

## **‘Reducing the word gap – improving outcomes’**

Dear Colleagues

This is the first of regular communication relating to the emerging Speech Language Communication Needs programme of work. The programme of work is part of a cross government partnership with the Department for Education to improve speech, language and communication in the early years for disadvantaged children and forms one of the key elements of the [Social Mobility Action Plan for Education](#) “Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential” (December 2017).

This bulletin will keep you up to date with key developments and information which can be shared across your networks.

PHE is committed to ensuring every child has the best start in life, early language acquisition has been identified as a crucial factor in supporting school readiness and setting the foundations for good outcomes later in life.

Public Health England commissioned two evidence reviews on early language from the Early Intervention Foundation and the Education Endowment Foundation; these reports were published and widely promoted in September 2017:

[http://www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/language-child-wellbeing-indicator\\_Sep2017.pdf](http://www.eif.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/language-child-wellbeing-indicator_Sep2017.pdf)

[https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Law\\_et\\_al\\_Early\\_Language\\_Development\\_final.pdf](https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Law_et_al_Early_Language_Development_final.pdf)

The evidence reviews generated considerable cross government interest and the key findings informed the Social Mobility Action Plan (SMAP) for Education, “[Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential](#)” announced in December 2017. The SMAP sets out a commitment between Department for Education and Public Health England to improve early language acquisition and reduce the “word gap.”

The SMAP made a number of recommendations including;

- the need for improved training for health visitors in speech, language and communication
- identification and procurement of an evidence based speech and language assessment tool to improve early identification of children with speech, language and communication needs
- support for health visitors’ decision making when using the ASQ assessment at the 2 year health review.

These recommendations were also included in the [Bercow Ten Years On](#) recommendations published in March 2018. PHE and DfE will work in partnership to address the recommendations and to reduce the word gap.

PHE will:

- Develop training and guidance, and an early language assessment to support health visiting and early years professionals in targeted areas to improve the early identification of children

with speech, language and communication needs and support health visitors' decision making when using the ASQ assessment at the 2 year health review.

- These resources will improve the quality of the universal and universal plus element of the health visiting programme with the aim of improving school readiness

We have established an Expert Advisory Group, who will provide an overview and steer as we develop this exciting programme of work. The work is fast-paced and will require stakeholders to work together to achieve the key deliverables. We want to ensure our stakeholders have up to date information so your networks are in the loop and can share expertise.

We know that there is already some excellent work going on around the country in terms of improving children's speech, language and communication and we would like to gather together some of these examples of local good practice. We are looking for examples relating to:

- Early language assessment tools
- training programmes
- parent feedback
- Impact and achieving results

We have developed a short template to help gather examples, please circulate this to colleagues and send examples to Alison Morton [Alison.morton@phe.gov.uk](mailto:Alison.morton@phe.gov.uk)

This is an exciting programme of work which will make a huge difference to the lives of children, over the forthcoming months there will be lots of activity. It is important all stakeholders are aware of the developments so they can support, we would therefore really appreciate your support in promoting the work with your networks.

Any questions or queries contact [Alison.morton@phe.gov.uk](mailto:Alison.morton@phe.gov.uk)

Kind regards,

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