of the reviews was mixed reflecting the involvement of a number of authors (including EIF associates). It was argued that to ensure more consistently high standards, if the EYTA were to be repeated, the development of the learning material would benefit from better specification, clearer objectives and more internal resources.

The EYTA theory of change (see Chapter 1) was developed in the second year, when discussions focused on the design of the programme.

EIF partners reported that initial thinking about the programme was shaped by two large seminars with representatives of the early years sector and discussions with relevant organisations, including those that had developed programmes in the same space. While overall design partners felt that the EYTA was developed with external input and challenge, some suggested that if the programme were to be repeated, there could be greater external involvement, for example, a critical review group of early years commissioners and leaders could help to revise the programme.

The EYTA was launched in the third year. While the programme was well developed when external design partners joined in the third year, they felt there was still scope to influence the programme's structure and content. There was a consensus that the design team worked very well together, both in terms of dynamics and skills mix:

'… *a really nice, rounded, balanced group of people with very different expertise.*' (Design partner)

Some design partners thought that it may have been useful to have included health expertise to increase understanding of how maternity services operate in community and hospital settings.

Because of its 'test and learn' nature, the programme was described as 'fluid and experimental' and a lot of work was still required during the delivery stage to refine the learning modules. Design partners felt that the iterative approach to design helped the EYTA to be responsive to the needs of programme participants. However, this fluidity made it difficult to decide what needed to be achieved at each stage before moving on to the next stage. Some design partners thought that it would have been helpful to revisit the theory of change regularly during the partner meetings (and workshops) to bring more structure and discipline to the discussions. They argued that given the fluid nature of the programme, revising the theory of change as the programme progressed may have also helped to bring more clarity to the expected programme outcomes and goals for different stages.

Finally, there was a consensus among design partners that insufficient resources were devoted to the design and delivery of what was a very ambitious programme. One external design partner was not as involved as intended due to pressures within their organisation, but the others felt that the EYTA had involved considerably more work than anticipated and found it challenging at times to meet the programme's demands. Similarly, the resources available for the programme delivery were viewed as insufficient. While the EYTA was a large programme for EIF, it was noted that the capacity given to it was small compared with other transformation initiatives (such as those described in Chapter 1). An 18-month duration with an associate assigned to each area had been considered but rejected on cost grounds.

2.4. Joining the EYTA

EIF partners were pleased with the response to the invitation to take part in the EYTA, having received 18 expressions of interests, and felt it met their ambition to reach and work closely with local areas.

The selection panel included representatives from the Department for Education, Public Health England and Staff College, as well as EIF. Other design partners not directly involved in area selection were kept informed and had the opportunity to advise. The selection process was originally designed to identify four areas in a region. However, the strongest expressions of interest were from local areas in different regions, and therefore the regional model was abandoned and five areas were selected to take part.

The application process was designed to be light-touch, straightforward and transparent about what would make the programme a good fit for an area. EIF had discussions with senior sponsors in areas that expressed an interest in the EYTA to explore their mandate and readiness for participation, and whether they had the capacity and capability to take part in a very intensive and demanding programme.

Only a few of the programme participants interviewed in the evaluation had been involved with the application, and those who were did not remember much about the process. From what they could remember, they confirmed that the application had been straightforward and valued the opportunity to discuss with EIF their fit with the programme. However, they felt that the timetable had been tight, and the process was rushed – shortlisted areas had a month to submit a full application. Some participants involved in the application (mainly lead senior sponsors) said that the tight timetable meant that other senior sponsors and those proposed for the EYTA team had little or no input into what the area proposed to do as part of EYTA. In four areas this did not seem to have caused difficulties, as the proposed work built well on other existing multiagency transformation initiatives and the handover of the proposed work to the EYTA team was well supported by the lead senior sponsor. However, participants in one area felt that limited stakeholders' engagement at the application stage slowed down their progress in the initial stages and they would have progressed more quickly if they had started with a better understanding of why the area was participating, and the intended approach. In the same area, some participants felt that the midwifery perspective was not well reflected in the EYTA work because they did not have a chance to shape the proposal.

A number of assumptions were made by the EIF, and were reflected in the prospectus, about the type of areas that would be right for the EYTA as indicated in Box 2.1. It was also made clear in the prospectus that areas needed the resources to engage in what was described as an intensive and demanding programme.

Box 2.1 Requirements of local partners for the EYTA[29]

- A commitment to evidence even if this requires challenging local practice
- Ready for new ideas: A commitment to transform maternity and early years systems, but at an early stage in the journey requiring help to develop a transformation plan
- The capacity to bring together strategic commissioners and service leaders who could engage with the learning programme and activities, think strategically, and bring wider stakeholders together, with a stable local leadership that could support the programme for its duration
- Long term ambitions for early intervention in the early years and existing work on maternity and early years strategy so that the EYTA would help to mobilise existing resources or co-ordinate existing initiatives
- Senior champions who actively supported the work of the academy by freeing up resources, acting on results and supporting service re-design

Design partners thought that all areas were committed to transforming their early years systems, and were very enthusiastic and highly motivated. In practice, however, they were less sure that all five areas had the capacity and capability required to take part in the programme. Furthermore, after the programme started, it became apparent that in two areas, the scope to influence decision-making was somewhat limited. In one area considerable strategic work had already been undertaken, which somewhat constrained the space for EYTA's impact because some key decisions had already been taken. In another area, the opposite was the case and design partners felt that thinking and strategic work was not sufficiently developed for some aspects of the EYTA approach.

EIF partners said that the selected areas articulated well how they met the criteria in Box 2.1, but it was difficult for the panel to judge how realistic the submission was, partly because of the light touch application process, which meant that assertions in application form could not be validated. EIF partners reported that areas were asked to assess potential risks to their capacity to fully engage with the programme, and areas that provided superficial assessments were not selected. Despite these efforts EIF partners felt that, in hindsight, there was insufficient scrutiny during the application process, and the experience will enable EIF to be more prescriptive about the EYTA requirements in future (e.g. the area team's composition, the role of senior sponsors, technical and specialist support required).

2.5. Why local areas decided to take part in the EYTA

This section explores what shaped local areas' decisions to take part in EYTA: the problems local area identified and how they expected EYTA to help them address these problems. The section also considers to what extent the problems participating areas identified and expectations from EYTA reflect the programme's theory of change outlined in Chapter 1.

2.5.1 The problems areas wanted to address

In the interviews, programme participants described shortcomings in their early years systems which reflected the assumptions of the EYTA theory of change. Areas had been aware of the problems for many years but had not had the capacity or opportunity to bring all stakeholders around the table to address them.

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[29] Summary based on the EIF Prospectus

Partnership

Siloed and poor partnership working were reported by all areas. While participants could point to good examples of joined-up working at the operational level, they felt there was insufficient partnership work at a strategic level, and that the areas lacked a shared vision for maternity and early years underpinned by a common set of goals and principles. For example, participants reported commissioners from different agencies having different outcome targets for their respective services and 'working against each other' to meet these targets, resulting in service fragmentation and duplication.

Poor partnership work was viewed as stemming from poor relationships between local authority and health agencies, the limited involvement of maternity services in early years strategy, and weak connections between maternity and health visiting services. Participants also mentioned challenges in engaging agencies, such as children's services, in prevention as statutory work was prioritised, particularly where failed inspections resulted in a focus on statutory work and narrowly defined performance measures.

'As practitioners we often get consumed by performance indicators and legislative requirements and processes, and so opportunities like the EYTA to step outside that are really helpful.' (Senior sponsor)

Evidence

Programme participants recognised that services were not improving children's outcomes significantly, even in service areas where investment had remained relatively high. Participants reported evidence-based interventions in their areas, but they were described as 'pockets of good practice', which did not reflect a consistent understanding and use of evidence across the system. Weaknesses were noted in shared knowledge of evidence, use of it, commissioning of effective approaches, sharing evaluation and other learning across the system, and in the prioritisation of effective early intervention.

Understanding needs

Across all areas, participants reported that agencies did not have a shared approach to understanding needs at the population level. This was compounded by poor sharing of information about children and families and a lack of common definition of vulnerable children and families who need targeted intervention.

Co-production with families

Engagement of parents in co-production was not included in the EYTA theory of change as an assumption about system-level improvement needed. However, a few participants mentioned lack of co-production with families as an issue in their area. Others said their area had a good track record of engaging parents, but it was noted that learning from this engagement was not shared across systems.

2.5.2 How EYTA was expected to help

Predictably participants' expectations from EYTA centred around finding solutions for the system problems discussed in the previous section. Their expectations broadly reflected the EYTA's theory of change goals around partnerships, leadership, use of evidence, system investment and commissioning, and developing a shared purpose.

- **Partnerships**: A strong attraction of EYTA was its multi-disciplinary approach to improving service integration and accessibility through the establishment of strong partnerships. Participants expected that EYTA would enable conversations about reducing agency

boundaries, force them to challenge silo thinking and support them to think differently across the system. EYTA was seen as an opportunity to think collectively and from a different perspective on how to deliver early years services. Some participants commented that the requirement to involve maternity services was particularly welcomed, because they are often excluded from early years initiatives despite their obvious relevance.

- **Developing capacity and leadership:** Participants saw the key added value of EYTA as providing a structure, a rigorous model and tools for implementing change, generating innovative thinking, and developing service pathways. Some participants thought that a system focus would help them to identify and address weakness in their systems. Others had already identified some solutions to system-level problems, but these were not well connected and EYTA was seen as a way of linking innovative initiatives by supporting multiagency working and system thinking. Others expected EYTA would help to sustain the local transformation agenda by supporting implementation:

'Because our grand idea of pulling the system together is kind of the easy bit. Translating that into actual action and doing it can feel like treacle, and I think that's often why a lot of people give up because it's all really tough and quite messy. … was hoping some of that [EYTA] structure would help influence some of those tricky processes, … whether it be the way in which we share information, the way in which we could have four professionals all working with a family that none of us really know the other one's working.' (Senior sponsor)

- **Use of evidence:** While supporting the use of evidence was seen by participants as a strong motivator for signing up for EYTA, typically participants did not articulate the different ways in which they expected the programme to support this. However, participants seemed to be acutely aware that to be credible, proposals for transformation need to be grounded in the evidence base. They talked about the attraction of having a robust and rigorous approach to transformation that can be trusted, by programme participants, but also and possibly more importantly, by wider stakeholders. EIF's strong track record in evidence was seen as providing 'academic validation' and more likelihood that proposals for transformation would be considered robust and grounded in evidence. As a participant put it:
  'When you say 'this is work in partnership with EIF' people listen.' (Senior sponsor)

- **A structured opportunity for leadership**: There was an expectation among participants that EYTA would help to create protected time and a safe space to collectively consider how to transform their early years systems. It was expected that the rigour of the EYTA model and tools would build leadership capacity by equipping participants with the skills and knowledge required to implement change.

- **Investment and commissioning**: Discussions about the need to transform the early years systems seemed to implicitly assume that this would require changes to commissioning practice and that EYTA would support participants to consider this as part of the system-thinking approach. In addition, some participants specifically mentioned that they hoped that EYTA would help to change commissioning arrangements from being driven by service outputs and 'easy wins' to focusing on making a demonstrable and sustainable difference to the lives of children and their families. Again, it was hoped that EYTA's 'academic validation' would help to drive investment decisions. As a participant put it:

'So when we went back to our respective senior management teams and our board, we said … 'This is money we want to redesign and reinvest. This is the external academic foundation of what the outcomes of that are going to be.' Having sat in enough of these meetings to get picked apart on your financial assumptions … it's a damn sight easier if you can just say, 'Well, the University of So-and-so validates these assumptions.' (Team member)

- **Developing a shared language and purpose**: In line with the EYTA's theory of change, participants expected the programme to provide a vehicle that would enable areas to develop a shared purpose and vision for early years. However, none of the participants mentioned a shared language (an intended aim in the theory of change). This concept did not seem to resonate with local areas and even design partners did not discuss it and explain its meaning.

Finally, one area had initially assumed that the EYTA would provide funding (although the prospectus was very clear that funding was not provided) but still viewed the programme as very attractive. A participant from another area said that it was helpful that the programme provided no funding as that:

'… clears the mind … reinforced the point that if you want change, then that change is down to you as a whole and how you achieve it. There's not money there to enable that to happen. It's got to be that reconsideration of what you've got and how you use your resources … it was interesting that … people rallied to the flag, quite quickly without the money there. I thought that was a good sign.' (Team member)

Overall, the view of participants from local areas was that their area and the EYTA had been right for each other and the programme had met their expectations. Participants in all five areas had benefited considerably from the experience and were very positive about the Academy. Participants generally viewed the programme as a good fit with the stage of work on systems alignment and transformation that they were at. However, there was some doubt about this in one area. Participants in this area reported that before joining the EYTA, they had already done some relevant work but felt this was not sufficiently taken into account in the EYTA programme, and that the programme encouraged them to focus narrowly on some aspects of the early years system before they were ready to do so.

In some local teams there had been some challenges in early understanding of the intention and approaches of the EYTA, which at least in part seemed to reflect hurried handover of the proposed work from the application leads to the EYTA team. And for all, the capacity required to take part was a challenge, as discussed in Chapter 3.

2.6. Reviewing reasons for participating against the EYTA theory of change

The first part of the table below summarises the findings on areas' reasons for participating in the programme. These were generally well aligned with the EYTA's theory of change assumptions about the systems-level issues the programme aimed to address (the issues set out in the third column of the theory of change shown in Chapter 2).

The second part of the table shows areas' expectations of how EYTA would support them to deal with their system level problems. The findings show that these expectations were broadly in line with the goals outlined in the theory of change (as set out in the fifth, sixth and seventh columns of

the theory of change diagram). (The EYTA goals are revisited in Chapter 4 where the programme impacts are explored).

Table 2.1 Reviewing the theory of change

Theory of change assumptions about the system level issues	Commentary based on evaluation findings
Lack of capacity to make the necessary improvements	Areas had been aware of systems level issues that prevented them from making improvements but needed active support to address them and move forward
Lack of prioritisation of early intervention	All areas reported challenges in engaging agencies in prevention and/or the early years agenda. They also comment on a lack of shared understanding of what contributes to improving children's outcomes
Lack of partnership working across health, public health and maternity services and lack of a shared language	Poor partnership and silo working were reported by all areas, while lack of shared language was not a concept that resonated with participants
Lack of collective understanding of evidence and how to apply it to achieve maximum impact	Use and understanding of evidence was described as patchy and areas wanted help to understand why services do not improve children's outcomes
Lack of a robust and up to date understanding of the needs of their population	Areas wanted help to fully understand the needs of their populations, as they did not have a shared and robust approach to understanding needs at the population level
Short-term goals	
Create the opportunity for areas to develop their capacity and leadership for improvement and the local demand for evaluation and evidence	The EYTA was expected to create protected time, a safe space, skills and knowledge to collectively consider how to transform the local early years system
Develop the capability of areas to understand early intervention evidence	The EYTA was expected to provide the evidence, an approach and tools to intervene early, but the expectation seemed to be that the programme would support the application rather than understanding of evidence
Increase motivation through developing shared language and purpose	There was an expectation that the EYTA would help areas to develop a shared purpose and vision, while the concept of shared language did not resonate with areas
Increase motivation through developing confidence in evidence and evaluation	The EYTA was expected to motivate wider stakeholders through the use of evidence and a rigorous approach,

	and it was expected this would ensure transformation plans were robust and grounded in evidence
Creating optimism about ability to address complex systems problems	There was an expectation that the EYTA would help to address complex systems problems

Medium-term goals

A coherent and robust implementation plan is in place in each local area	Through the EYTA approach participants expected to develop proposals that were robust and would appeal to agencies across the system
A robust local approach to evidence and evaluation across the system is created	The need to strengthen evidence use and evaluation was recognised, and the EYTA was seen as providing 'academic validation' and buy-in
Better quality commissioning decisions take place	The EYTA was expected to improve commissioning and funding decisions
Motivation to prioritise and invest in early intervention in the early years is improved	The EYTA was expected to result in better funding decisions, which in turn were expected to result in more (effective) investment in early intervention and early years
Each local area has the partnerships, staffing and governance arrangements in place to deliver the implementation plan	The multidisciplinary boards accountable for the EYTA were expected to approve and support the implementation of the EYTA work (see Chapter 3)
Local leadership capability on maternity and early years systems is in place	The EYTA was expected to create protected time, a safe space, skills and knowledge to collectively consider how to transform the early years systems

Long-term goal

Effective interventions and services reach the children and parents (including in the ante-natal period) who need them most within the five EYTA areas	Achieving effective interventions and services was seen by all areas as a long term goal, with the ultimate aim of improving outcomes for local children and their families and reducing inequalities

3. Participating in the programme

The first part of this chapter explores whether the composition of the local teams was in line with the EYTA expectation that they would involve key stakeholders from across the system and system leaders. It then discusses the role of the EYTA senior sponsors, and how the local teams worked together and developed a focus for their work.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the learning programme and views on: the topics covered; the pace, sequencing and duration of the programme; and the different learning approaches.

Key findings

- The local area teams included a good mix of people, with representation from across early years and maternity services.
- Overall, it was felt that most local team members were in positions that provided oversight of the whole system and a mandate to drive change.
- Each local area identified a single lead senior sponsor, and a wider group of senior sponsors. In most areas the lead senior sponsor was seen as a strong champion for change, very supportive and engaged with EYTA, although engagement was not consistently maintained throughout the programme in all areas. Engagement also appeared to be more patchy among the wider groups of senior sponsors.
- One of the strengths of the EYTA model was that there was no expectation that a team would have a leader, as this supported a very co-operative style of working. However, some challenges in operating the democratic and collaborative style envisaged by EYTA were also evident.
- Teams' ability to 'hit the ground running' and work at pace was facilitated when a team had ownership of the proposed EYTA work. Help at the start of the programme to learn to work as a team and senior sponsors' support were also important facilitators.
- The time and resources to do the EYTA work varied across the teams but had generally been underestimated by local areas.
- At the start of the programme some teams were more advanced than others in terms of strategic thinking about transformation. However, regardless of their starting point, the EYTA approach made all teams reflect on whether the transformation planning previously undertaken reflected the needs of their local population, the roles of different agencies in meeting these needs, and evidence of what works in supporting children and families.
- The learning programme was viewed as having covered relevant and important topics, which helped teams to find a focus for their work and develop an implementation plan.
- Some wondered if learning was sufficiently focused on how to make change happen and whether strategies for system change should be covered in more depth in future. Others felt that there was too narrow a focus on 'gold standard' programmes, which do not cover the wide range problems teams had to tackle or might not be appropriate.
- While the pace of the work was challenging for local teams, on the whole the sequencing of the programme seemed to have worked well.
- Participation in the design workshops was high and these events were described as informative, engaging, relevant and high quality.

- The online learning was valuable, as it complemented the workshops well and provided opportunities for reflection. However, barriers were also reported in fully engaging with the online learning due to time constraints and difficulties in accessing Microsoft Teams.
- Some participants thought learning from other areas had been a very valuable part of the programme. For others, opportunities for peer-to-peer learning had been more limited than expected.
- Tailored support was described as very useful and participants would have liked more help from the EYTA programme team or external specialists to support the refinement of their local area plans, move to implementation and develop evaluation plans.

3.1. Composition of the EYTA local teams

As discussed in Chapter 1, there was an expectation that each team should include around 6-8 members covering strategic commissioners from the LA, CCG and PH, as well as leaders of key services, including child health, family support, early education and the voluntary sector. It was expected that these representatives would be in leadership roles in key parts of their maternity and early years system, even if they did not see themselves in those terms. This was considered essential to build new and dynamic relationships to enable system change.

3.1.1 A multi-multidisciplinary team

Overall participants from the local teams and design partners felt that the teams included a good mix of people, with representation from across early years and maternity services. As discussed earlier, the opportunity to work in a multidisciplinary team and build relationships across agencies was seen by participants as a very significant benefit of being involved in the EYTA. All five teams covered the range of agencies envisaged in the prospectus, except that three areas had not been able to recruit a representative from a voluntary agency, due to the sector's difficulties in responding to the invitation to take part. While participants felt this was a gap, they also highlighted the sector's voice was nevertheless represented as some agencies had a very close working relationship with the sector.

While the team membership seemed to have been determined by senior sponsors at the application stage, teams (with one exception) remained opened to representatives from new agencies joining after the programme had started, including GPs, public health, CCG, school nursing and disabled children services. Some participants talked about having an expectation that as the work progressed, it was likely that the need for new perspectives and voices would become apparent. As this participant explained:

'*Each iteration of conversation helped I think to identify the different roles that we needed to fit around the table to contribute to the conversation*.' (Senior sponsor)

In other cases, late additions reflected the fact that agencies had either not been invited to participate until later or had not been able to field a representative (reflecting either capacity challenges or the EYTA being of low priority).

In one area, while the need for new perspectives was identified as the work progressed, the team membership was not extended, in part because it was assumed this discouraged by the programme and in part because of the inability of potential new members to commit to EYTA. Ad hoc consultations (e.g. with GPs, adult mental health, therapy services) were used to fill gaps in the team.

In some teams, remaining gaps in coverage were noted in relation to education, inclusion or SEND, school nursing, paediatrics and primary care. Several teams found it hard to engage midwifery sufficiently, certainly at the start.

Participants from local areas felt that more thought should have been given at the start about the team's composition, as some gaps were identified shortly after the work started and recruiting new members with little notice could be challenging and disrupt the team's dynamics. It was, however, considered important for the team's membership to remain open to bring in new members as the work progressed.

3.1.2 A team of system leaders

Overall, it was felt, by both design partners and programme participants, that most team members were in positions that provided oversight of the whole system and a mandate to drive change. As a participant explained, team members were leaders within their own fields, and it was their responsibility to:

'… go back out into their teams and start energising the work that was then pulled together by… EYTA … Certainly, people in my organisation, they're empowered to attend these meetings and make decisions and act on behalf of the trust with my oversight and the oversight of the director of midwifery and the director of nursing.' (Senior sponsor)

Only in one area, participants commented on the fact that some members of their team were too junior, and this was seen as particularly problematic because of inconsistency in the lead senior sponsor's engagement (see below).

An issue that was raised in relation to the composition of the teams was that as they included mainly senior staff, they lacked operational capacity and insight, particularly given the considerable amount of 'legwork' required at some stages of the programme (e.g. gathering information for population needs assessments and service mapping). In two areas where participants felt this had been problematic, an operational team was eventually set up.

There was an expectation in the EYTA prospectus that local teams would interact with a wider group of professionals and community representatives who are leaders and champions for change in early years services. There was little evidence that team members had mobilised stakeholders not involved in the EYTA. As discussed in Chapter 4, work in most areas was still at a relatively early stage, and it is difficult to know whether the lack of wider engagement will be a future obstacle.

3.2. The role of senior sponsors

Senior sponsors' engagement was seen by the design partners as essential to the success of EYTA:

'If they [senior sponsors] 're not engaged and committed and supportive of what their team are doing, A) It's going to be hard to get things done in the first place, and B) How is it then going to be driven forward.' (Design partner)

Senior sponsors were expected to actively champion the EYTA transformation work and ensure that it would be implemented. They were also expected to ensure that the EYTA would have appropriate local governance.

The prospectus had envisaged that there might be one lead senior sponsor in each area, and this was what emerged in all five areas. Participants in most areas described their lead senior sponsors as strong champions for change who had been very engaged and supportive, with regular meetings to update and discuss progress with the local team. However, in one area, team members reported that the lead sponsor appeared somewhat removed.

In all areas, participants reported mechanisms for the engagement of other senior sponsors through governance groups - an existing multi-disciplinary board (e.g. CYP joint commissioning partnership board). Typically, team members were rather vague on how these boards engaged with EYTA, had not met wider sponsors, and were not sure how involved all senior stakeholders were. In the evaluation interviews, the small number of non-lead senior sponsors interviewed had generally not be closely involved. However, where the lead senior sponsor was very engaged there was typically confidence that EYTA work would remain high on the agenda:

'....[lead senior sponsor] is very clear in … terms of her vision and her steer on things. So … ..[lead senior sponsor] was a key kind of link, … given her position in the organisation, obviously she's the sort of key driver really for transformation. So yes, I think it didn't feel like we didn't have that level of steer or oversight because of [lead senior sponsor] being part of [various partnership boards].' (Team member)

Senior sponsors themselves reported that there were clear mechanisms for ensuring that all senior sponsors were kept up to date with EYTA's progress and had the opportunity to shape key decisions. While some recognised that the level of engagement of senior sponsors had been varied, ultimately:

'Everyone knew we had to be doing something in this space.' (Senior sponsor)

Reflecting the views of team members, design partners thought that some lead senior sponsors had been very engaged and supportive throughout the programme, while others had been less consistently engaged. There was less certainty about the engagement of senior sponsors that were not leading on the EYTA and whether the initial enthusiasm was maintained. For example, a design partner questioned:

'…whether they [senior sponsors] truly kept together as a multi-agency group' (Design partner)

Due to the limited direct involvement of senior sponsors, some design partners felt the relationship between the EYTA programme team and senior sponsors had not been as open as it should have been, and that more open conversations about challenges to progress would have been helpful. Design partners reflected that if EYTA were to be repeated, the relationship with senior sponsors would need to be re-considered. While keep-in-touch meetings with lead senior sponsors were organised throughout the programme, it was suggested that a learning programme for senior leaders could also be provided. One design partner also felt that the engagement of a single senior sponsor, with a group of service leaders, might be sufficient. However, the general view was that having a group was important.

3.3. How the local teams worked

Both design partners and programme participants noted that teams' ability to 'hit the ground running' and work at pace varied due to a number of factors discussed below.

3.3.1 Ownership

The findings show that the extent to which participants quickly took ownership of the work set out in the EYTA application influenced how ready a team was to start the work. Participants from one area struggled to 'get going' as the impetus for EYTA was reported to have come primarily from the lead senior sponsor, and there had not been sufficient handover.

'…. we weren't really sure what we were meant to be doing … I think we were all being very respectful of one another, knowing that we needed to work together, knowing that we needed to make these changes, … trust the process, … that was really good, that was the bit that worked… but ... we were fumbling around quite a lot, at the beginning.' (Team member)

It was also harder for partners to engage if they did not immediately see a clear role for their agency in the work, and scope to influence it. For example, some maternity representatives felt their role was marginal, the focus of the team's work did not reflect their agency's priorities and more generally EYTA was not sufficiently focused on maternity services. A participant from maternity services described their experience of being part of the academy as:

'…trying to fit a square peg into a round hole all the time.' (Team member)

3.3.2 Coming together as a team

Participants from all areas felt they needed time and support at the start to learn about each other's work, build trust and all be 'on the same page' in relation to the aim of the project and their role in the team. Typically participants thought that team building activities at the first workshop were very much needed, and if the EYTA were to be run again, time and space for teams to do the 'forming, norming and transforming' should be factored in, with the flexibility to adapt the team-working activities to the needs of different teams.

'The way [the work was] staged, they were done in a very logical format, so there was that natural flow. So at the beginning where you've got your workshops, you're getting to know people. We forget how valuable that is actually and if you invest the time in getting to know people, you then work out where your strengths and weaknesses are, and you work around them.' (Team member)

Once teams settled down, participants reported that, on the whole, they worked well together and formed strong relationships. Team members who felt somewhat marginalised seemed to be the exception.

'We had our own specialisms which we brought to the table and our own experiences, but nobody came with a specific role, which I think was good …. I thought we had a lot of commitment in our Early Years across the board from the different agencies and a lot of good people who were keen to improve things, keen to think differently. I think we had a lot of strength in the group of people that came together …. This was the opportunity to consider [our results] again from different perspectives, and what is it that's going to make the difference? I think what we had was a whole pile of experience, enthusiasm, commitment, optimism, I think that was all there.' (Team member)

According to both design partners and programme participants, the teams were fairly stable and most people who joined the programme were still engaged at the end, although there were some changes because of job moves.

Participants' commitment to, and trust in, the EYTA model contributed to effective team working. Help from the EYTA programme team throughout the programme was also valued by participants, who felt supported in dealing with tricky team dynamics and tensions, and that they could be open and have frank discussions when they were struggling to keep up with the work. Design partners also felt that having a project co-ordinator whose job was to monitor, drive and support the work of the local teams was very important, and some wondered if in future more resources may be needed to support local teams, particularly those who struggle to work at the pace required.

Views on the role of the local team's co-ordinator varied. Some participants said their team's co-ordinator did exactly 'what it says on the tin' and co-ordinated rather than led. It was indeed argued that one of the strengths of the EYTA model was that there was no expectation that a team would have a leader, as this supported a very co-operative style of working. However, some participants felt their team's progress at the start was slowed down because their co-ordinator was too junior to push forward the agenda. Dominant personalities were also reported by some participants, suggesting some challenges in operating the democratic and collaborative style envisaged by EYTA.

3.3.3 Support from senior sponsors

Participants said that senior sponsors were important in supporting the team's work in three ways. First, because they could free up resources, and there were examples of additional resources being brought into the team and freeing up time to allow participants to carry out the EYTA activities. Second, senior sponsors helped to 'unblock' situations and pull levers, for example, when agencies were reluctant to engage with EYTA. Third, their professional experience and understanding of the wide system meant senior sponsor could be very helpful 'critical friends', and some participants reported useful input and challenge from the senior sponsor throughout the programme. As discussed above not all teams benefited from this kind of senior sponsor support.

3.3.4 Time and resources

Both design partners and programme participants believed that the EYTA had involved considerably more work for the local teams than anticipated. Participants recognised that the prospectus made it clear that the EYTA was an intensive and demanding programme that required sustained commitment, but the prospectus may not have been shared fully or read and remembered. However, they thought that this information was not sufficiently specific about the timing and resources required for different local application activities to ensure adequate resource planning.

Participants noted that, with the possible exception of the co-ordinators, typically there was an expectation in the local areas that the EYTA work could be done alongside the 'day job', and participants' workloads had not been reduced to allow them time to engage with the programme. Fitting in the work proved challenging at particularly intensive stages. For example, for a period a team said they had to meet for half a day a week to complete the EYTA activity. Participants typically felt they were not able to meet as a team as frequently as they needed to work at pace.

The local application work (e.g. population needs assessments and service mapping) was also seen as very time-consuming, as it required considerable resources and in some instances technical capacity (e.g. data analysis) some teams lacked. Participants from a couple of areas reported that their work was delayed until they secured operational capacity to help with the 'legwork', as they had not realised at the start of the programme what level of operational input would be required.

Participants from another area commented that they were only able to work at pace because they were supported by a business unit with a focus on transformation.

Travel to and attendance at workshops was seen as onerous. Some participants were also surprised by the amount of travelling required to go to the workshops and the two-day residential (as these seem to have become very rare in their area). These requirements were clearly outlined in the EYTA prospectus and this finding could indicate that senior sponsors involved in the application had not taken on board or passed on this information to their colleagues, although they may also reflect the fact that the intended regional approach (see Section 1.1.3 proved unfeasible).

Despite the time pressure, it was reported that very few team members were not very engaged (e.g. 'dipped in and out') or dropped out, and typically this was due to job changes and unexpected pressures from their agencies (e.g. an internal re-organisation, a failed Ofsted inspection, which meant that the agency no longer had capacity to engage with EYTA). These views are supported by the event participation figures (see below). Even when agencies were less engaged than expected, their contribution was still valued because the EYTA helped to improve relationships and their involvement was a basis to build on.

If the EYTA were to be repeated, it was argued that local teams would need more clarity about what different components would require and when. Participants felt that it would have been helpful to have had a better understanding of the nature of the work required at different stages, so they could have secured resources to do some of the 'legwork' (e.g. collate and analyse data). Guidance on how often team meetings are required to prepare for workshops and complete various local application activities would have been useful, as all teams had underestimated how often they needed to meet.

3.4. Finding a focus for the work

Participants' initial expectations of the work they would be doing as part of the EYTA varied. At one end of the spectrum there was a team that already had a transformation plan and saw EYTA as providing a vehicle to develop it further, and plan and support implementation. Other areas were less developed, but thought this was actually helpful.

'*We didn't come in with a masterplan of saying 'we're going to do X, Y and Z.' We knew EYTA was focused on early years and … looking at it from a multiagency perspective. We knew we would be examining what's going on, but what we wanted to change … I think that [not having a plan] was a strength … because … we'd have got the cart before the horse… the programme … took us on a particular way of doing things, which was helpful to help us determine what we needed to do*.' (Team member)

Regardless of their starting point, the EYTA approach made all teams pause and reflect on whether existing or emerging transformation plans reflected the needs of their local population, the roles of different agencies in meeting these needs and evidence of what works (and does not work) in supporting children and families. For all areas, there was a challenge in getting the balance right between breadth across the system and what was feasible in the timeframe, and deciding how to scope the work. Participants reported that developing a focus for the work created tensions within the team, as initially there was a tendency for team members to be primarily interested in their own part of the system. All teams had to deal with tensions around competing priorities to a certain extent, although in some teams these were resolved more quickly than in others. The structure provided by the EYTA was seen as helpful in dealing with tensions, and in-depth analysis of needs and discussions of expected outcomes had helped to find common ground and shared objectives.

'… because we all had these competing agendas, once we'd focused on one piece of work part of the team sat back and said, 'Oh, that's great. Okay, that ticks that box, so we're okay now.' The other half of the team would be forced to say, 'Well, hang on a minute, that doesn't tick my box.' You would then start looking at the problem again, and you start to bolt-on more and more. So instead of a single-bullet solution, what you ended up with was a much more collaborative approach…. it worked because we did as a team, if we had tried to do it as individuals we wouldn't have come to that same point.'* (Team member)

Initially most areas had expected to work across the whole of early years and maternity systems. They were encouraged by the design partners to identify specific components to focus on (e.g. school readiness or healthy pregnancy). One area found this frustrating, feeling they were being pressured to focus too narrowly and too soon, and felt it compromised their relationship with some wider system partners. But others found it helpful. Developing service pathways in one or a small number of selected service areas was seen as providing the opportunity to 'test transformation' on one part of the system. For example, a focus on the continuity of care model (a national maternity programme) was seen as a platform from which to bring about wider improvements across the system.

3.5. The content of the learning programme

This section discusses the content of the learning programme (outlined in Chapter 1), delivered through workshops, on-line learning and local application activities (population needs assessment, service mapping and developing a theory of change as well as the implementation plan).

On the whole design partners and programme participants felt that programme topics were the right ones and no major gaps nor irrelevant topics were identified. There were differences in views in how these topics should come together. For some design partners and most participants, the strategic commissioning approach provided a useful framework for the programme, moving through needs assessment; identifying priorities; using community intelligence to identify target groups and existing interventions; considering what a redesigned set of service pathways would look like, testing them with wider stakeholders, and developing an implementation plan.

'It has been a really clear and linear process, and linear topics have been looked at, which have made a lot of sense to me ... they've been really useful in helping me shape my understanding of the transformation.' (Team member)

'I felt that, yes, that they were where we should have been going. I feel that they were all taken from the right direction and the understanding that we needed to - what were the issues for us? Were we clear about those? What were the needs in the borough?' (Team member)

However, some participants and design partners questioned whether the programme was sufficiently focused on how to make change happen. As discussed below, for some this was because the coverage of system change was not sufficiently in-depth, and there was too much focus on tools and not enough on how to get people to think differently and change mindsets.

The rest of the section present views on different topics covered by the programme. It should be noted that most of the learning had taken place several months before the interviews and typically respondents struggled to remember in detail the topics covered in the workshops and online learning, as well as local application activities carried out in the early stages.

3.5.1 Leadership

Leadership work was covered through workshops and online learning, including opportunities to get feedback from colleagues on personal leadership style. Overall participants were positive about the leadership training and some found it particularly valuable because it was about collective leadership and linked to system change.

'The leadership stuff's been brilliant about looking at leadership styles, leadership qualities leadership through times of uncertainty and change, because, I'm sure you aware, leading through times of uncertainty and change, the most automatic thing you will do is go back into your own silo.' (Senior sponsor)

Some noted that the leadership training may have been particularly useful for them because they were less senior than others on the programme. Others would have liked more emphasis on developing system leaders. A few said that the leadership training was not what they expected as it felt like a leadership development course and they had not seen the connection with the rest of the programme, or did not feel they needed more work on leadership.

3.5.2 Preparing for change

In the early stages of the learning programme, participants were asked to complete a Maturity Matrix which measured where the local early years system was assessed to be in terms of stages of maturity. The approach involved individual assessment against a wide set of criteria, with written commentary. Local areas were also asked to complete questionnaires measuring readiness for change, again individually. This information was intended to feed into an initial assessment of the local system, and both instruments were repeated towards the end of the programme. Typically, participants struggled to recall these activities, and those who commented did not seem to have found them useful. It is possible that participants had forgotten how information from these activities informed their understanding of their system, and this may also reflect their use as baseline measures before there had been significant discussion of the issues covered by the questionnaires.

3.5.3 Identifying vulnerable populations

All the teams were asked to review local needs assessment data and develop outcomes frameworks. Needs assessments were developed in different forms with different levels of detail. One area submitted an existing needs assessment, which was not updated for the EYTA work. The outcomes frameworks involved a single slide or small set of slides outlining (to different levels of detail) aims, outcomes and possible measures.

On the whole views about the range of learning relating to this component were very positive. The practical application of this component (i.e. developing a population needs assessment and outcomes framework) was seen by some participants as a crucial step in deciding how to develop their work.

Participants were typically familiar with needs assessments and outcomes framework, having previously developed them within their own agency. However, the added value of the EYTA was: developing them collaboratively in a multi-disciplinary team, which brought a much more in-depth understanding of what influences child outcomes; and, having a rigorous process for conducting them, including feedback from the EYTA programme team.

'We had to do that as a collective to come up with a common understanding.' (Team member)

Participants commented less on the development of outcomes frameworks, and this work seemed quite high level, although a few said the outcomes framework helped to focus minds on evaluation.

3.5.4 Service mapping

In this element, areas completed a detailed Excel template provided by EIF to document interventions currently available across service systems in different pathways or areas of work, recording the intervention, target group, reach, outcomes and value for money.

Some participants were very positive about this activity, reporting that it had enabled constructive conversations about what was and was not working in their system. The EYTA methodology and feedback had enabled them to gain an in-depth understanding of their services, highlighting the complexity of pathways and opportunities for connections and joining up.

'When we were going through our current [services] and the things that we delivered and actually looking at, really, really scrutinising those and thinking their cost, the outcomes, the outputs, who with, who we're reaching, that was time-consuming but [helpful].' (Team member)

Other participants found the exercise less helpful and felt it had not told them anything they did not know as it had focused on existing services and programmes, while it would have been more helpful to focus on how to address problems in service systems (e.g. why some services did not seem to improve children's outcomes) that were already recognised. It was also felt that the focus on services rather than the wider system had made the work too narrow or shallow, missing areas such as housing, transport, employment that contribute to poverty, social inequality and poor outcomes for children.

3.5.5 Theory of change and logic model

Workshop sessions discussed theory of change and logic models. Local teams developed theory of change diagrams for their planned work, documented using a range of structures on either a single or a short set of slides. Teams were provided with a logic model template but from the interviews it was not clear that all teams completed this.

Participants from four teams were very positive about these elements of the programme with some citing them as the most valuable part of the learning programme. Learning how these tools had been applied by the Born in Bradford team to a 'real programme' was reported to have been particularly helpful. The rigour of the EYTA process and the opportunity to do these activities collectively were again seen as very valuable. Some participants reported that the theory of change provided the 'light bulb' moment: while the needs assessment and the gap analysis had helped to identify the problems, the theory of change helped to focus on the solutions. As this participant explained:

'The process really helped us to think about, okay, so what are we going to change, why, and what the output will be in terms of short-term goals and long-term goals, so I thought the methodology was really good actually.' (Team member)

Similarly, the discussion of logic models[30] was reported to have been valuable because:

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[30] The terms 'logic model' and 'theory of change' may have been used synonymously by participants in the evaluation interviews.

'…it showed us the strengths of a good planning model that we maybe had forgotten how to use or never learned it in the first place, and because we were moving as a group towards a system-wide development and delivery… It forced…to think about your models and your concept and validating them in a very good, academically formulaic way, which I think a lot of operational delivery lacks.'(Team member)

Some participants also commented on how their logic model had become an important and 'live' document, which highlights how they were all working towards the same outcomes for children and their families, and that they regularly revisited it to evidence their thinking about actions they take.

Only one team found this component of the programme of limited value. The 'theoretical' coverage in a workshop was reported to have been challenging for some team members. The team had initially developed a theory of change at a broad level, aiming to capture high level systems change, but had been given feedback that they needed to focus more narrowly, and felt this was too granular and risked a return to siloed working. This seems to highlight the challenges of applying the theory of change methodology in a system context, and the tension between developing a theory of change that is specific and precise, but without limiting the scope of the local approach.

3.5.6 System change

Systems change was covered in workshop sessions. On the whole, participants thought the learning programme had supported them to understand how their system worked and how different parts of the system related to each other. However, some design partners and participants from one area believed that there was scope for widening the coverage of system change, for example, to explore in more detail the theoretical basis and evidence underpinning system change, different ways of looking at it and its methodology. They also thought that this element of the learning programme could be strengthened if the ability to influence systems and build relationships featured more strongly throughout the programme.

'[The programme should be] about the behaviour change. We're not looking at technical solutions for tame problems, here. We're looking at really tentacled, really complex, rich issues, that need a whole different kind of behaviour set to be able to influence and manage your way through those systems. Although …. the residential was very strongly focused around that, I think that was something … we probably needed to come back to that again and again and again. At the end of the day, it's very easy for people to slot back into, 'Oh, well, this is just about understanding our dataset better', or, 'This is about just creating a new pathway'… They end up thinking oh, … we can actually just put a technical solution to it. What they really need to do is to be thinking, actually, this is really complex, how am I going to influence upwards, across the Health and Wellbeing Board, for example? How am I going to get people who are on the fringes, who don't agree with me, actually involved and bring them in so we can change the system and get people buying into it?' (Design partner)

3.5.7 Understanding evidence and evaluation

This comprised a number of components from workshops and online sessions on understanding influences on child development and effective programmes, measuring impact and evaluation. Participants' views were generally positive. They found the evidence sessions informative and helpful to ensure everybody was on the same page about '*the whole prebirth, best start in life evidence base'*, as previously different parts of the system focused on different elements of the evidence base.

'I suppose the beauty of having EIF there was that they brought the evidence as well. An example for us is that some people had a lot of personal views about how the system should change and that some things should move to groups, some things should be like this and actually it enabled us to look

at that in terms of the evidence as well, rather than just personal preferences. A lot of those ideas were based on personal experiences of services, rather than on evidence …. [Had this led to changes in direction?] Absolutely, yes and I think it's made us realise it will take quite a lot longer to do the work. We certainly haven't finished the piece of work, but there's a lot more thought being given to it now in relation to evidence and the work has been broken down between us now in terms of how we're going to take it forward. That feels really positive.' (Team member)

However, some gaps, were identified. For example, there were comments that some of the evidence on child development was out-of-date and too narrowly focused on early communication, speech and language and early education, and did not map across the whole systems being addressed by the EYTA. Some felt that there had been a lot of evidence about what does not work, but less on solutions where there was little evidence of effective programmes. The focus was felt to be too narrowly on 'gold standard' programmes, which do not cover the wide range of problems teams had to tackle, or might not be appropriate.

'… so I suppose I'm still a bit unsure about how we make a decision locally if we're not going to base it purely on we're going to go with a licensed model that works with a very specific cohort, because the problem we're got is that we've got a very large and very diverse cohort of parents. The reason we wouldn't chose FNP is because our need is far greater than the small number of teenage parents where there's a very narrow criteria of people on the programme. So we're looking for alternative ideas really … for what's working well elsewhere or what we could try that would be different. So I feel like we've still got to work that out for ourselves.' (Team member)

The focus on evaluation of local activity was welcomed. While the EYTA work had made participants more aware of the need to evaluate, a few participants thought that coverage of how to evaluate was too limited and would have welcomed more.

3.5.8 Community engagement

All the local areas recognised the importance of involving local families in the design of new approaches. While some participants commented that the team member from the voluntary sector had helped to provide the parents' perspectives throughout the programme, it was recognised that parents also need to be directly involved in transformation. Four teams had planned to consult parents towards the end of the programme, but these activities had to be postponed because of Covid. The fifth team had consulted parents but as part of a linked project, closely connected to the EYTA work.

Only a couple of participants, both from the same team, commented on the community engagement session which was described as helpful and 'very powerful'. There was a view across all areas, if not all participants, that this part of the programme had needed more emphasis.

'The team was basing decisions on what we [professionals] were feeding back …. We weren't asking women what their … concerns were, why they couldn't access certain services …. So I think we really needed to go out there and talk to the women and find out what their issues were.' (Senior sponsor)

'If an organisation is looking at just doing EYTA, there does need to be built in some local consultation in the development of the plan.' (Team member)

Similarly, some design partners felt that there should have been a greater focus on community involvement in programme design and delivery and saw this is at the heart of system change.

3.6. The pace, length and sequencing of the programme

There was a consensus among both participants and design partners that the pace of the programme had been too fast, given the breadth of issues of concern and the amount of work involved in the EYTA programme. In particular, it was felt that insufficient time was allowed for the local application activities. Moreover, as discussed earlier, lack of clarity at the start about when this work would be required made planning for these activities particularly challenging. Design partners thought that they had underestimated local teams' capacity and capability to carry out the various programme activities. Consequently some teams moved to the next stage when they were not ready to do so as they had not completed the work. Participants also reported that in some teams some of the local application activities had been covered in a rather superficial or incomplete way, and that made the development of an implementation plan rather challenging.

While one design partner raised the question of whether they should have cut the content, the findings presented above do not show any obvious scope for cuts in breadth or depth, and suggest that the content may need to be extended and some parts to be covered in greater depth. Some design partners and participants felt the programme should have been longer, but also that a key difficulty was teams' inability to work at the pace required. This led to views that, if the EYTA were to be repeated, a more flexible programme should be considered to give teams the possibility to complete different programme stages at a pace in line with the available resources.

Views about pace also reflected different views about the structure and sequencing of the programme. One programme participant thought that the EYTA may work better as a longer programme in two stages, with the first part focusing on developing relationships, understanding the system and developing teams of system leaders, while in the second stage teams could develop plans, work with wider stakeholders in the system to get their buy-in, and move to operational work. The first stage was seen as crucial, and it was important that there was a process that ensured that this was completed before moving on.

In terms of sequencing, design partners thought that teams were being asked to do some of the technically challenging work (e.g. developing a theory of change and logic model), at too early a stage, when teams were still forming, and they should have allowed more time for team building at the initial stage. A partner also wondered if doing the interventions mapping earlier in the programme would have enabled the EYTA programme team to gain a good understanding of the system in each area and how evidence based their work was, providing a strong vehicle for focusing on local evidence right from the start.

Comments from programme participants about the sequencing of local application activities were not consistent. For example, a participant felt they were asked to develop a theory of change too soon when they had not yet found a specific focus for their work and consequently the theory of change was at a general level. On the other hand, another participant felt the theory of change should have been developed before the outcomes framework, as without a theory of change they struggled to decide what outcomes to include in the framework.

It is clearly difficult to accommodate different preferences, and speed of work, within a group programme. Local areas sometimes commented that there was too little time to get feedback from design partners on local application work and to iterate and complete it before the next workshop and set of activities. There were differences between areas in what had and had not been done, which was sometimes challenging when aspects of the learning programme were intended to build on previous work completed. Design partners also felt that there had not been clarity about whether particular pieces of work had to be completed (and how this could be enforced) or whether the local application activities were an opportunity rather than a requirement.

3.7. Learning approaches

As discussed, team members attended a series of design workshops and completed online learning. The EYTA programme team provided feedback to local teams at the workshops, written feedback was provided on local application activities. Furthermore, a panel of experts provided feedback on the implementation plans developed by the local teams at the 'Dragons Den' session at the last design workshops. In this session, each team presented their proposed plan to a small panel of national experts in different fields, who raised questions and then, in the afternoon, worked with teams to help them develop plans. These different learning approaches are discussed in turn below.

3.7.1 Design workshops

Figures provided by the EYTA programme team show that attendance at the design workshops was high i.e.: 79% of team members at workshop 1; 75% at workshop 2; 82% at workshop 3; and 77% at workshop 4. Figures on feedback collected by the EYTA programme team at the end of the workshops showed consistently high levels of satisfaction with the individual sessions.

The interviews also showed that on the whole participants found the workshops informative, engaging, relevant, high quality and 'snappy'. As this participant explained:

'I think the presentations … by and large were good. They were good quality. They were snappy…. they were, 'What's this about? This is what it's about. Here's some key points,' and I like that. I respond to that. I like short and sharp pieces. … they tried to keep that whole agenda moving, keeping people thinking and not too much of the chalk and talk, and spending time in small groups were important…' (Team member)

There were a few comments about some of the presentations being too 'academic' and delivered by 'speakers who were bit disconnected from the real world'. However, positive comments about 'excellent' speakers who demonstrated 'how things work in practice' were more typical, as the quote below illustrates:

'…she was very professional, very to the point; a bit of a waffle-free zone. So when you listened to her she had your attention, and you knew that what she was saying could directly map across into operational delivery.' (Team member)

The workshops were also valued for providing consolidated time together as a team, away from the distractions of the day job. This was also seen as very important to develop relationships and develop as a team of system leaders.

3.7.2 Online learning

The EYTA programme team reported that, from the feedback they received, engagement with online learning was good, and on the whole participants said they enjoyed it, as it complemented the workshops well and provided opportunities for reflection. However, participants reported barriers in keeping up with the online learning, including lack of time and very tight deadlines for some of the online activities. It was suggested that live online sessions (e.g. the Q&A sessions) should have been recorded for those who could not join them. Some participants had difficulties in accessing Microsoft Teams, despite the efforts of the EYTA programme team to resolve these problems, although the rapid move to online communication during Covid is likely to mean that future participants will be better equipped to use tools such as Microsoft Teams.

3.7.3 Peer-to-peer support

The original programme design to have geographically clustered teams to support peer-to-peer support had to be abandoned. It was nevertheless hoped that the events would support peer learning.

Some programme participants thought that the peer-to-peer learning opportunities had been 'spot on'. The workshops provided good opportunities to hear what other areas were doing, and for some, some of the most valuable learning was from other teams, particularly those that were 'more advanced' and which provided good 'role models'. Others were less positive about the opportunities to learn from other areas. They thought that learning was limited by the fact that areas were rather different in terms of population profiles, the challenges they faced and in their stage in the journey. Furthermore, participants felt that they did not know enough about the work of other areas to decide if it would be worth exploring opportunities for peer-to-peer learning (outside the workshops). None of the participants interviewed reported reaching out to other EYTA teams, and the general view was that if the EYTA were to be repeated it would require more direct work to support and broker peer-to-peer learning.

3.7.4 Tailored support

The EYTA programme team provided feedback on local application activities, and additional onsite support was provided to teams that requested help with specific activities. Typically, participants reported that the advice and support from the EYTA programme team had been very valuable. Participants thought it provided a good balance between support and challenge and had been important in helping teams to find a focus for their work and work as a team. As this participant explained:

'…the tailored support was really helpful …especially because we were coming from different disciplines and sometimes the purpose of the Academy really helped draw things together more, identify where we might be going off on a tangent to bring things back' (Team member)

Some participants would have liked more support from the EYTA programme team throughout the programme, where they had found local application activity challenging, particularly to support the development and refinement of implementation plans and to develop evaluation plans. One participant said they had expected to get a dedicated person to work with them and that this would have helped a lot with the development of their work.

Views on the Dragons Den exercise varied. Some participants thought the session had been helpful as it generated constructive discussions and useful questions. Others felt that presenting plans had required a great deal of work that they had not been ready to do, and that as a result they had not got much out of it, and it felt 'a bit of an empty exercise'. Implementation plans were not fully developed and still had many gaps, and the feedback focused on these gaps, while advice on dealing with challenges would have been more helpful. Some participants had expected more in-depth and individual feedback – being assigned a Dragon for continued work - and it was felt that not enough time was allowed to discuss each team's plan at the workshop, as well as afterwards.

The design partners acknowledged that they had underestimated the level of support local teams would need. While some additional resources were secured to respond to demands for additional tailored support, it was evident that this was not sufficient to meet teams' expectations and needs. These findings suggest that, as it had been considered at the design stage (see Chapter 2), teams would have benefited from having a dedicated coach to support them throughout the programme. However, it was noted this would have considerable resource implications.

3.8. Reviewing programme design against the theory of change and logic model

The findings presented in this chapter show that, as indicated in Table 3.1, the programme's delivery reflected the learning approaches outlined in the EYTA's theory change (in the fourth column) although peer to peer support across areas was not meaningfully included.

The EYTA logic model is not shown here but was also reviewed (Table 3.2), as this included more detailed information about the programme's delivery. The findings show that, as outlined in the logic model, EYTA brought together stakeholders from across early years and maternity services, local teams remained actively involved throughout the programme, the EYTA helped to deal with tensions within area teams, and there was optimism about making change happen. The transformation work was, however, at an early stage and much remained to be done, partly because of delays due to Covid. The two aspects of delivery outlined in the logic model that may need to be reviewed were: the length of the programme, which was considered too short; and the use of Microsoft Teams, due to access issues.

Table 3.1 Reviewing the theory of change

Theory of change programme description	Commentary based on evaluation findings
Face-to-face group work and evidence sessions delivered through a series of design workshops	Delivery in line with expectations
Online learning activities and peer-to-peer support provided across all areas	Online learning in line with exceptions. Peer-to-peer support across areas was not meaningfully included. More tailored support than anticipated was provided in response to areas' needs and request for more support.

Table 3.2 Reviewing the logic model

Logic model assumptions about the programme delivery	Commentary based on evaluation data and findings
All five areas stay actively involved	Local teams' participation and engagement were high throughout the programme
12 months is sufficient time to deliver the programme	Longer than 12 months required to work at a pace that better suited participants and to include support with refinement and implementation of the areas' implementation plans
Senior sponsors have sufficient leverage to make change happen	There was optimism about making change happen, but much remained to be done, partly because of delays due to Covid
Local differences can be resolved adequately as to not negatively impact on design	The EYTA had helped to resolve tensions within area teams but local EYTA work not yet reached

	the stage when potential tensions in the wider system needed to be addressed
The EIF team and external design partners will allocate sufficient and appropriate resources for the duration of the programme	While more work than anticipated was required, design partners were able to deliver the programme as planned, even though one partner was not able to be as engaged as they hoped (see chapter 2)
The IT software (Microsoft Teams and Survey Monkey) can effectively support the delivery of the EYTA	Some participants had difficulties accessing Microsoft Teams
Local stakeholders can be engaged and mobilised to support the delivery of the EYTA	The EYTA brought together local stakeholders. There had been very limited stakeholders' involvement beyond the EYTA teams, but there were plans and/or the expectation that wider stakeholders would be involved at later stages
Feedback from participants will be used to ensure a genuine 'test and learn' approach	Participants appreciated how their feedback was used to shape the programme and meet their needs
Suitable venues for the design workshops will be secured	This was achieved
80% attendance at meetings	Attendance at meetings was not systematically monitored
Events: 90% attendance	Attendance was slightly below what was expected i.e. 79% at workshop 1; 75% at workshop 2; 82% at workshop 3 and 77% at workshop 4
80% feedback 'very satisfied or satisfied'	For almost all sessions over 80% of participants who completed the feedback were 'very satisfied or satisfied'
Learning phases: 70% completion 80% feedback 'very satisfied or satisfied'	Learning phase 1 had a completion rate of 57% (averaged across the different tasks) Feedback on the 8 activities of learning phase 1 shows that for half of these activities over 80% of participants were happy with the activity and found it useful for their work. For 4 activities the proportion that was happy and found them relevant was below 80% (between 59% and 79%) Tasks involved in phases 2-5 did not lend themselves to measurement and therefore

	completion and satisfaction rates could not be calculated

4. Achievements and impacts

This chapter reviews the progress made by the five local areas, the impact of Covid-19 on their work, and the types of changes and impacts already experienced or for which foundations had been laid.

Key findings

- Teams were at different stages in the development of implementation plans when the evaluation fieldwork was conducted. In two areas, the plan had been accepted by the relevant local governance boards. All areas recognised that there was substantial work still to do to develop plans further for implementation. Although less progress had been made than representatives of local area teams and design partners had expected, and work had been abruptly halted by Covid, the local areas saw their work as a strong foundation for moving forwards.

- In three areas the focus of the implementation plan was reasonably clear, described consistently between participants and in the implementation plan. In two areas there were more inconsistencies. Some local team members felt that it would have been helpful to have spent more time, during the EYTA programme and within the team, developing a shared higher-level vision for support for families before moving into further planning.

- The local areas were generally confident that the work would be taken forward, because of the commitment of the lead senior sponsor and team, the high profile of the work, alignment with other transformation work, and the scrutiny of governance boards. They also recognised challenges: that the work was at an early stage and could become fragmented, that other transformation work might cut across it, that plans held significant workforce implications, that funding implications had not been worked through and financial pressures could work against plans, and that the work was vulnerable to changes in key personnel.

- Covid-19 had been a major disruptor of local areas' work on implementation plans, and there were concerns that Covid-recovery plans might divert capacity from transformation activity. However, alongside this, the EYTA work undertaken had strengthened the ability of local agencies to respond to Covid collectively, and their response had itself supported or taken forward some aspects of the EYTA implementation plans. This included, for example, rapid progress on data sharing, joint risk assessments, adaptation of service offers and joint communication with families.

- The key areas where impacts had already been experienced were in the development of stronger relationships and partnerships between local EYTA participants, and systems thinking – particularly the recognition of shared goals that can only be achieved through working together across the system.

- Impacts relating to the use of evidence were more disparate and less obvious. They tended to be talked about as gains or insights for individual team members rather than agreed collective changes. Participants particularly took from the EYTA work an appreciation of the value of local data in understanding need, and of developing a shared understanding of wider evidence on child development.

- EYTA programme content on leadership had been valued and some participants felt their leadership skills had developed particularly with regard to systems leadership. EYTA teams reported that there was now more sense of a shared agenda and shared purpose.

- Some changes to services and provision as a result of the EYTA had already been made, and implementation plans describe intentions for significant changes to pathways, joint work and provision.

- The almost universal view was that EYTA had been very valuable, and participants were very positive about this. Even where they felt the work undertaken would have been done anyway without the EYTA, they felt it been done better, more quickly and with a wider scope because of EYTA.

4.1. Clarity of vision and plans

4.1.1 Clarity and consistency

The EYTA programme was, without doubt, ambitious in its scope and pace, and in addition was curtailed abruptly by Covid. The five areas were at rather different stages in the development of their implementation plans at the time of the evaluation interviews (see area profiles in the Appendix and Section 1.1.1 for what it was intended implementation plans should cover). One team had advanced further than others in the specificity of their plans and activity to take them forward, and one was less advanced than the others. Two teams had taken their plan to the relevant local governance boards and had it accepted, whilst this was a future action for the remainder.

Participants in all five areas identified aspects where they needed to continue to develop and refine implementation plans (with less emphasis in the more advanced area). Areas for development included: the focus of the plan and priorities; the overall logic, coherence and a clearer narrative; development of workstreams and work to turn intentions into actionable plans; outcomes and their measurement; community engagement; consultation with staff; setting out specific actions and timescales.

Some team members felt they had made less concrete progress than they had expected at the start of the EYTA programme, but were confident that they had built a strong systems-wide partnership that they saw as an essential foundation for moving the work forward.

'We're in a much better place actually, because what we've achieved is something much more meaningful … we've got a deeper understanding, a deeper commitment. A really strong partnership is there, in place.' (Senior sponsor)

Among the EYTA design partners, there were mixed views about the stage reached by the local teams and in levels of confidence that the work would be taken forward successfully. Some were satisfied that the areas had, with perhaps one exception, made very meaningful progress that would continue; others were less sure.

'I think there has been more around hearts and minds in terms of impacts. That may well mean that change is more sustainable in the future. That this has felt less like a technical exercise than we had originally conceived at the beginning. It has been more about leaderships and relationships.' (Design partner)

As noted in Chapter 3, a key challenge for most teams had been finding a focus within the very broad ambition for the programme. There were differences between the local teams in the extent to which they were confident, at the point of the evaluation interviews, that they now had a clear, shared, high level vision, with consistent understanding of the streams or areas of work to be developed further. In three areas the focus of implementation plans was overall clear, although with some inconsistencies in how it was described. In two the focus was less clear. For some, although there had been progress and was now a clear sense of shared purpose, the work to develop a

shared vision was not yet complete, and there was some concern that strategies and plans were being developed before overall visions were well formulated.

'So I think we have a shared vision inasmuch that we know we need to keep going with this model and keep meeting, and I think we're clear about that. I'm not sure that we have a shared vision around the vulnerable children [pathway], the issues that we need to tackle, …. I think we need to go back to the sponsors really, and find out if there's anything specific they want us to look at. I would imagine the [governance board] might have a different view and vision compared to another service area, so we need to try and find out what they want from that … I think we have a shared vision that we would like in this ideal, to have services jointly commissioned, and much more cooperation between services, I think definitely.' (Team member)

'The vision of what we wanted for local families was different to what we thought commissioners wanted …. Lots of different opinions of what the vision was …. That needs fleshing out, that needs a wider discussion …. Would it not be better to get consensus and commitments to the vision and aspiration and then work from that in terms of where we are, what we need to do and how we're going to get there, using everyone's expertise?' (Team member)

There were some inconsistencies in accounts of plans, either where participants within an area described the vision and core aims rather differently, or where there were differences between what they described and what was documented in the implementation plan. There was sometimes a continuing tension not yet resolved locally between keeping the focus wide on the system as a whole and identifying specific areas for change which would stimulate wider systems change. However, among other participants there was more consistency in how the overall vision and strands of work were described, although it was recognised that there was work to do to ensure this was captured and shared more widely. Factors supporting greater consistency appeared to be the capacity of team members to take forward work together, the engagement of a lead senior sponsor, and the extent of earlier work on transformation.

4.1.2 Progress and confidence

There was generally confidence that the work had secured, or would secure, commitment, buy-in and traction as needed across the system. This emerged where participants saw the senior sponsor as very committed, and participants also pointed to the commitment and passion of the local EYTA team; the high profile of the work; the credibility given by the EIF and the fact that EYTA is a national programme, and in two areas the fact that it was aligned with wider transformation plans.

Although they were aware there was still a considerable amount of work to do, these factors also underpinned high levels of confidence among some participants that the work would be taken forward once the immediate pressures of Covid-19 responses (see further below) had lifted. Participants also pointed to the scrutiny of local governance boards to which the EYTA work reported as further grounds for confidence that the work would continue.

'Because if not us, who? …. Just because the EYTA is over it doesn't mean we've still not got to do the right thing and do our jobs. It is a priority for the children and young people's partnership board.' (Senior sponsor)

However, local team members and also design partners recognised that there were some challenges to taking implementation plans forward and there was not universal confidence that the work would be taken to a successful conclusion. Potential challenges were seen in:

- Concerns that the work was vulnerable because it was still at a very early stage: it was not yet sufficiently well formulated or advanced, there remained significant questions about the directions for work, and next actions had not been agreed and delegated. For some the vision was not sufficiently clear, and there were concerns that the work could become fragmented, or diverge from the emergent vision, when it was taken forward by different sub-groups
- Concerns that major changes in structure or strategy arising from other transformation work nationally or locally (an example given was the NHS Long Term Plan – see Chapter 1) might lead to competing visions, priorities and capacity demands. In general there was little discussion in the evaluation interviews of ways in which EYTA implementation plans connected with other local transformation initiatives (including the various policy initiatives described in Chapter 1). Although this was occasionally mentioned, and alignment seen as helpful, it may be a vulnerability in plans if these connections have not yet been strongly made

'While we're doing Early Years transformation work there might be another bit of a system that wants us to be pulled into their planning with a different footprint. We had a situation where we all thought we were working on the EYTA together and then the CCG, because of their changes, then decided to develop a care alliance with a slightly different set of partners and they were also prioritising school readiness. They started doing almost another plan.' (Team member)

'We've got transformational programmes going on left, right and centre across the whole of [the area] … EYTA almost got lost in all of that.' (Team member)

- Recognition that plans held very significant workforce implications and that in most areas there had been limited involvement of staff beyond the EYTA team, so that the wider workforce had not yet been involved or bought-in, and detailed consideration given to the work needed
- Recognition that important discussions about funding had not yet taken place, and concern that future financial pressures (including arising from Covid-19) might lead to agencies reverting to silos to protect budgets
- Concerns that members of the EYTA team and key senior sponsors either had left their role or might in future. Although some felt there was sufficient cross-agency buy-in to manage such changes, others felt the work was still dependent on the commitment and championing of individual team members

Some participants felt that potential areas of future resistance had been taken into account as the work progressed. However, where it was explored in evaluation interviews, it seemed that these had not been systematically mapped, explored, and strategies discussed to overcome them.

The EYTA design partners described a range of influences on the progress made by teams, including:
- Their starting point: whether there was sufficient clarity about the future direction (or readiness to work towards it), without such firm views about this that there was little room for development
- The degree of senior sponsor buy-in to and involvement in the EYTA work and their capacity to manage and lead change across systems
- The seniority and capacity of the team to 'keep up' with the EYTA programme of work
- The dynamic within the local EYTA team and their ability to develop together, working across systems without one member or agency dominating, and their ability to engage others beyond the EYTA team itself.

4.2. Implications of Covid-19

As noted in Chapter 1, the final stages of the EYTA programme were affected by the rapid increase in Covid-19 cases and national government directive to lock-down in mid-March 2020, and the final planned EYTA workshop was not delivered. The need for urgent multi-agency planning in response to Covid-19 impacted very significantly on the progress of areas' work on their implementation plans. However, at the same time it was widely felt that the EYTA work enabled local areas' work in response to Covid, and indeed that the Covid response was in some ways supportive of implementation plans.

4.2.1 Disruption of EYTA work due to Covid

Although there were occasional references to pieces of work that had continued, in general the 'relentless pressure' and urgency of Covid-related work mean that EYTA work had come to an abrupt halt. Participants expected to pick the work up again, and at the time of the evaluation interviews some were just starting to do so. However, there were concerns about a potential loss of momentum, particularly as different agencies and individuals were becoming free at different points to re-start the work. There were also concerns that a combination of increased need and reduced funding could threaten plans, and that the priority of Covid-recovery plans might divert capacity and priority from implementation plans and change their relevance. In one area the delays meant that a new service model which was to be developed and tested first in one locality would now need to be rolled out across all localities simultaneously. In another there were real concerns that Covid would lead to the closure of childcare settings which played a key role in the implementation plan's focus on language and communication.

4.2.2 Advancement of EYTA ambitions through Covid responses

Alongside this challenging picture, however, there were also more positive perspectives.

First, there were many reports that the work undertaken through the EYTA had significantly strengthened the ability of local agencies to respond collectively and at speed to the challenges of Covid, and that the local system was much better placed to work together. The partnerships that had been forged through the EYTA work (see further below) were a key resource, at both EYTA team and local governance board levels. They had enabled direct conversations and supported collaboration. The experience of innovative, flexible and family-centred work as part of the EYTA, and new learning and skills in adaptive leadership, had enabled rapid joint work in response to Covid.

'The relationships we've built with each other has enabled us to coalesce and work in such a way around sharing data quickly, campaigns around nought to fives, amending our pathways across the system to effect the new world we're in at the minute, and mapping together what we think the surge is going to look like in the next eight to ten weeks now we need to be realigning our services to support. We never would have done that if it wasn't for our relationships, because we trust each other.' (Senior sponsor)

'What this corona virus has shown me is that the relationships and the strengths in the system and the trust in the system is there, actually, to really accelerate our processes and combine them and make sure we have got one really joined-up system for our early years. I think this will strengthen a lot of those relationships that we need to be strong and I think it will show people who were maybe doubting that things could be done, that they can be done.' (Team member)

Second, the work undertaken in response to Covid had itself supported aspects of the EYTA plans. It had involved collaborative work in areas that were aligned to, or actually part of, areas'

transformation plans. For example, two areas described rapid progress in data sharing so that agencies were sharing information on vulnerable families and either sharing or jointly undertaking risk assessments. Service offers had been rapidly adapted, bringing agencies together. One area for example described a system of link worker contact with all new mothers, providing a resources pack and outlining available help on behalf of several agencies. Data protection challenges had been overcome in the face of an urgent need, and the relationships formed through the EYTA had been an important facilitator to this.

The need to move rapidly to virtual service delivery, and virtual interactions between professionals, had also given a boost to digitalised service delivery that formed part of several areas' plans, and meant that staff resistance to these ways of working had been rapidly overcome.

Social inequalities in the impacts of Covid had also highlighted the vulnerability of disadvantaged families and communities and reinforced the commitment in plans to targeting resources to families and communities in greatest need. In one area, EYTA team members had overlaid the EYTA plans on Covid recovery plans and seen a very high level of synergy.

These developments did not always involve all the agencies involved in EYTA, but they were viewed as important instances where work that would need to be taken forward as part of EYTA had been accelerated by Covid. There were instances of this in all five areas. The EYTA work and relationships formed through it supported urgent Covid-related work, and Covid-related work in turn strengthened EYTA relationships and the relevance of aspects of implementation plans.

4.3. Key areas of impact of the EYTA work

It was not expected that, at this early stage, the evaluation would find impacts on service delivery or provision, let alone impacts on children and families in the local area. Instead the evaluation interviews focused on whether EYTA participants had perceived changes resulting from their involvement in the EYTA, and this is drawn on to assess whether the EYTA has the capability to achieve its intended impacts in the future.

This section summarises views about where changes, or the foundations for future change, were perceived. The exploration and the framing below are informed by both the EYTA programme theory of change and wider literature on systems change summarised in Chapter 1. The most recurrent and strongly perceived impacts were on relationships and on systems thinking and these areas are explored first before describing other areas of perceived impact.

4.3.1 Relationships

The experience of the EYTA was seen as having led to much stronger relationships and partnerships. This impact was almost universally described by participants in the evaluation, and in very similar terms in all five areas.

The EYTA was seen to have led to much stronger working relationships between team members (and as described below, to some extent also beyond the EYTA team). Team members described being able to have direct conversations with each other in ways that significantly facilitated day-to-day work. One senior sponsor said that the senior sponsors group talks together 'most days', although, as described in Chapter 3, senior sponsor involvement varied. People described having formed direct relationships with agencies with which they previous had little or no contact. Following the EYTA work, they now knew which individuals in different agencies to reach out to when new issues arose, or who to ask for a steer to the right person.

These strengthened relationships were based on the personal connections that EYTA members had formed through the experience of working together and attending EYTA workshops. They were also based on a much better understanding of each other's services, and a recognition of collective aims (see further below). The relationships were described as 'less transactional', based on trust, enabling constructive challenge and non-blaming approaches.

'We had worked with some of the people before. I think there is something different about this process. I don't know if it's is because we're all saying 'We're doing it as part of the EYTA' that we have got further with it and we have been able to have those conversations where we do challenge people more. Something has happened, I think, because it seems that siloed working has stopped. We are looking at how we can link better together.' (Team member)

Although there were occasional participants who had not experienced improvements, these changes were generally viewed by both EYTA team members and senior sponsors as very significant. They were seen as essential foundations to moving forward with transformative work, and some had been surprised at how important they were as an outcome of the EYTA work.

'At the start I probably wouldn't have said that my expectations were around a strong partnership where the way that we work together would be really meaningful and would enable us to therefore move on and do the right thing because … it would have felt very wishy-washy and woolly, but actually, at the end of the day, it has all been about a culture shift …. That has more of a long term impact than if we'd just jumped through some hoops and gone through the motions and not deepened our commitment, knowledge and understanding of each other…. We haven't got that commissioning plan in place but actually it doesn't matter because what's in place is probably something much more substantial and meaningful and will probably mean that there'll be greater success when we do get to the point where we've got the commissioning plan." (Senior sponsor)

The impact of strengthened relationships was already being experienced in facilitating urgent responses to Covid (as discussed above), and in taking forward both EYTA-related and other work. Although the focus was on strengthened relationships between EYTA team members or between senior sponsors, some participants felt that there was a wider impact beyond those directly involved in the EYTA team. There were examples of agencies being newly represented on strategic boards, a secondment, teams attending each other's meetings, cross-team training, new involvement of an agency in the system for responding to child protection concerns, and new data sharing. One senior sponsor noted that EYTA senior sponsors' modelling of the importance of inter-agency working in what they say and do creates expectations for how their teams will work too. More generally it was felt that stronger personal relationships between service leaders can smooth the way to better inter-agency working on the ground.

4.3.2 Systems thinking

The second area of impact widely described was in systems thinking: an understanding by participants of themselves and their service as part of a wider system, and recognition that it is only through the endeavours of the system as a whole that individual agencies' aims can be achieved.

Participants described having a new understanding of other parts of the service system, of what other services provide, the national policies and performance frameworks shaping their work, different governance arrangements, the key aims of different parts of the system, and the constraints and challenges they face.

They also had a new recognition of the complexity, duplication and lack of coherence and join-up of the existing service system, and of how this was – or likely was – experienced by parents. They could

see how confusing and unclear the combination of services was from the perspective of parents, and the scope for duplication, mixed messages and gaps between different agencies.

Perhaps most importantly, there was a new recognition of shared goals between services and agencies: that they are dependent on each other to achieve each agency's goals, and that these goals are, or should be, shared goals. For example, there was a new understanding of the connections between healthy births and the developmental delays that affect measures of school readiness, or of the significance of language and communication as a 'golden thread' connecting the work and outcomes of multiple agencies. Having a shared understanding of the causes of disadvantage and need contributed to this.

'I think what we do have is a much richer understanding of each other's outcomes and each other's focus and the willingness to work together to achieve those aims that I think we each thought were probably our own area of responsibility …. What I learnt from working with maternity services … is that one of the ways of reducing our SEND population [here] is by helping women get to full term …. So in terms of that connectivity, there is such a richer and more sophisticated understanding.' (Team member)

'The systems approach to working … the learning across the board's been really helpful, and will be helpful in a practical way moving forward in terms of how we plan, how we evaluate. And just working in partnership as well, we always work in partnership, but how you do that in an effective way so it's not just a token, it's a real systems approach.' (Team member)

Some participants described a much stronger sense of themselves as part of the wider system and said they now talk much more often in terms of the system. Several felt that the EYTA team discussions had got to the point where team members were no longer participating as representatives of their agency or service. They had progressed from wanting to advance or protect their own service's agenda to recognising that they had to think and engage on behalf of the wider system. In identifying aims and areas for work as part of their implementation plans, teams had worked hard to identify aims, outcomes and areas of work that cut across service areas and that could only be addressed through collective endeavour.

'They've stopped seeing themselves as one part, and as part of a system. I know that particularly in areas like early years there are cost cutting issues and problems and strengths. The solutions are never one agency. It's how we all work together, and I think the Academy helped people understand that.' (Senior sponsor)

As noted in Chapter 3, undertaking service mapping had been an important contribution to these new insights, and some participants said it was an approach they had used in other strategic initiatives but that the EYTA work had been richer because it was wider, deeper, and undertaken collectively. The evidence sessions had also been relevant, particularly in highlighting the causes and consequences of early childhood vulnerability. The focus on integrating maternity and early years, and specific work on theories of change and logic models, had all also reinforced the need to think across the system.

These impacts were not universally described. Some participants felt that the work undertaken had not been sufficiently deep, or not sufficiently broad. They pointed to issues that were missing from the service mapping work, including housing, employment, transport and the causes of poverty.

Some described themselves, their senior sponsor, or other agencies, as continuing to focus primarily on advancing or protecting their own service agenda. And occasionally there was a view that systems thinking was already a strong feature of local work, although the examples given tended to

relate to systemic thinking as part of agency practice in working with families, rather than to strategic levels systems thinking.

4.3.3 Impacts relating to the use of evidence

Impacts relating to the use of evidence were less often highlighted spontaneously by participants and the impacts described were more disparate. In part this reflected the multiple forms of evidence addressed by the EYTA programme content, which included international evidence about effective programmes and approaches, making the case for using empirically supported programmes with fidelity over those not empirically supported, local population data on need and outcomes, local evaluation data, and insights from ethnographic research or wider engagement with families. Impacts tended also to be talked about as gains or insights for individual team members, rather than as changes across the EYTA or the wider system. Participants particularly valued how EYTA taught them to look at their data i.e. collectively and through rigorous processes, although there were fewer immediate benefits in relation to evidence-based programmes and evaluation. However, some important impacts, and future impacts, were described.

Some participants described a new personal recognition of the importance of evidence and data and the need for better local data on the effectiveness of local services in meeting need.

'Well data for me was always like, ugh … but I've had to learn that actually it's important. One of the presentations was on data and it highlighted that by having the correct data and knowledge that gives you a better stance to move forward on things. I took that on board ….' (Team member)

'It was a great signpost to everyone to know what your own data is. I have to say, I was embarrassed, I didn't know what my own data was …. And the impact of what we do on our colleagues …. It was very good in the fact that it was holistic.' (Senior sponsor)

There was also a new shared understanding about how vulnerability arises, and that the most disadvantaged communities, and the children with the poorest outcomes, on a range of different measures are found in the same localities.

"What I think it forced us to do was to just sit and look at a needs analysis together, which we'd never done with maternity, we'd done in a piecemeal way across public health and the rest of the authority. …. When you put all those outcomes together, it's the same communities that are affected by the same issues. Children are more likely to die in our most deprived communities in exactly the same way that their educational attainment's going to be much poorer and that their parents are more likely to smoke." (Team member)

As noted above in relation to systems-thinking, there was also a new recognition of the need for multi-agency work to address disadvantage.

There was a wide recognition of the need for shared outcomes and outcome measures, and common assessment tools. Although plans here were at an early stage and few specific advances had been made, it was widely said that the EYTA team now had a much better understanding of the data collected by different agencies. One example of specific change, discussed since before the EYTA but prompted by the EYTA work, was that in one area, data from the 2 year old development check was now being shared between health visiting and the local authority.

"We have got some better will now in terms of wanting to share information … I'd say and more agreement that we need to share information, so that's very positive …. it was very helpful to have senior sponsors who've bought into the Early Years Transformation Academy from different

disciplines because that in itself shows commitment that there needed to be some very clear agreement in terms of this information sharing and commissioning." (Team member)

Although many participants felt that the evidence covered in the workshops was not necessarily new to them, they saw real value in shared exposure to and reinforcement of it.

The aspects of the EYTA that were seen to have contributed to the use of evidence were workshop sessions and webinars sharing early years evidence, working on joint strategic needs assessments and other ways of collating local data, and developing theories of change, logic models, and outcomes frameworks.

There were however mixed views about whether there had been changes in attitudes to or use of evidence, and some participants felt that their own understanding of and commitment to evidence, and the local area approach, had not really changed. As discussed in Chapter 3, there was also some scepticism about the focus on evidence-based programmes, on the basis that they are too targeted or expensive to reach need at significant levels, inflexible, expensive, and not necessarily well aligned with local plans. Overall, specific commitments or intentions relating to evidence were fairly sparce in the area's implementation plans. However, there were references to improving data sharing and joint assessment, monitoring outcomes and impacts, and general references to using evidence.

4.3.4 Leadership capacity

It was difficult to assess specific impacts on leadership capacity in the interviews, although as noted in Chapter 3 some people had valued the leadership content highly and found it personally helpful. Certainly there was progress in the sense that leaders at different levels were coming together on a shared agenda and developing shared plans, and this perhaps suggests that the work undertaken has developed capacity for leadership of improvement.

4.3.5 Services, provision and pathways

Already, some changes to services and provision had been made, including new service provision or planning specific areas of service development. Although it would not be realistic to expect significant change yet, it was clear that, if implementation plans are developed further and actioned as intended, there will be very substantial change. The changes planned involved new joint pathways (expressed in one area as involving a single plan for each family across multiple service areas with a single lead practitioner), new provision, greater focus on early intervention and targeted provision, and the introduction or extended use of specific programmes[31].

4.3.6 Shared language and purpose

In line with the fact that shared language (referenced in the theory of change) was not particularly identified as a shortcoming in systems before the EYTA programme, it was also not given prominence in discussions about the current and future impacts of EYTA. Where it was discussed this was in quite diverse terms encompassing agreement between agencies about the characteristics that would lead a child or mother to be identified as 'vulnerable' or what would make them eligible for targeted services; shared understanding of the causes and consequences of vulnerability or disadvantage; shared outcomes and outcome measures; consistent use of language between professionals as part of their interactions with each other; and consistent messages to

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[31]These included Triple P (versions of which are graded as 'evidence based' by EIF), Graded Care Profile (for which there is evidence of promise) and locally developed interventions. In generally however there were few references to specific programmes.

families. It was not clearly an area where change had been experienced. Some participants felt that it might emerge from more specific work on implementation plans; others felt it was inevitable that each service or profession would continue to have its own language, and that what was important was a better understanding of each other's professional languages.

There was clearer evidence that the EYTA had led to the development of shared purpose. As noted earlier, there was a new recognition of the shared goals between services and that joint work was needed to achieve them, and implementation plans set out a shared vision for children and families.

4.3.7 Investment and commissioning

At this early stage it would be unrealistic to expect to see changes in local areas' investment and commissioning. There was a general recognition in all five areas that the EYTA had led to increased recognition across maternity and children's services of the importance of the early years and of early intervention for vulnerable children. All the areas' plans would imply an increasing orientation of funding to early intervention or targeting need, although details had not yet been worked through. There were also some references, in interviews and in two plans, to joint commissioning, and there had been some initial discussions of this before work was suspended because of Covid-19. There were some instances where it was reported that the work undertaken was beginning to, or would, influence the commissioning of individual services.

Overall if implementation plans are taken forward this would mean significant changes to investment and commissioning, but this is very much an area of work in progress.

4.3.8 Co-creation with local families

Co-creation with families also did not feature much in discussions with areas about the learning programme, and as noted in Chapter 3 some areas and design partners felt there should have been a greater focus on community's involvement in the EYTA programme. There were occasional comments that the EYTA work increased capacity for or the priority of this work. It had highlighted, to individual participants, the importance of engaging with local families to understand their needs and experiences of the service system, and to co-create planned changes. However generally this was an area where participants felt there had not been impacts from the EYTA, either because this had always been part of the local approach, or because it was not particularly emphasised in the EYTA work.

4.4. How the EYTA programme contributed to changes

The almost universal view among local areas was that the EYTA had added value to their work, and almost all participants were very positive about the experience and how they had benefited. Even where participants felt that existing transformation agendas meant they would have done similar work without the EYTA, they saw clear added value, and felt the work had been done better, more quickly, with a wider breadth because of EYTA.

'Everything that we're doing, we couldn't possible have been done without EYTA, no doubt about it …. They've given us the structure on which to build, so they've given us the blocks and said follow this path and we'll help you identify where your issues are. In terms of everything else, the ball is in our court I think, it's down to us …. It's one of the best things I've done in terms of going through the process together with a group of people and going through the steps and working things out, I've really enjoyed it. So would I encourage other authorities? Yes I would.' (Team member)

'I think [the implementation plan]'s probably twice as good as it would have been, thanks to the Academy. I think a version of it would have come out regardless, because the system pressures would have required us to move in that direction. However, without the Academy we would have gone off down certain routes. We would have had to reinvent the wheel, and sometimes reinventing the wheel would have been reinventing it through failure. Whereas, the EYTA processes took us to a place - to us to a much more robust planning place, a much more robust outcome-establishment place. So it was definitely, definitely worth doing … I'm very, very glad I did it, and I'm very grateful to the Academy.' (Team member)

'What the Academy did is it gave us focus, structure and time, and brought together the key people to make it happen.' (Senior sponsor)

It was difficult for participants to attribute the changes they perceived to specific aspects of the programme, both because they often struggled to recall the full programme in detail and because elements had contributed in combination. Different participants pointed to different elements. The service mapping work had often been particularly influential, and for others the leadership work, shared exposure to early years evidence, work with local data, and developing theories and change and logic models had been important. The input of and feedback from EIF and partner experts, and their role in facilitating discussion, had also been important.

More generally, though, the programme was seen to have been impactful because of the opportunity it presented to focus in depth on early years and inter-agency working, and the commitment made by local leaders to this. As discussed in Chapter 3, this meant that there had been protected time and an expectation of significant input of resources from each agency, an opportunity to stop and reflects and work much more deeply, and an expectation that the team would continue to come together however challenging. The structure, timeframe and requirements of the EYTA programme meant that agencies were committed to undertaking the work, and the 'permission' of senior leaders, accountability to governance bodies and their scrutiny of the work, was also important. As discussed in Chapter 2, the profile of the EIF as a highly respected and influential organisation, and the national profile of the work, was also important in ensuring that the work was prioritised by leaders and by the local teams.

4.5. Reviewing impacts against the EYTA theory of change

In this final section we summarise commentary on the impacts of EYTA against the goals set out in the theory of change model (the fifth, sixth and seventh columns in the diagram shown in Chapter 1).

Overall, findings suggest that most of the short term goals were fully or partly secured, particularly leadership capacity, shared purpose and optimism about addressing systems change, and to some extent the demand for (particularly local) evidence. Medium and longer term goals have generally not yet been met.

Table 4.1 Reviewing the theory of change

Theory of change goal	Commentary based on evaluation findings
Short-term goals	
Create the opportunity for areas to develop their capacity and leadership for improvement and the local demand for evaluation and evidence	The implementation plans were not as far developed as initially anticipated but they reflected plans for leadership for improvement. There is some evidence that skills and effective approaches to capacity and leadership have been created. Some evidence that the demand for evidence has been increased, particularly the use of local population data, and increased recognition of the importance of evaluation.
Develop the capability of areas to understand early intervention evidence	Shared exposure to the evidence seen as valuable but it is less clear that the capability of areas to understand it has been developed. This is perhaps clearer in relation to their understanding of their own local data.
Increase motivation through developing shared language and purpose	It is clear that the EYTA had developed a shared purpose, although not always clearly and consistently expressed, and this was viewed as an area for continued work. It is not clear that the EYTA has developed shared language, and this concept is not well understood.
Increase motivation through developing confidence in evidence and evaluation	Not clear that the EYTA has developed confidence in evidence and evaluation.
Increase motivation through creating optimism about ability to address complex systems problems	There was a high level of optimism about the ability to take EYTA implementation plans forward. This optimism may occlude some of the likely challenges in tackling complex systems problems.
Medium-term goals	
A coherent and robust implementation plan is in place in each local area	Implementation plans were being developed and this was work in progress. Areas and design partners view further work as needed to develop plans which suggests they are not yet 'coherent and robust'.
A robust local approach to evidence and evaluation across the system is created	It is not clear that the work so far undertaken will result in a robust local approach to evidence and evaluation across the system, although plans included some references to evidence and evaluation.

Better quality commissioning decisions take place	It was expected that, if implemented, the plans will result in both more joint commissioning and more evidence/outcomes-based commissioning. However, the local areas were some way from completing this work and the postponement of discussions due to Covid makes findings here very tentative.
Motivation to prioritise and invest in early intervention in the early years is improved	The implementation plans implied investment in early years and in early intervention although it was not clear if this involved new investment or better utilisation of existing resources.
Each local area has the partnerships, staffing and governance arrangements in place to deliver the implementation plan	There is substantial evidence of stronger personal relationships, and this and implementation of plans has the potential to strengthen partnerships at strategic and operational levels. Plans for work on staffing and workforce development had not yet been developed. Governance arrangements were in place but will need to be reviewed
Local leadership capability on maternity and early years systems is in place	The data suggest that leadership capability had been developed for some participants, that leaders now had more shared purpose and awareness of systems-level issues, and there were instances of more systemic working in response to Covid-19. There was inconsistency in engagement by senior sponsors. It is difficult to assess whether sufficient capability is in place to deliver on plans
Long-term goal	
Effective interventions and services reach the children and parents (including in the ante-natal period) who need them most within the five EYTA areas	Plans, if developed further and implemented, had the potential to lead to significant change in services, but much work remains to be done. It is difficult to assess at this stage whether this will involve effective interventions and services. Integrated pathways and multi-agency working was perhaps given more focus than use of effective intervention and services and comprehensiveness of reach. Plans focused on specific elements of early years systems rather than reaching fully across them.

5. Conclusions

This final chapter looks across the findings reported in earlier chapters and draws out strategic implications and recommendations. It draws together responses to the five evaluation questions set out in Chapter 1.

Key findings

- Overall it is clear the EYTA has been a very rich learning opportunity, and the evaluation points to clear strengths in the overall approach, content and delivery of the EYTA.

- The design partners were able to recruit and retain the target audience. Teams were set up broadly as envisaged by EIF. Lead senior sponsors were mainly actively involved throughout, although it was not clear how far other senior sponsors were engaged and their direct involvement with the EYTA appeared to be limited.

- The programme was delivered largely as planned. However, the clear message was that more time was needed both for the development of the programme and to participate in it. EYTA teams and senior sponsors consistently reported challenges in finding the necessary time and capacity to participate fully, and the consensus was that the programme needs to be more than a year long.

- Participants were very positive overall about the programme and all the subject matter was viewed as relevant and high priority. There was clear value for participants in having taken part. The clearest impacts were the development of stronger relationships and partnerships, and systems thinking – particularly the understanding of shared goals and interdependencies. There was also some evidence of renewed recognition of the importance of evidence, leadership capacity developing and of shared purpose.

- The following recommendations are made for strengthening the EYTA programme and future work in this area based on the interview data and on the wider evidence about effective approaches to evidence mobilisation and systems change.

  The focus of the programme
  Clarify the programme intentions, focus, content and capacity requirements: Develop a stronger framework which clarifies the logic and particularly the relationship between systems change and evidence. Use this to develop the programme and provide more clarity to participants about what is required

  The structure of the programme
  Plan for a longer and more flexible programme, given that the pace was a challenge for local areas and they achieved less than had been expected. Allow longer for the application and initiation stages: to allow for wider engagement of stakeholders and the initial development of relationships and systems leadership. More time is also needed to allow for the non-linear nature of work in this area and for iterating between different levels of systems analysis (zooming in and out) to enable the development of a shared high level vision, agreement about the dimensions or components of the system were change is needed, and to develop operational plans. This also suggests a need for more flexibility in the programme structure since participating areas will not necessarily move in concert, and may need more time to complete one stage of work before moving on to the next.

  Plan for the active involvement in the programme of teams working at different levels, and for

alignment in their work. The evaluation data suggests that there is a need for active work with senior sponsors; systems leaders at the level of the EYTA team, and operational groups. This would be consistent with the evidence about the importance of multi-level and aligned teams.

The content of the programme
Widen the lens on evidence and data and ensure that the programme does not focus too narrowly on evidence-based programmes. Interview data suggests that important elements are the use of local data, local evaluation, and effective non-programmatic practices and service approaches.

Widen and deepen coverage of systems change: looking beyond maternity and early years services, at the causes of poor outcomes, and at what holds the current system in place – including power structures, mindsets and values. This reflects both the interview data and the wider literature on systems change.

Strengthen the coverage of co-creation with local communities and staff, hearing diverse voices, and peer to peer support, which were seen by participants as too light in their coverage. Again this would be consistent with the literature on systems change which emphasises the value of hearing divergent voices from the periphery of systems rather than 'the usual suspects'.

Provide more technical assistance and tailored support since these were highly valued and seen as insufficient inputs. Again this would be consistent with the wider evidence about the importance of technical assistance and 'backbone support'.

5.1. Reviewing findings against the evaluation questions

Combining insights from across the literatures of evidence utilisation, implementation and systems provides strong endorsement for the EYTA programme model, in which EIF and partners act as intermediary organisations in a brokering role between practice and science to aid the uptake of evidence and wider systems change. This evidence suggests key aspects of work are:

- Developing capacity and conditions for systems leadership, including a supportive climate and culture for evidence use and transformation
- Forming coalitions which bring together multiple community stakeholders around a shared agenda, based on trusting relationships
- Defining the boundaries of the system widely, looking deeply into the system and what holds it in place, and bringing a systems lens to understand the causes of problems
- Developing implementation teams at multiple levels to support change across a number of entities
- An emphasis on co-creation where multiple actors collaborate for change, bringing together diverse perspectives and including community engagement in the design and selection of approaches
- Building a data-informed improvement culture
- Recognising that change is a phased but non-linear process, beginning with exploration and moving to clarity about the parameters and substance of the intended change, with agreed strategies for change based on analysis of the context.

These insights are drawn on in this chapter.

Overall, it is clear that the EYTA has been a very rich learning opportunity for the design partners and the participating areas. Each of the teams made significant progress in making plans to bring together early years and maternity systems. The progress made was more limited than had been

anticipated, reflecting a misalignment between the timetable and the ambitious goals, but it is nevertheless significant. Each area is now in a very different position from where it was at the start of the programme, with a stronger sense of shared purpose and of the need to come together across maternity and early years systems, and an implementation plan which forms the foundation for further work. Whilst not all that change is attributed to the EYTA, the EYTA was, for most participants, seen as very influential. There was generally confidence about moving plans forward, although this was balanced with recognition of challenges.

The evaluation points to very clear strengths in the overall approach, content and delivery of the EYTA. It also highlights areas of learning and for further consideration, many of which were noted by the design partners in the evaluation interviews. Overall, the very reflective and open approach to learning among the design partners was a hallmark of the EYTA, and aligned with the intended 'test and learn' approach.

5.1.1 How successful was the academy in recruiting its target audience and retaining its participants?

The original intention had been to recruit four local areas within the same geographic region. The academy recruited five areas, two pairs of which were in the same region. This more dispersed geography limited opportunities for peer networking, and increased the resources required for participation.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the teams were broadly at the stage in thinking about the integration of early years and maternity systems envisaged by EIF and partners, although they were in some ways perhaps less ready for the EYTA approach. They were generally committed to using evidence (or at least to strengthening their use of evidence) and to transforming maternity and early years systems and four of the five were at an early stage in the journey. They were able to bring together the necessary groups, and four of the five had stable local leadership to support the work. Senior champions supported the work (although as noted below there were some challenges here) and freed up resources (in giving 'permission' for the work alongside other priorities rather than in providing additional resources). The application process had not reached as widely across the systems as would have been ideal because of time pressures, and in one area there had been insufficient focus on handing the work on to the EYTA team.

All five areas were retained throughout the programme and were actively committed to continued work once the pressures of Covid have lessened. The membership of EYTA teams was largely retained, and there was relatively high attendance at workshops and in online learning. There were occasional reports of team members dropping out but these were few. As discussed below it was less clear that the wider group of senior sponsors were retained in a consistent way.

5.1.2 Was the programme delivered as planned? And what were the planned and actual resources required to develop, deliver and participate in EYTA

Design partner perspectives

From the perspective of the design partners, the programme was generally delivered as planned. The early development of the programme needed more time than anticipated and could have benefited from clearer objectives for and specification of the programme (see further below).

The recruitment phase proceeded as planned, with the exception noted above that five areas were recruited areas and were not from a single region.

The delivery largely proceeded as planned. It was always intended that the detailed planning of content of programme modules should take place alongside delivery, using a 'test and learn' approach to adapt future delivery based on feedback from participants: this was seen as a real strength in the programme. The interview data suggest that this work would have been enhanced with more clarity about the overall objectives and the model or theory underlying the programme, in particular the relationship between evidence utilisation, partnership working and systems change. For example, the evaluation did not get a consistent picture from design partners in whether the overall aim of the programme is to support evidence utilisation (with increased partnership working and systems change viewed as important means to this end), or whether the overall aim is systems change (with consistent evidence use across systems viewed as an important component of this). There were also different emphases in what was seen as the focus within these overarching aims. The initial theory of change could also have been used more purposefully in the ongoing development of content. It was clear though that feedback from participants was actively sought, and acted upon.

The topics covered mapped closely on to initial intentions as expressed in the initial programme theory of change and the prospectus. The learning approaches used were generally in line with intentions. There were fewer opportunities for peer support than intended. This partly reflects the more dispersed geography of the local areas, but the fact that the five areas saw themselves as quite different, and particularly where relationships in the EYTA were new, placed more priority of working within than across EYTA teams. The pace of workshops also contributed to this. Overall, the findings suggest that more focus was needed to make peer learning an active part of the programme.

The programme also involved more tailored, individual support from design partners than had initially been envisaged, with partners working directly with local teams to support the 'real time application' aspects of the programme – the work undertaken between sessions on service mapping, needs analysis, outcomes frameworks and theories of change. This was boosted in response to demand from the local areas, and most participants would have valued more support particularly with the refinement and implementation of the plan.

Linked with this, an area of uncertainty for design partners that emerged during the course of the programme was whether they should require local teams to complete the local application activities to a required level of quality, providing feedback and support until this had been achieved, or whether these were simply opportunities for the local teams to develop their learning and work that the teams could use as they preferred. In practice, it proved impossible to take the former approach, because of the limited capacity for tailored support, the pressure of time, and given that this was a group-based structured programme.

Local area perspectives

From the perspective of the local areas, delivery largely proceeded as expected. Local teams were brought together as intended with few gaps. Teams were open to new members and perspectives, although it was not always easy for new members to feel fully part of the programme. Feedback from some teams was that there needed to be more considered decisions about team make-up at the start as introducing new members during the programme could be challenging and disrupt the team's dynamics. It was, however, considered important for the team's membership to remain open to bring in new members as the work progressed.

There was limited engagement of partners or stakeholders beyond the EYTA team, and it was not entirely clear from the prospectus or interviews with design partners what had been expected here. There was also a tension between the need for team members to have the seniority of systems leaders, and the need for operational level capacity and insight. Some areas set up an operational group alongside the EYTA group, or intended to bring operational level staff into future work. Areas

also highlighted the challenge of bringing in local technical support in areas such as analysis or needs assessment at relatively short notice.

The prospectus identifies the need for a senior sponsor group, but notes that the direct relationship with the Academy might be assigned to a single senior sponsor. In practice, the picture from the fieldwork is one of limited engagement of senior sponsors as a group. EYTA members tended to describe a single overall senior sponsor, and varied but generally low levels of engagement with the senior sponsor in their own agency. It may be that there was more engagement between senior sponsors than reported (since team members would not necessarily be sighted on this) and senior sponsors reported that they had mechanisms for keeping other seniors up to date and involved. The small number of non-lead senior sponsors interviewed were not always very close to the EYTA work.

Resources required

Information about the resources required for development and delivery of, and participation in, the EYTA was not systematically collected during the programme. The general messages are however consistent. The design partners felt that more time was needed for the development and delivery of the programme than had been originally expected, and EYTA teams described needing to put in significant amounts of time and found this very challenging, especially since the EYTA commitments had to be accommodated alongside existing work.

5.1.3 How satisfied were participants with the content and programme overall? What were the barriers and enablers to successful delivery?

Satisfaction with the programme

Participants were overall very positive about the programme. The topics covered were seen as highly relevant and helpful. There were, naturally, individual participants who found an area of content less novel or less useful, but overall none of the subject matter was viewed as irrelevant or of low priority. Key areas where suggestions were made for expanding coverage were:
- widening and deepening work on understanding current systems
- effective approaches to designing and leading systems change
- proven or promising approaches where evidence-based programmes are not feasible or not sufficient
- community engagement
- evaluation

The forms of learning, or programme inputs, were also generally viewed positively. The workshops were generally well received, seen as lively, interactive, stimulating and rich learning opportunities. Feedback was largely about the need for more time, although alongside this it was clearly challenging for participants to make time to attend. The online learning content was well received, and the key challenges here were in finding time to work though it and some technical difficulties. Active tailored support from design partners was very highly valued, and as noted the local teams would generally have liked more of this. The outlier here was peer learning, which had much less emphasis in the programme than expected. Although some participants felt that it should have been given more emphasis, others were less sure this would have added value.

In terms of the overall structure, the EYTA clearly addressed a very ambitious and wide-ranging agenda. For many participants and all teams, it was challenging to find the right balance between looking widely across all aspects of early years and maternity systems versus focusing on specific aspects (and if so what to select), and between the high level vision and ambitions for change versus agreeing specific areas for action. For some, this meant that a particular piece of EYTA work did not fall at the right time in their wider transformation work, or was addressed at either too high or too specific a level, or needed to be reviewed as part of further work. This is consistent with emerging

evidence about systems change being a non-linear process and the need to 'zoom in' and 'zoom out' iterating between a detailed and a high level strategic perspective.

Finally the pace was almost universally experienced as very challenging, particularly towards the end of the programme, and this led to a common view that it needs to be longer than a year.

Barriers to and enablers of successful delivery

For the design partners, the barriers discussed related to the pace of work and pressure this placed on capacity, and areas where more clarity in objectives and focus for the programme was needed. Enablers were not specifically discussed, but it was clear that the work had a high strategic priority for each organisation, individuals were personally committed and highly motivated, and the general view was that the delivery team had worked well together.

For the local teams, the key challenges that emerged were time and capacity constraints, challenges around focusing the work, and Covid. The key enablers were again recognition of the strategic need for the work; the structure and high profile of the EYTA programme; senior level buy in, accountability structures, and clear shared expectations that the work would be completed however challenging; the passion, commitment and motivation of team members, and positive experiences of the programme and its early benefits.

5.1.4 What was the perceived value for participants in terms of outputs and outcomes of the programme including what was useful and how learning was used? How did this differ from those anticipated and those set out in the theory of change and logic model?

Most participants viewed the work completed very positively. Overall, less progress had been made than had been anticipated by design partners, senior sponsors and teams themselves, and the intended outputs had not all been completed. However, they were generally positive about the outputs and viewed the implementation plans as significant, important and valued. Some participants felt that they would have produced these outputs without the EYTA, driven by existing transformation agendas or intended work. However, even here participants felt the work had been undertaken more widely across systems, to a higher quality, faster or with more likelihood of plans being taken forward than would have been the case without the EYTA.

There was generally confidence that plans would be taken forward, although some challenges were recognised. (The challenges may be under-estimated given that there did not appear to have been systematic work to map and address potential obstacles to implementation.) The design partners were not all convinced that the extensive work involved in implementation plans would be taken to its conclusion in all areas.

The two areas where the most recurrent and strongly perceived outcomes were in relationships and systems thinking. Participating in the EYTA was universally seen to have strengthened personal relationships in ways that were seen as very important for future work on systems change and for ongoing service delivery. Similarly, EYTA was almost universally seen to have strengthened aspects of systems thinking. It was seen as having led to a new recognition of shared goals and the need to work together across the system to achieve them. (These outcomes are not explicitly set out in the theory of change.)

Outcomes relating to evidence were a little more muted and more disparate, although in part this reflects the fact that evidence is part of the programme in a number of different forms and ways.

Participants described personally having a better understanding of the importance of evidence, or aspects of evidence, and saw value in the whole team being exposed to the same body of evidence. There were examples of this being a 'lightbulb moment' for individual people who saw connections between services that they had not previously recognised. There had also been increased recognition of the importance of local data. It was not clear that there were new collective attitudes towards evidence across an area but there had been some early progress, and more often plans, for information sharing and shared assessment tools.

In terms of other outcomes in the theory of change (those expressed as short term goals), there was some evidence that capacity and leadership for improvement has been developed. There is clear evidence of new shared purpose (although this was not expressed as having a shared language). There appears to be increased motivation and optimism about addressing complex systems problems. Of the medium term goals, there are early plans and intentions in most of the goal areas, although significant work to be done to achieve them.

5.1.5 What can be learnt to inform future activities to apply evidence to early years systems and evaluate these activities?

The potential of the EYTA programme

Overall, the evaluation highlights that the EYTA is a valued approach to tackling a set of issues which had a high priority, and which were widely viewed as challenging to address – in line with the recruitment intentions. It is largely seen as an approach that adds value to and is different from other approaches, and there is clear demand and appetite for the approach. The EIF is also seen as a very credible leader of the programme. The EIF is particularly associated with evidence about child development and effective programmes, and there were some comments that the EYTA ambition requires a wider body of evidence than this.

Now that the programme has come to an end, the achievement of its next and ultimate goals is in the hands of the five local areas. At this stage it is difficult to say whether the programme has the capacity to catalyse the change it intends. There are certainly signs of promise. However, there are a number of areas emerge in the evaluation where the EYTA programme and its delivery could be strengthened. In addition, the disruption caused by Covid-19 meant that work was unexpectedly suspended.

This section sets out a series of recommendations for development of the EYTA programme and similar future endeavours.

Recommendations relating to the focus of the programme

Clearer focus and aims for the programme
Future work in this area would be strengthened by being supported by a strong framework based on integrated evidence across early childhood development, knowledge mobilisation and evidence utilisation, systems change and implementation. An important part of this would be to clarify the overall logic, particularly the relationship between systems change and evidence. Is the overall aim to support the wider use and application of evidence and of proven practices (with increased partnership working and systems change viewed as important means to this end)? Or is the overall aim to stimulate systems change (with consistent evidence use across systems viewed as an important component of or mechanism for this). Where do integrated early years and maternity pathways fit in the logic? Are they an essential component of systems change, or essential support for better evidence use, or the ultimate aim of the programme? Where do other aims fit within this framework?

A clearer framing would enable more clarity and sharper articulation of the aims of the programme, and more clarity about the necessary content. It might also be easier to see where external partners could be brought into the design of the programme, particularly those from health systems. Finally, it would also mean that more specific information could be given to potential participants which would enable them to plan more precisely the membership of participating teams and the necessary capacity at different stages of the programme from within and beyond the team.

Recommendations relating to the structure of the programme

A longer programme

A clear message from the evaluation, and from wider literature, is that systems change involves prolonged and intensive endeavour. On the whole, local participants and senior sponsors felt confident that their implementation plans would be taken forward, although some potential challenges were noted by local areas and by the design partners. It is clear from this evaluation that there remains very substantial work to be done to get to the point where there are implementable plans across all areas of intended systems change. Effective implementation will also require systematic mapping of potential enablers and barriers to implementation and the design of implementation strategies to address them[32], as well as active monitoring of implementation, progress, and the achievement of interim and final outcomes.

The application process had been led by a small number of people in each area, with limited wider involvement, and it was clear that in some areas there was a gap in understanding between the application leads and the EYTA team which they had to work hard to fill in the early stages of the programme. Future work could provide longer for the application process and emphasise the importance of this stage for engagement of stakeholders across the system including both senior sponsors and those who will be most involved in the work.

Design partners and participating teams were clear that a one-year programme was not sufficiently long. The work was rushed, particularly towards the end when implementation plans were developed, and plans were generally viewed as not yet fully developed. There is some vulnerability to the continuation of the work, and a longer programme would have taken the work to a more secure point. A longer initiation stage, with clear goals, would also allow local areas to clarify which agencies need to be represented on the team and in the senior sponsor group, to engage these people, and to allow time for initial formation of relationships. It is also worth considering the recommendation made by one participant to have a two-phase programme, with the first phase focusing on developing relationships, developing systems leadership, understanding the system and gathering data and evidence, and the second based on developing the vision, areas for focus, local application of learning, and development of plans.

A less linear and more flexible programme

A particularly challenging aspect of work in this complex space is how to iterate between levels of focus and to zoom in and out, from high level vision, through dimensions or components of change, to operational plans. The evaluation suggests it was challenging to find the right balance between breadth and feasible scope of work, and to identify where to focus. It appears from the evaluation interviews that it might have been fruitful to spend more time focusing on the overall vision in each local area, unpacking what this means across different areas of practice before developing more detailed plans. This may require a less linear and more flexible design to the programme. It is also worth considering whether flexibilities could be built in so that more time is available where it is

[32] Kirchner J, Smith J, Powell B, Waltz T and Proctor E (2020) 'Getting a clinical innovation into practice: An introduction to implementation strategies' *Psychiatry Research 283 112467*

needed for individual areas to complete, or return to, pieces of work, before moving on to the next stage.

A programme involving aligned teams at multiple levels

Evidence from the evaluation highlights the need for transformation work to be brought together across multiple levels: the high level strategic board to which the EYTA work reported (which sometimes itself reported to a higher board); the senior sponsors group; the lead EYTA group; operational group/s, and the wider workforce. The alignment between these groups has been found in wider evidence to be important for implementation success[33].

There is scope for more active programme engagement with a group of senior sponsors, both to support them to build a climate and environment for transformation, and to ensure that EYTA plans are fully aligned with wider transformation work. There was relatively little discussion in the interviews about how EYTA plans connect with other transformation work. Local team participants highlighted that it could cut across EYTA plans, and there may be missed opportunities for using it to support and take forward EYTA plans.

Equally, teams noted the need for more operational capacity and for greater engagement of the workforce in taking forward the EYTA work, and two areas had set up operational teams alongside the EYTA team.

Recommendations relating to the content of the programme

Widen the lens on evidence and data

The evaluation interviews suggest that the EYTA was right to cover multiple forms of evidence but that coverage needed to be wider and cover:

- What children need to develop to their full potential, how deficiencies in support and environments arise, and the consequences of these
- To what extent, where and for whom these issues are currently manifesting in the local area: and how to use local data to map, monitor and identify priorities. There were views that the lens on this needed to be wider to address the whole system, including elements beyond early years and maternity but which influence those systems.
- Effective approaches to supporting child development: although evidence-based programmes are an important aspect of this, there also needs to be a focus on practices or service approaches that are empirically supported. It is striking that the five areas' implementation plans all refer much more often to services than to specific programmes, and there is a need to consider how to build the principles or common elements of effective programmes into wider systems to align the focus of evidence with local systems more fully
- How to select and adapt existing programmes, or how to design changes or new approaches
- How to incorporate learning from existing local evaluation data, and how to extend and strengthen local evaluation. This was covered in EYTA but it was felt not in sufficient depth
- How to implement new approaches
- Evidence about effective approaches to designing, planning and implementing systems change

[33] Metz A and Bartley L (2012) 'Active Implementation Frameworks for Program Success' *Zero to Three March 2012 11-18. Metz A and Bartley L 'A Stakeholder View of Leading and Sustaining Change' in Albers B, Shlonsky A and Mildon R (eds) Implementation Science 3.0 Switzerland: Springer*

Widen and deepen coverage of systems change

As noted, there is scope for more clarity in future work about the priority placed on systems change and how it relates to other aims and to the underlying programme logic. The evaluation suggests it was an important area of change: new understanding about the lack of alignment across service areas and how this might be experienced by families was an important aid to integrated work across services. Although this is an area with limited proven approaches, feedback suggests a need to look more widely and more deeply at local systems. Current thinking about systems change highlights the importance of looking deeply at the causes (and the causes of the causes) of poor outcomes for children and at what holds the current system in place, covering issues such as policies, power structures, how resources are allocated, mindsets and values.

This would also involve extending the service mapping to look more widely across the whole system as experienced by families (beyond maternity and early years) to understand how maternity and early years fit, and to define the boundaries of the maternity and early years system. It is not clear that there was a sufficiently strong focus on the wider community and people as assets, as referenced in the EYTA prospectus. Participants would also have valued more focus on effective strategies for systems change, and how to apply learning in practice.

Build in co-creation with local communities and staff, hearing diverse voices, and peer to peer support

The literature across innovation, implementation science and systems change emphasises the importance of co-creation with local communities, and the evaluation findings suggest that this is an area of work that should be given more focus in future work. Taking a family- or community-centred lens was sometimes a powerful influence on teams, helping them to come together in a common understanding of where the system was failing and what families wanted from the system, and to identify key directions for transformation. It also gave a richer understanding of the strengths of families, their access to community resources, and their views about the role of self- and peer-support. This was particularly powerful where teams had engaged directly with local communities. Similarly, the local team that had involved staff groups in design work felt this brought a new layer of understanding of community needs and preferences. Both these approaches added credibility to the work and eased its acceptance by strategic boards – but more importantly, and in line with wider evidence, they were seen as leading to better service re-design.

These are two examples of the importance of hearing diverse voices. Other examples are the involvement of voluntary and community sector leaders in their EYTA group, hearing from other practitioners in the workshops, support from the 'Dragons', and the idea of hearing from national policy-makers and stakeholders. Overall there is scope to build more of these creative influences into the programme and into future work.

The opportunities for peer to peer learning were also constrained, and there is scope to build in more opportunities here.

Provide more technical assistance and tailored support

The participating areas strongly valued the tailored support they had received from the design partners and would have welcomed more of this. This is aligned with the importance of intermediary organisations and technical assistance, which is highlighted by implementation science and systems change literature. This may also be important as the local teams move forward with their systems change effort.

Overall, this formative evaluation has shown that a programme aimed at bringing together maternity and early years systems and supporting the application of evidence about children's needs is attractive to the sector and has added value. The EYTA was a positive experience for the

participating teams and local areas and helped them to make important progress towards systems change with the aim of improving outcomes for families and children in the early years.

Appendix A Area profiles

Area 1

This is a London area with a population of over 400,000 including over 20,000 children under 5[34]. It ranks in the second highest quartile of local authorities for child poverty[35]. The lead senior sponsor for the EYTA programme was the Executive Director for Children's Services, and the work involved a core group of around 14 people (not all centrally involved) with leadership provided by a Transformation Unit. The team representatives were from children's services, education, public health, the NHS Trust, a Children's Centre's head, commissioning, a voluntary sector organisation and the borough's Transformation Unit. There was a change in Co-ordinator part way through the EYTA programme.

The key aims set out in the application were to catalyse a new pre-birth to 5 system, with aims to improve the way need is developed locally with a shared outcome framework and tools; focus on communities where need is highest; harness tech and community power, and focus on speech and language and on school readiness. There were also aims to improve the use of evidence, develop a shared vision and strategy and a local graduated offer. Children's services were inspected by Ofsted during the EYTA period and rated as Outstanding. The borough worked with an innovation support agency alongside the EYTA which particularly led on the engagement of local families and staff.

The implementation plan set out a vision for all families and children to be assured, confident and supported in a way that helps them to thrive, with equal opportunity to enjoy seamless, accessible and joined-up services that support and empower them to learn, develop and be happy and healthy. This is explained as requiring accessible settings and opportunities; integrated and joined-up workforce, leadership and systems; and messages, language and checks that are consistent across a pre-birth to 5 pathway based on an integrated vision across agencies. Six workstreams have been set up to take the work forward, with plans to develop action plans in each:

- A new antenatal to birth maternity-led model with improved handover between midwifery and health visiting
- Universal pathway up to 12 months: including a mixed model for the 608 week HCP check including group-based activity and an additional contact at 3-4 months
- Targeted offer for vulnerable families, with a shared assessment tool
- Developmental reviews including triaging to different modes of review and support offers based on level of need
- Targeted Special Education Needs support including a co-ordinated support offer and upskilling of staff
- Use of digital technology

Next steps set out involve development of detailed actions plans for each workstream, costing, engagement with the wider workforce, development of a pre-birth to five strategy, prototyping and testing new ways of work, and developing evaluation plans. At the time of the evaluation interviews, the plan had been accepted at Board level.

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[34] ONS Population Projections for Local Authorities: 2018-based estimates for 2020 – used in description of all five areas
[35] In description of all five areas, based on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index: proportion of Lower-layer Super Output Areas in the 10% most deprived nationally

Area 2

Area 2 is a London area with a population of over 200,000 including around 19,000 children under 5. It ranks in the second highest quartile of local authorities for child poverty. The lead senior sponsor for the EYTA programme was the Director of Children's Services, and the work involved a core group of around 9 people. The key aims set out in the application were to support the development of an early years strategy, help to test an electronic red book, and improve access to health records across systems. There were aims for services to better reflect families' needs through coproduction and early intervention, to increase school readiness, strengthen professional networks, develop change champions, and build resilience and sustainability in the system through coproduction and empowerment, and better use of data. The area already had a system transformation agenda driven by the CYP transformation board, with multi-agency representation and aims to move to an integrated care system across health, local authorities, education, and public health.

The implementation plan set out aims for families to be better empowered through information about children's health and development, to improve access to co-produced services based on best practice and what works, to increase the early identification of and support for vulnerable families, and to increase the proportion of children ready to start school by the age of five. There are proposals to establish a new integrated pathway and to incorporate social prescribing, an approach already being implemented in the borough. Next steps for the area were in-depth analysis of the target group, engaging workforces across the system to identify new services, co-developing a service offer with residents, and sharing ASQ data between health visitors and partners. By the time of the evaluation interviews, the plan had been approved at Board level.

Area 3

Area 3 is a Midlands area with a population of over 300,000 including around 18,000 children. It is in the highest quartile of local authorities for child poverty. The lead senior sponsor for the EYTA programme was the Director of Public Health. The Coordinator was the public health consultant for young people, who became interim Director of Public Health when the senior sponsor left towards the end of the programme. The EYTA team was a core group of around 8 people from children's services, education, public health, midwifery, health visiting, commissioning and the local voluntary sector.

The key aim set out in the application was to extend the new care model to be introduced by a multi-speciality community provider to children. There were plans to focus on health pregnancy (targeting vulnerable families), improving school readiness (with a focus on speech, language and communication), and reducing the impact of poverty including obesity and dental health. The area has been on an improvement trajectory for children's services for the last few years, and was one of the first to implement an integrated care model.

The implementation plan sets out a vision for an integrated, effective and sustainable early years system where service providers and families 'do the right thing'. There are five aspirations: healthy pregnancies and support for the first 1000 days including using more evidence-based approaches; improving and narrowing the gap in school readiness; reducing the impact of poverty on children's health, wellbeing and development with an improved early years offer; empowering families and hearing the child's voice; and strengthening trust and relationships between communities, families and services. Plans will be developed to create a locality approach involving a targeted community-based midwifery service with continuity of carer, a named Family Support Worker, increased health visiting contacts including with peer supporters, improving the join up between midwifery, health visiting and early years, developing universal and targeted programmes of work, increasing the take-up of the 2 year old free childcare offer, and improving community and home learning environments.

Next steps set out are to develop the plan further, develop integrated services through a new integrated care provider, and roll out the new model in one area before rolling out to two others. Workforce implications are set out in the plan, the plan also refers to the voluntary sector and to the importance of an asset based approach, and a robust evaluation framework will be developed. At the time of the evaluation interviews the plan had not yet been take to the relevant Board.

Area 4

Area 4 is a Midlands area with a population of over 300,000 including 23,000 children, in the highest quartile of local authorities for child poverty, and with children's services having been in intervention within the last few years. The lead senior sponsor for the EYTA programme was the Director for Children's Services, and the work involved a core group of around 11 people. The key aims set out in the application were to increase healthy pregnancies and secure attachments, meet development milestones and increase readiness for school, increase healthy weight, and safeguard children from preventable illness, injury and emotional harm. There were plans to develop a single workforce with shared values, language goals and understanding of the local system. At a systems level, there were aims to reduce fragmentation, develop a joint outcomes framework and transformation plan, ensure a coherent and evidence based service offer tailored to need that makes sense to families.

The implementation plan sets out a vision of improving outcomes and reducing inequality for children through healthy pregnancies and a focus on the first 1001 day; children meeting developmental milestones; healthy diet and physical activity, and children safeguarded from preventable illness, injury and emotional harm. Three priority outcome themes are identified: healthy pregnancy, school reducing particularly improving speech language and communication, and reducing the need for safeguarding and neglect. There is an ambition to mobile a 'single workforce' and for joint commissioning. Next steps are to develop the Joint Strategic Needs Analysis, develop logic models and pathways, develop a pathway for families with multiple vulnerabilities, develop the evaluation plan and outcomes framework, and undertake engagement events with staff and mini ethnographic studies with families. At the time of the evaluation interviews, the plan had not yet been adopted at Board level.

Area 5

Area 5 is a large rural area in East Anglia with a population of over 900,000 including around 23,000 children under 5. It is in the third quartile of local authorities for child poverty and is an Opportunity Area, and children's services were in intervention until a few years ago. The lead senior sponsor for the EYTA programme was Director of Commissioning, Partnerships and Resources for children's services. The EYTA team was a core group of around 10 people from children's services, education, mental health services, public health, midwifery, and community health services. There was a change in Co-ordinator part way though the EYTA programme.

The key aims set out in the application were to improve outcomes and practice, particularly in speech and language, to plan differentiated and targeted offers, and to connect more strongly with midwifery. There were further aims for better births, meeting developmental milestones particularly in disadvantaged families, reduce neglect and improve social mobility. There were also references to improving the first 1001 days support offer, helping families and communities to support themselves, and strengthening partnerships. The authority had recently undertaken extensive remodelling of its children's centres offer and saw this as an important part of their work for transform the system, and was in a period of stability having at one point been in intervention and experiencing a lot of instability.

The implementation proposal sets out a vision to transform maternity and early years services as part of developing an early childhood whole system approach, with three priority areas: more children reaching developmental milestones, reducing neglect, and increasing social mobility. Seven locality early years and maternity delivery boards have been set up to develop the system, involve parents and monitor outcomes. The implementation plan set out includes objectives to develop a cross-workforce competency framework, shared training on speech and language development, a workforce development offer, and shared community hubs bringing together services, improve digital connections, embed the use of Graded Care Profile across the system, develop a joint assessment tool, develop new pathways and develop provision. At the time of the evaluation interviews, the plan had not yet been taken to the relevant Board.

Appendix B Methods and research instruments

Familiarisation

The evaluation team reviewed the EYTA prospectus; the applications made by the five local areas; programme materials used in design workshops, online learning and application in local areas; and other programme data including feedback sheets, completed Maturity Matrix and Readiness for Change questionnaires. They also attended the Dragons Den workshop.

Theory of change workshop

Following the interviews with EIF and delivery partners (see below), a workshop was held with representatives from the four delivery organisations to review the theory of change. The workshop involved group work to map:

- The problems the EYTA should aim to address
- What success would look like for each problem
- Prioritising between intended outcomes and goals
- Review

The workshop discussion was largely in line with the existing theory of change, although with key points being different expressed, and with more emphasis given in particular to: the importance of understanding family perspectives and experiences and coproduction with families; leadership skills and capacity; and the importance of vision, shared moral purpose, and capacity and courage for transformative change.

Samples and recruitment for interviews

The key representatives from EIF and design partners were identified by EIF and contact details passed to the evaluation team with consent. Contact details of the local area representatives were also passed on with consent. The EIF made an initial suggestion of the individuals to be approached in response to sample criteria set by the evaluation team which included representing diversity in individuals' agencies and in the level of engagement. Individuals were approached direct by the evaluation team with an invitation to take part in an interview.

Fieldwork

Interviews were undertaken by telephone or web-platform (Zoom or MS Teams) and followed topic guides which set out the key themes and topics to be explored, without prescribing question format. The interview guides are shown below. The interview guide for EIF and delivery partner interviews covered:

1. Background: understanding of purpose of EYTA and reason for involvement
2. Programme development
3. Recruitment and development of local teams
4. Appraisal of delivery and participation
5. Perceptions of impacts for local teams
6. Learnings and next steps
7. Reflections on the theory of change

The interview guide for local teams covered:

1. The decision to participate in the EYTA
2. Formation of the local team
3. Overall experience of participation
4. The local work supported by the EYTA
5. Readiness, implementability and sustainability of the implementation plan
6. Impacts of the work so far and future anticipated impacts
7. Final reflections

Interviews lasted for between 60 and 90 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis

Interview data were analysed using the Framework[36] method, a matrix-based approach to thematic analysis. A set of matrices were drawn up for each study sample (design partners and local team members), reflecting the evaluation questions and the key themes within the data. In the matrix, column headings represent topics within each theme, and rows represent each individual participant. Data from each interview were summarised within the relevant cell, noting the context of each summary where relevant. The summarised and ordered data were then reviewed to identify the range of views or experiences, to draw out differences, and to look across themes and topics to explore explanatory factors.

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[36] Ritchie J, Lewis J, McNaughton C and Ormston R (eds) (2014) *Qualitative Research Practice: a guide for social science students and researchers 2nd edition* London: Sage

Evaluation of the Early Years Transformation Academy

Topic guides

Centre for
Evidence and
Implementation

EVALUATION OF THE EARLY YEARS TRANSFORMATION ACADEMY
TOPIC GUIDE: Delivery partners

Objectives: To explore
- objectives and aims of the EYTA
- development process
- whether the EYTA was delivered, and experienced by local areas, as intended
- early impacts, esp whether it is catalyzing activity and underlying changes locally as intended
- how the approach could be strengthened for the future and learning for other similar initiatives

The topic guide will be used flexibly, adapted to fit the background and role of participants. It outlines the issues to be explored but not the specific questions to be used, since these need to be varied according to context. We will ask probing follow up questions throughout to obtain rich descriptions, example, explanations, understanding what responses are based on, implications etc. These following up questions are not shown on the topic guide but are used throughout.

1. **Background**
- Role, any necessary background on the organisation
- When become involved and how, whether previously worked in collaboration with EIF / why EIF selected these partners
- Why became involved: what was it about the EYTA that led to involvement, own organisation's aims (short term and strategically)
- What they saw as the aims of the EYTA (eg bringing systems together, evidence take up, embedding programmes, building leadership capacity etc)
- What they saw as preventing these aims having been achieved already, ie what was needed to address these issues (eg better understanding of the evidence, strengthen relationships across systems, create shared vision etc) and how this informed views about aims of EYTA
- Whether views about this changed through involvement in EYTA
- What if anything was unique about EYTA
- What was the status of the EYTA in their organization, how does it link with other work, whether this shaped their objectives in being involved

2. **Involvement in development**
- Overview of development process, their involvement, discussions with sector / others
- Key design decisions (about content and approaches) and what informed these (eg experiences of other initiatives, evidence of what works)
- Was the programme fully developed in advance or was there further planning as the programme proceeded
- Resources required from them to support development, compared with expectations
- What got right, not, what would do differently or more/less of, key learning

3. **Recruitment and development of local teams**
- How the programme was framed in approach to local areas (prospectus and beyond)
- Views about right audience and whether reached
- Involvement of senior sponsors and development of local teams: how was this done, did they engage and retain the right people - how
- What got right (in process and in framing), what would do differently, key learning

4. **Appraisal of delivery and appraisal**
- Their involvement / organisation's involvement in delivery
- Whether delivery proceeded as intended, any changes made to design or approaches as they went
- Involvement of senior sponsors once the programme was underway
- What they got right, didn't, would change, learning for the future in terms of:
  - Content – topics covered, balance between them, sequencing: did they addres the right aspects of the system and how to change it

    o Approaches (use of online, design workshops, tasks set, support given locally, peer interactions) balance between them and use of different approaches for different issues

    o Pace and duration

- Their own experience of delivery, barriers and enablers to their participation, resources required, compared with expectation
- How they feel it was received by local areas
- Were there particular moments of 'epiphany' or real markers of change
- Quality of engagement by local areas, how varied between them and over time
- Barriers and enablers to local areas ' participation, any concerns or support needed, compared with expectations
- Appraisal of the quality of local areas' work (across different stages and elements) differences between the areas
- Overall, what got right, what would do differently, key learning

5. Perceptions of impacts

- For local areas (link back to the aims) what impacts have they seen, not seen (and evidence for this); are they seeing the conditions and capacity for local systems improvement start to develop; compared with expectations
- What aspects of the programme contributed, what else contributed (eg national policy changes, local changes)
- Where are the local areas now on the journey, what do they need to move forward / deliver on transformation plans; will they be able to sustain this themselves, areas of vulnerability – how does this need to be addressed
- Differences between areas in progress and impact, reasons for this
- What overall do they feel needed to be in place, happening, available locally to support the programme
- What would have strengthened impacts and progress made
- Impacts for them and their organization (link back to reasons for participating)

6. Learning and future

- Overall how to strengthen the programme for the future
- Key learning for them about work in this area
- Own organisation's next steps / future plans
- Ambitions for next steps for the EYTA

7. Reflections on ToC [if time]

- Ask them to look at the ToC diagram
- Review assumptions and alignment with issues discussed in interview to identify alignment, gaps or differences

    o 4 domains, school readiness, parental capacity

    o Systems level issues

- Review progamme if any areas of difference
- Review short term goals
- Review medium term goals

Objectives: to explore:
- Reasons for participating, expected changes, whether they were fulfilled
- Whether EYTA was experienced by local teams as intended and in a way that met their needs
- Readiness for implementation and perceived implementability
- Early impacts and changes and how they came about, sustainability of plans and learning
- Learning for similar initiatives, for the local area, and for how the approach could be strengthened for the future

The topic guide will be used flexibly, adapted to fit the background and role of participants, the focus of their work within the Academy and scope of change plans, and current stage of implementation. It outlines the issues to be explored but not the specific questions to be used, since these need to be varied according to context. We will ask probing follow up questions throughout to obtain rich descriptions, example, explanations, understanding what responses are based on, implications etc. These following up questions are not shown on the topic guide but are used throughout.

Background
- *Introduction, purpose and scope of evaluation, recording, use of data, non-attribution, discussion of how to treat sensitivities*
- Role and service/department
- Nature of involvement in EYTA: when became involved and in what type of activities

1. Decision to engage in EYTA
- Understanding of why their local area became involved, drivers of decision
- Understanding of objectives, expectations of programme
- Perceptions at this stage of the strengths and weaknesses of their early years system:
  - Key issues in relation children and families -eg not achieving expected outcomes, not tackling causes of poor outcomes
  - Key issues and barriers in their early years system
    Probe for: priority of early intervention; partnership working and shared language; shared understanding of evidence and approaches to using it; shared understanding of needs of population; leadership capacity; shared vision; expectation of collaboration with families
- Whether understood programme would address all/any of these issues
- Other relevant initiatives ongoing, how EYTA linked and perceived value added
- Experience of recruitment and selection process: who and what it involved; whether the process provided enough guidance on resources needed

2. Formation of local team
- How local team was put together, make-up and how this changed over time
- How clear expectations of involvement were, how these evolved over time
- Any gaps in team and in participation, why
- Resources and capacity needed to participate, whether and how made available
- Significance of role of coordinator and learning about requirements
- Engagement with senior sponsors: who were senior sponsors, when and how emerged, nature of involvement in EYTA and engagement with local team

3. Overall experience of participation
- Overall views about:
  - Relevance and usefulness of topics – *see prompt list*
  - Balance across learning approaches (workshops, online learning, tasks, Dragons' Den, tailored local support, peer interaction)
  - Sequencing, pace, duration
  - 3 most useful elements to the work they have done locally
  - 3 most difficult elements
  - 3 least useful elements
- Work undertaken / outputs produced – *see prompt list*:
  - How helpful (process and output), how (will be) used, impacts so far
- Barriers and enablers of participation for them and other team members, how addressed

- Key learning for them; advice to EIF and partners / future EYTA participants

Prompt: programme topics and key resources used / created	
Topics	• Resources
• *Leadership* • *Systems change* • *Co-production* • *Use of evidence and implementation* • *Improving the quality of local interventions*	• *Maturity Matrix* • *Readiness for change* • *Population needs analysis* • *System / service mapping* • *Theory of Change, logic model* • *Outcomes framework* • *Implementation plan* • *Evaluation plan*

4. The local work supported by the EYTA

Check understanding of the core elements of their work ie what their project focused on. Adapt questions to focus on and compare between different core elements as appropriate.

- If/how the team refined/changed the focus of the work set out in the proposal:
    - How they developed their understanding of the problems they were focusing on eg mapped the early years system and identified what holds current conditions in place (in relation to both families and children and systems)
    - Any changes locally (eg change of leadership, restructuring, inspections) that have influenced the focus of their work
    - If/what kind of research evidence/data they have used for this work eg to identify predictors /causes of disadvantage
    - If/how they gathered insights into all key aspects of their early years system (eg mindsets, regulations, resources, power) and interactions between them
    - Whether team has developed a shared vision of how their early years system needs to change and whether this vision is shared by senior sponsors
    - Will the vision have sufficient traction across the early years system, possible gaps, consequences and how to address these
    - What aspects of EYTA were more/less useful for this work eg service mapping, population needs assessment

- Who was involved in developing a vision of how their early years system need to change (*eg new members brought into the team, consultation beyond the team*):
    - Were new voices and perspectives were brought in, when and how
    - What insights did this bring
    - Were there gaps
    - If/how EYTA helped to decide who to involve, when and how eg co-production

5. Readiness, implementability and sustainability of plan

- Developing a plan to implement their vision for changing their early years system:
    - How they plan to tackle the problems they have identified eg is there enough focus on what's holding problems in place, are strategies sufficiently powerful to create real change
    - Role of research evidence/data
    - Role of senior sponsors
    - Role of parents – if not consulted but plan to, whether they think this is the right time to engage them
    - **Changes that have affected the plan, including COVID-19**
    - Has everyone bought into it, who is missing
    - If/how did EYTA helped to develop a plan eg developing a logic model

- Implementing the plan for change:
    - Readiness: does everyone believe the plan can and must be fulfilled, how was this secured, how confident do they feel
    - Who is leading on implementation
    - What is the governance around this; how will delivery be monitored and significant challenges identified and addressed

- o What difference will COVID-19 make to implementation
- o Have they identified (other) threats and potential resistance to change and planned how to address
- o What will it take to implement the plan and is that in place, what has changed to make the plan feasible now
- o If/how EYTA has helped to get ready for implementation eg system planning, leadership

- Perception of relevance, importance, value of the work they have done and how this is perceived locally, outside the team
- Overall, what if anything was distinctive about the approach they have used and how this came about
- What were the most important insights from EYTA and how did they come about

6. Impacts of their work so far and for the future

- What have been the impacts so far, how they are evident and how widely experienced. Changes in:
  - o Leadership: shared understanding of and commitment to how the early years system needs to change
  - o Capacity to make changes and confidence in ability inc leadership capacity
  - o Quality of partnership working and relationships
  - o Culture: shared language, strong learning culture, optimism about ability to address complex problems
  - o Understanding of needs of population
  - o Systemic thinking: understanding of the complex interplay of influences on early child development and the root causes of inequality; recognition of how need to change eg to re-allocate power between services, between services and families; align systems (such as workforce development and training and commissioning
  - o Approaches to research evidence: understanding of importance, analysis, use (eg in service planning, commissioning), data sharing, generation of evidence
  - o Resources: (planned) increases in resources to early years and early intervention,
  - o Co-production: parents' involvement in defining the problems and developing solutions
  - o Working with families: in a holistic way (eg service pathways) and using a strength-based approach (eg enabling parents to be their children's advocates)

- How did the impacts come about and what was the role of EYTA
- Whether the work they have done as part of EYTA has affected their response to COVID-19
- What have been the barriers or blocks on change and impacts and how this compares with their perception at the start of the work
- What are the implications and wider impacts of the changes they are perceiving / what difference will they make in the future

7. Finally

- What support will they need for the future and where will it come from
- Overall what difference will their involvement in the EYTA make and how will this be evident (eg in commissioning, use of data and evidence, attitudes to families, experiences of families)
- How does this compare with their expectations at the start
- What has been their key learning
- What final advice would they give to EIF and delivery partners and to future local areas engaging in change

Evaluation of the Early Years Transformation Academy