



**Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL)
training and accreditation: a follow-up
evaluation – FINAL DRAFT**

Research, Evidence and Evaluation Department

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1. Introduction

This report presents the findings from an evaluation of the training and accreditation programme delivered by Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL).

1.1 Background

PEAL originated as a consortium project of the National Children's Bureau (NCB), Coram Family and the London Borough of Camden. Its core aims include identifying and disseminating existing effective practice in engaging parents, by rolling out a core model of training with materials to support practitioners in engaging parents. The training supports all early years settings to meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), a mandatory quality framework for the provision of care and learning development for children aged 0-5 years and the Children's Centre Practice Guidance, a performance management framework, for partnerships with parents to enhance children's learning.

PEAL training can also be seen to complement other current initiatives such as the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL), a voluntary programme designed to develop social and emotional skills of children involving parents in allowing children to practice and consolidate skills learnt. Parents Involvement in their Children's Learning (PICL) is another complementary initiative that involves training staff in Children's Centres to give parents an understanding of how babies and very young children develop and learn.

In April 2007 PEAL was funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) as part of the Early Learning Partnerships Project (ELPP) Strand 3 - upskilling the workforce. In conjunction with partner organisations, PEAL training was rolled-out to practitioners working with young children in home-based and group settings to build the skills of those who work with children, in order to effectively engage parents and support them to get involved in their children's early learning. As well as attending the PEAL training, practitioners can use the learning to carry out follow-up work that can be assessed as part of an accredited course, called the *accreditation of learning*.

1.2 About this evaluation

In 2008 NCB's Research Evidence and Evaluation (REE) department was commissioned to evaluate the Strand 3 programme. The purpose of the evaluation was to inform commissioners and managers about both the process of implementation of the training and the impact of

the Strand 3 programme. This evaluation aims to build on the Strand 3 evaluation rather than replicate it, by specifically focusing on the changes practitioners have made as a result of the PEAL training, and the impact the training has had on individuals and settings, as well as on parents and children. Additionally, the evaluation also focuses on practitioners who have taken the accreditation route. Again, the aim is find out what changes have been implemented as a result of the accreditation, as well as its impact on individuals, settings, parents and children. A key element to this evaluation is to find out what the accreditation adds for individuals and settings, and how the accreditation has impacted on work with parents and children.

The aims and objectives of the evaluation include:

- How has accreditation affected practitioners' ability to implement change?
- What impact has the accreditation process had for practitioners, settings and families?
- What changes in practice have been brought about as a result of the PEAL training?
- What factors have enabled practitioners to implement those changes?
- To what extent have any positive changes within workplaces been sustained?
- What have been the effects on practitioners, settings, children and families?

1.3 Structure of the report

Section two of the report outlines the methods used for the evaluation. Section three discusses practitioners experience of the accreditation process. The following section outlines the findings from the evaluation, highlighting practitioners' experiences of PEAL training and accreditation and the subsequent implementation of changes to practice. Section five looks at the impact of the accreditation on practitioners and settings, and parents and children. The last section highlights the key findings and implications from the evaluation.

2. Methodology

The evaluation used qualitative methods to collect data from the following sources.

Figure 1: Data Sources

PEAL Accreditation	11 interviews with practitioners/managers within different settings who had completed the Level 3 PEAL Accreditation
PEAL Training	2 interviewees with practitioners/managers within settings nominated by local authorities who had bought in the PEAL training
Total	13 interviews

A total of thirteen semi-structured telephone interviews were carried out with practitioners. Interviews lasted around 45 minutes. All interviews were conducted between February - March 2009 with two pre-prepared interview schedules, one for the accreditation participants and the other for the local authorities' nominees. The interview schedules focused on implementation of changes from PEAL training and accreditation and subsequent impact on individuals and their settings, as well as for parents and children (see appendix B and C for interview schedules).

Interviews were digitally recorded with consent from participants and transcribed for analysis purposes. The data were analysed using Framework, a qualitative approach to analysing data, involving organising data into a series of matrices in order to identify emerging themes.

2.1 Interviews with practitioners nominated by local authorities

In order to explore issues around implementation and impact of learning from the PEAL model, the evaluation set out to interview practitioners who had put elements of PEAL into practice. It was intended to interview up to 10 practitioners who had completed the PEAL accreditation, and up to a further 10 who had not, but who nevertheless had put their learning from the PEAL training into practice. To identify this latter group, a decision was made to contact local authorities who had commissioned PEAL training over the last

two years and ask them to nominate settings which had implemented the learning from PEAL.

An initial email to recruit participants was sent out by PEAL at the end of January 2009, asking 26 local authorities to contact PEAL or the evaluation team if they were able to nominate settings. The evaluation team then followed up this initial contact. Contacting local authorities to gain nominations was a time consuming process; on average it took two emails and nine telephone calls before contact was made, and this did not necessarily lead to a nomination of a setting for an interview. Despite numerous attempts over a four week period, contact was made with only three local authorities. Difficulties in making contact with the other 23 local authorities included:

- Members of staff responsible for PEAL had left and responsibility for monitoring this area of work had not been passed on (n=2)
- Settings not able to take part as planning their own evaluation of PEAL (n=2)
- Invalid email addresses and no further contact information available from local authorities (n=4)
- No response to email/telephone messages (n=16)

In total five settings were identified by local authorities. Of these, three were unable to take part because the key staff member had left, or because the setting had received additional funding from PEAL for further development work, making their participation inappropriate. As a result, two interviews were carried out in the remaining settings with practitioners who had attended training but not undertaken accreditation.

2.2 Interviews with practitioners who completed PEAL accreditation

This sample of interviewees was drawn from all those who had completed the accreditation more than seven months ago and had implemented changes to their settings and practice as part of their accreditation portfolio. Interviewees were selected from PEAL's database of practitioners who had completed the accreditation. A total of 30 accreditation participants were identified by PEAL, of whom 20 had telephone numbers recorded. All 30 practitioners were sent an email or letter detailing the research. Those with phone numbers were followed up with a series of phone calls to arrange interviews. Those who did not have contact numbers were asked to get in touch with the evaluation team if they were willing to take part. After an exhaustive series of phone calls at various times of the day, the evaluation team recruited a total of 11 practitioners who had completed the accreditation.

2.3 Characteristics of interviewees

This section outlines the characteristics of the 13 practitioners who were interviewed for the evaluation.

Settings

Figure 2 provides details of the different early years settings in which practitioners worked.

Figure 2: Settings

Childminding	4
Children’s Centre	3
Private Nursery	1
Pre-School Nursery	4
Outreach Mobile Classroom	1

Roles & Responsibilities

Figure 3 details the roles and responsibilities of interviewees.

Figure 3: Roles of participants

Roles	Number	Responsibilities
Manager	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Managing staff and overall setting• Training staff• Planning curriculum/activities• Developing policies• Working with directly with children and parents
Deputy Manager	2	
Nursery Officer	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keyworking for pre-school children and assessing their needs
Playworker	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working with transient communities – children and families• Encouraging early years education
Early Years Professional	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Day to day running of nursery• Planning sessions and working with children and parents
Childminders	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Looking after children – involving wrap around care and after-school care• Working with children with special educational needs

2.4 Timings of PEAL training and accreditation

All of the interviewees completed the PEAL training approximately 18 months before this evaluation, and those 11 who did the accreditation completed it approximately a year ago.

2.5 Previous work to engage parents

Prior to undertaking the PEAL training, most interviewees were doing some work to engage parents in their children’s learning. This may have been due to work around the Early Years Foundation Stage,

other initiatives such as the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning initiative and the Children's Centre's Practice Guidance to work in partnership with parents. Prior work in engaging parents included:

- Organising play sessions for parents to come and play with their children and recognise the importance of play
- Talking to parents and sending out questionnaires about their children's routines and interests at home in order to organise activities
- Providing opportunities for parents to talk about any concerns relating to their children and organising extra activity sessions if necessary
- Parents' evenings
- Having a policy that states parents can come in and talk to staff at any time
- Inviting parents to help out during sessions
- Sharing information with parents on their children's behaviour and development through daily diaries

Childminders' prior experience in engaging parents was somewhat distinctive. Their previous work involved communicating with parents about their children's specific needs, whilst the children were in their care. A few acknowledged that they had not been doing anything specifically to engage parents in their children's learning and that the training had raised their awareness on how to involve parents.

2.6 Expectations of PEAL training

Interviewees reported that they did the PEAL training in order to gain new ideas on engaging parents, refresh their knowledge or confirm whether they were on the right track, in terms of their current work with parents. A few reported that they did the training because they knew it supported the Early Years Foundation Stage and the Children's Centre's Practice Guidance to work in partnership with parents.

The body of the report sets out the findings from interviews with all 11 practitioners who completed the PEAL accreditation. Issues raised by the two remaining interviews from local authority nominations who did not undertake the accreditation are summarised in Appendix A.

3. The accreditation process

3.1 Background to PEAL accreditation

PEAL training participants were offered the opportunity to extend their learning from PEAL and have it assessed, gaining credits towards a qualification. During the PEAL training programme, participants received information about the City and Guilds level 3 unit 16: 'Work with parents to engage them in their children's early learning'¹. This is an optional level 3 unit and forms part of the City and Guilds award 'Work with Parents'.

The unit consists of 30 hours of study, which includes:

- PEAL training
The equivalent of two days training, including preparatory work in the practitioner's own setting and the PEAL training day
- Reading and research
Reading the practice examples and the PEAL reader included in the training pack
- Assessment portfolio
Practitioners are required to provide evidence to demonstrate how they have met the assessment criteria for the unit by putting together a small file/portfolio demonstrating their reflections and application of learning. The assessment guidance for the unit suggests various forms of evidence which can be included in the portfolio (Figure 5)

Source: PEAL unit: Assessment support booklet, p4

¹ Unit 16 was developed by a team including PEAL, Parenting UK, Lifelong Learning UK and City & Guilds in 2007.

Figure 5: Forms of evidence

Type of evidence	Brief description
Expert witness testimony	A statement from a colleague who is a qualified occupational expert (familiar with the national standards for 'Work with Parents') which supports the learner's analysis of their work they have carried out with parents.
Witness testimony	A statement from a colleague (who is not an occupational expert) or parent/carer which supports an account or analysis of work undertaken.
Work products	This can be anything the learner has produced or used in their work with parents. Each product needs to be accompanied by a reflective account and/or a case study.
Questioning	Records of discussions or questions for further clarification between the learner and the assessor.
Projects/case studies	More detailed accounts of work with a children, family or on a project. A way for the learner to reflect on and evaluate their practice in more detail.
Practice journal (also referred to as the reflective account/diary by some practitioners)	Annotated journal of work to be used on a regular basis. All evidence submitted requires an account explaining, analysing and reflecting on the activity undertaken and the evidence provided.

Source: PEAL unit: Assessment support booklet, p 8-9

The above are suggestions and practitioners can discuss with their assessor whether other forms of evidence can be included in their portfolio. There is, therefore, a degree of flexibility in terms of what evidence is required for the accreditation. In addition, the flexibility of the assessment enables practitioners to either develop their existing practices with parents and to evidence this work, and/or to develop new projects/areas of work for their accreditation.

All the practitioners we interviewed had undertaken some case study or project work as part of their accreditation, with some practitioners building on their existing work with parents (expanding or developing

projects/activities they already had in place prior to starting their accreditation) or developing new areas of work to engage with particular families or groups of parents. One practitioner only had a short period of time between undertaking the PEAL training and the due date for their accreditation. She appreciated the flexibility the course provided, allowing her to use evidence from previous work engaging parents as part of her portfolio.

The practitioners also kept practice journals (referred to as the 'reflective diary' by many) in order to record the work they undertook as a part of their accreditation. All work undertaken for the accreditation had to be accompanied by a reflective account which could be included in a practitioner's reflective diary.

The account could include:

- Analysis of policy and practice (for example, explaining how a setting's policy supports the engagement of parents in their children's early learning)
- Reflections and analysis of strategies used (for example how a practitioner may have worked to build confidence in parents as their children's first educator or an analysis of how parental and practitioner attitudes can be barrier to engaging parents)
- Exploration on practitioners' own skills in working with parents to support their children's learning and identifying changes needed to improve own knowledge and to build on own practice and/or setting

Source: PEAL unit: Assessment support booklet, p 8-15

3.2 Decision to undertake the accreditation

Practitioners were asked what had influenced their decision to undertake the accreditation and what their expectations of the process were. Ten of the practitioners reflected on why they had decided to undertake the PEAL accreditation. Reasons included wanting to develop their own professional practice, a chance to 'get more' out of the PEAL training and to put the ideas and learning from PEAL into practice.

Figure 6: Reasons for undertaking PEAL accreditation

- Professional & personal development (including gaining a qualification) (n=9)
- Opportunity to build on the PEAL training and 'to get more' out of the PEAL training (n=4)
- To gain more ideas on how to engage/involve parents in their children's learning (n=3)

Professional and personal development, including gaining recognition for skills and learning, was a clear influence for many of the interviewees:

The more qualifications you've got, the better it looks in your portfolio and the more benefit it is to the setting, in a qualification driven world...which is really my motivation.

Early Years Professional

One practitioner wanted to 'better' herself, improve her future job prospects and to become more involved with parents in her current setting:

Personally I wanted to get more involved at working with parents and I thought by doing the accreditation if I do move from one setting to the other... it's a qualification that other people can recognise as well that I've done this training.

Nursery Officer

Four of the practitioners also reflected on their expectations when they first started their accreditation journeys. One practitioner, a manager of a setting, wanted to have clear ideas and strategies that she could implement with the help of her staff in the setting. Another manager, with a long career in early years, was hoping that by doing the accreditation, her practice would be refreshed and she would gain reassurance that the practices she implemented in the setting were founded on sound principles.

One childminder was really hoping to gain their qualification at the end of the course and to be able to demonstrate to their parents that she could work effectively with them to help them to support their children's learning. Another childminder expected the accreditation to help her take forward the ideas she had gained from the PEAL training, so she could build on her knowledge and understanding on parental engagement.

3.3 Experience of the accreditation process

Practitioners were asked to briefly describe how they had found doing the accreditation. Interviewees' experiences of doing the accreditation were mixed, with some finding the distance learning approach of the accreditation (where practitioners were assigned an 'online' assessor who would offer online and telephone support) a hindrance rather than a help. Some practitioners reported poor, or in one instance, very little contact with their assigned assessor, and were frustrated by the lack of support they received.

In contrast, other practitioners reported that the whole process of undertaking the accreditation ran smoothly and that they had good lines of communication with their assessor, receiving prompt support and guidance.

It was clear from the responses we received, that having a good, supportive relationship with an assessor and good lines of communication between both parties made for a more positive experience of the accreditation process. However, even those practitioners who reported that they had received little by way of support from their assessors still completed their accreditation and found the work that they had undertaken for their qualification 'useful' and 'interesting'. Their frustrations were more to do with the administration of the accreditation rather than the actual content of the course per se.

4. Implementation of PEAL accreditation and learning

A central aspect of this evaluation was to explore with practitioners the changes they had made to practice as a result of undertaking the PEAL accreditation. During interviews we explored with practitioners:

- The nature of the work undertaken for their accreditation
- The extent to which practitioners were able to make changes to their own and/or settings practices
- The degree of influence undertaking PEAL accreditation has had on the changes practitioners have made and their overall ethos/outlook on working with parents
- What had helped practitioners to make changes to their practice
- What difficulties they encountered when implementing changes, and how they had overcome them

Each of these issues are examined in detail below.

4.1 Range of work undertaken for PEAL accreditation

As highlighted earlier, all the practitioners incorporated the use of case studies or projects into their accreditation work. The nature of this work varied, with some practitioners targeting their work on a particular child or family, whilst others implemented ideas/activities with a whole group of children and parents across their setting. As part of, or in addition to case study/project work, some practitioners developed or adapted materials to support their work with parents, for example devising parent questionnaires, or developing activities to do with children and parents, such as cookery or music classes. Figure 7 outlines the range and nature of work undertaken for the accreditation:

Figure 7: Range of work undertaken as part of the accreditation

- Introducing setting to home diaries, sharing observations of child's learning, information on the EYFS, and pictures of what the child enjoys doing in the setting
- Sharing learning about how to engage with parents to support their children's learning with colleagues and encouraging them to try out new ideas with the parents they work with
- Liaising with professionals from other agencies working with parents, to provide them with an insight into the cultural, social and practical barriers parents can face and how this might impact on their ability to engage with their child's learning
- Carrying out joint observations of children's learning with parents – supporting parents to understand how and what their children are learning from a particular activity in the setting
- Making physical changes to settings to create an environment which is inclusive and welcoming for families. Examples include creating signs in different languages, revamping information boards, having posters on display which represents the diversity of the community and having picture boards
- Creating time and space in the day to talk to parents more and make them feel more a part of the setting (including having staff on hand to 'meet and greet' parents when they arrive, and making time to be around for parents if they want to talk about their children)
- Home visits to get to know the family and children prior to joining the setting
- Reviewing or developing setting policies
- Setting up specific activities/projects for children and parents, with an emphasis on working with the parents to help them explore what their children learns from taking part. Such activities included cookery, music and arts and crafts classes

The overarching aim of the work undertaken by practitioners for their accreditation was to encourage parents, including in some instances 'harder to reach' groups such as fathers or members of the travelling communities, to be more comfortable and involved in the settings and understanding their own role in their child's learning and what they have to offer. For example, one practitioner, a manager of a setting,

was one of three practitioners interviewed who wanted to improve settings' engagement with fathers. The manager noted that fathers were not as involved or linked into the setting compared to the mothers. In the first instance, the manager sent out a questionnaire and spoke to some of the fathers. Feedback confirmed the manager's suspicions:

...we sent questionnaires out...and they [fathers] said although they love coming to the setting, and we have got two male nursery nurses here, because it's predominantly a woman's environment, that sometimes they did feel when they were dropping their children off, a little bit like they were just dropping them off and go, they didn't have the confidence to ask the staff things.

Manager

The manager then planned a series of activities and events which reflected the interests of the fathers who attended the setting:

So we did things like when the football was on, we did a really big thing about all the different countries in the matches and we invited them in...at breakfast time and had breakfast with the children, talked about the football to the children. We've had fathers come in and do some sports with a small group of children and they found that really more beneficial. And while they were here, obviously they were getting to know the staff better as well.

Manager

Another feature of some practitioners' work was building trust and mutual understanding with parents, who were perhaps reluctant to engage with settings and professionals in the past.

One practitioner worked with families from a traveller community, slowly building up the trust of families, introducing them to ideas for activities to do with their children and helping them to access their local Children's Centre. Another practitioner spoke about how they had worked with a family who had recently arrived from Poland to help the child settle into the setting and to build a relationship with the father. The father's English was not very good to begin with and the practitioner felt that he was reluctant to stay in the setting and talk to staff. Using a combination of a daily home diary, informal chats and sourcing English and Polish written materials, the practitioner was able to build a good relationship with the father, who in turn helped her by providing her with ideas and feedback on how the child's language skills were developing.

As noted earlier, the flexibility of the accreditation enabled some practitioners to gather and reflect on evidence from on-going work with parents, which had started prior to attending the PEAL training and starting their accreditation. Other practitioners had started to implement changes to their practice shortly after attending a PEAL training event, and had subsequently built on this work for their accreditation. The majority of practitioners gained ideas for new activities or how to modify existing areas of work directly from the PEAL training day and the associated resources, particularly the practice example cards in the PEAL training pack.

4.2 Changes made to practice

It was clear from all the interviews that practitioners had put a wide variety of activities and strategies in place during the accreditation to build or further develop their work with parents. Practitioners noted that undertaking both the PEAL training and the accreditation had led them to make changes to both their own practices and to implement changes in their settings. It is important to note that all of the interviewees were in positions where they had a high level of autonomy in their roles and were able to implement changes (either self-employed as childminders or in more senior or managerial positions in their settings).

Many practitioners said that the accreditation had changed their own professional practice and challenged some of their views on how to engage with parents. Three practitioners in particular spoke about how they had changed their practice by trying to be more accessible so parents could feel able to talk to them and being mindful to listen to parents.

I think I'm speaking to parents more. I try to see my parents, all my parents at least once a day, either when they bring the child or when they collect the child, just to share a little bit of information about how the child's been that day and what any concerns we might have between us.

Nursery Officer

Another practitioner, a childminder with around 18 month's experience, reported that since the accreditation her relationship with parents had moved beyond a mere pick-up/drop-off encounter into something more meaningful. The childminder was now making more time to communicate with parents and thought that they were more in touch with what their children were doing and learning in the setting.

For those practitioners based in nurseries or Children's Centres, their work for their accreditation had brought about some changes to the

way in which staff at the setting considered the needs of parents and incorporated their opinions when planning activities.

In one example, learning to actively listen to parents was an insight that one practitioner, a deputy manager, was able to share with her staff team. Since the accreditation she had stressed the importance of staff really listening to parents, particularly those who first appeared reluctant to engage with staff, and not to be too quick to judge parents. As a result, she believed that as a centre they were 'learning to listen more' and as a result parents were getting more involved.

Another manager reported that parents were now more at the forefront of thinking at the setting, particularly when planning activities to support children's learning:

I think whenever we do anything now, we think about it, not just how is it going to affect the children, how's it going to affect us...but also we do think more about our parents and how, if it's going to affect them, then we need to involve them at the very beginning. So we need to say to them this is what we're thinking of doing, what do you think?

Manager

It is important to note that the end of the accreditation process and the gaining of the certificate of work did not necessarily mean that activities stopped. Many of the strategies put in place by practitioners, such as setting to home diaries, physical changes to settings, and a variety of parent and child activities continued. In addition, some practitioners reported that they had continued to build on the work they started during the accreditation, putting new things into practice.

4.3 Extent to which changes made are a result of the PEAL accreditation

During interviews we asked the practitioners to reflect on the changes they had made to their practice and the extent to which they thought changes could be directly attributed to the work undertaken for their accreditation. During interviews, ten practitioners considered to what extent the accreditation had contributed to any changes in their individual or setting practices.

Discussion with practitioners revealed that a number of other factors had influenced their own individual or setting practices whilst they were undertaking their PEAL accreditation. The implementation of the EYFS, other training and development opportunities and physical changes to buildings all contributed to changes to policies, strategies and activities in settings. PEAL accreditation came at a time of change

across the early years sector, and it was difficult for some practitioners to unpick the extent to which the accreditation had influenced some aspects of their practice. Nonetheless, the majority of practitioners believed that the accreditation had played a role in the changes they had made.

Practitioners credited either the PEAL training or the actual accreditation as a direct source of ideas or inspiration for many of their activities and strategies to work with parents. For one seasoned practitioner in particular, the accreditation gave her access to new ideas for work with parents and helped her get back into a habit of keeping up to date with developments in early years:

I've been around a long time, I've worked a lot with parents but I think that [accreditation] has helped... to reinforce ideas and it gives me more ideas also of how to go about it. And again I notice that I've been reading a little more also, I stopped reading books and things like that for a while, but sometimes I do go back to, to some of the books and things that I see comes out in magazines and so, just to read and catch up with what's going on.

Deputy centre manager

Two other practitioners agreed that the accreditation had motivated them put ideas from PEAL into practice 'sooner rather than later' and stopped them losing what they had learnt from the PEAL training.

As well as being a source of potential ideas, the accreditation process (particularly the reflective diary and case study work) had given practitioners the opportunities to reflect on their practice and to make changes:

I think doing the accreditation...it was a really good reflection on practice. Because when you write things up it does make you reflect on what you're doing. All the way through, it reflects on what you're doing, and how it can impact, and what a difference it makes.

Manager

One practitioner in particular believed strongly that work they had undertaken to engage with 'harder to reach' families and support them in accessing other services would not have happened without the accreditation. Another practitioner felt that their work to engage with parents would have happened regardless, but without the level of in-depth knowledge on building relationships with parents gained through the accreditation, its impact would have been more limited:

I would probably have done some [activities] that were straight from the practice example cards, I would probably have had a go at. But in terms of relationships with families, I don't think I would have got as far as I have without doing the accreditation, which enabled me to really sit down and think through specific examples with each set of parents.

Childminder

Two practitioners (who both described themselves as highly experienced professionals who were already doing a lot to involve parents prior to their accreditation course) thought that on reflection they would have still made changes to their practice, but that maybe changes would have taken longer to implement.

4.4 What helped them to make changes

Analysis of interviews with practitioners revealed that the accreditation itself provided practitioners with the motivation to make changes and with tools and ideas to try out in their work with parents.

When we did the PEAL training, they said about having strategies where you can talk to the parent while they're walking out the room and it was putting some of those strategies in place as well for the parents that are busy, trying to make time... just to talk to them, and letting them know that you're available.

Nursery Officer

For some of the practitioners, the accreditation gave them more confidence in their abilities to engage parents. In one instance, a childminder believed that she was more confident in approaching parents to make suggestions about activities they might like to do with their children to support their learning. Furthermore, she believed that because the PEAL ethos and materials backed up her suggestions, she could now confidently pass on ideas to parents, without them feeling that she was just 'interfering' in the parenting of their children:

[Doing the accreditation]...gave me a bit more confidence as well to actually approach the parents, because you want to say to the parents, well what about this, what about that, but I didn't always have the confidence...I didn't want them to think I was interfering. Whereas, I could actually say to them, well I'm doing this course and these are the suggestions, if you like, I think they were more willing to take it onboard themselves.

Childminder

4.5 Difficulties faced in putting ideas into practice

Whilst a variety of work was undertaken for the accreditation, some practitioners did experience difficulties in putting some of their ideas for their accreditation into practice. Efforts to encourage parents to become more involved in settings and/or their children's learning were sometimes thwarted by parents just being too busy to take part in activities.

Engaging with some parents was sometimes difficult, as they did not always appreciate or understand their role as a children's first educator in the way that the practitioners did. For example, one practitioner reported that parents who made extensive use of her time as a childminder thought that the responsibility for their children's learning rested more with her.

I've tried to work with the parents more regarding their children's education, but unfortunately most of the parents are too busy and they tend to want me to do most of it, especially the ones that I have for long hours.

Childminder

Another practitioner, working with transient communities, reported she had to work especially hard to counter some parent's suspicions of professionals and some of their cultural views of learning being a low priority in their children's lives.

Staff reluctance to implement changes was faced by a small number of the practitioners. In one instance, a manager reported difficulties in convincing staff to make changes to their practices. She found that she was able to motivate staff more readily by first implementing the changes herself and modelling how to work with parents to the other staff.

The biggest barrier I think you will often meet is staff...I've always found that if you trial [ideas] yourself it tends to then give them motivation, the staff think, well I'll think of something I can do then like that. Or if it fails then you don't mention it again really, so those barriers sometimes are difficult, but you just get through them.

Manager

Staffing issues and access to funding also raised difficulties for three of the practitioners interviewed. In one instance a Nursery Officer had wanted to start home visits to prospective families, but to date had not been able to allocate staff with this role without adversely affecting ratio levels in their setting. Another manager had set up a number of

different parent and child activity groups in their setting, but noted the continued difficulty in securing funding for this work. Finding the time to implement changes to practice was also raised by a small number of practitioners.

Despite the difficulties encountered, practitioners tried to adapt their approaches to meet the challenges they were facing. Some practitioners talked of continuing to 'plug away' and keep trying to engage with families. For example, one childminder talked of referring back to their accreditation materials when they came up against a difficult situation and valued the accreditation in terms of giving her ideas of different things to try when at first her efforts did not succeed.

5. Impact of the PEAL Accreditation

This section outlines the impact of the PEAL accreditation on practitioners and settings, as well as the benefits for parents and children. It should be noted that the impacts highlighted may not solely reflect practitioners' undertaking the PEAL accreditation, and that the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage may also have some bearing on practitioners' practice and subsequent impacts.

5.1 Ethos of PEAL

The ethos of PEAL reflects that parents are pivotal to children's education and that supporting parents' engagement in their children's early learning is effective in making a difference to children's lives and outcomes. Practitioners reflected on the extent to which undertaking the accreditation had changed their own settings' ethos or outlook. It was fair to say that undertaking the accreditation had not necessarily resulted in a wholesale change of practitioner or settings values. Indeed the cornerstone values of PEAL, building authentic relationships, engaging with parents and promoting engagement in children's early learning, were values already shared by the interviewees. What the majority of practitioners did note was that the accreditation had broadened their own outlook, particularly heightening their awareness of and understanding of parents and the pressures and concerns that families faced.

Most practitioners commented that they were able to understand parents more and put themselves 'in their shoes', particularly in relation to family pressures and the barriers parents faced in getting involved in their children's learning. This 'heightened understanding' led to some practitioners making colleagues and staff more aware of parents' needs and experiences. Additionally, others commented that their outlook had changed in terms of realising the benefits of working with parents, by building a rapport and sharing information about their children, and feeling more positive about what they can do to help children.

Am I being reasonable, am I giving them enough information, all those sort of things really, it's just putting myself in their shoes more, yeah. That's what I think you have to do, you come out of your box, look at the outside of the box, step into their shoes, and think how it feels for them, and where we are, or aren't meeting their needs, and what we can do to help with that.

Manager

Well it just made me look at things differently, and think well if I can be putting things in, this is for their child, not for my own

children, and I think they should be doing it. Making me think more positive about myself, and what I can do to help their children.

Childminder

5.2 Impact on Practitioners

Most of the practitioners reported that the PEAL accreditation gave them more confidence. This confidence transpired on many levels. For example, the accreditation gave them more confidence to implement changes or new ideas, gave them confidence by validating the work they were already doing with parents and by completing the accreditation for their own personal development.

I think it's good to know that I could do it, again with my confidence...I was very happy to know I've gone back to do some research and to know that I was doing it properly.

Deputy Manager

Because I think that if you just go on one day training, it's just another training day and you haven't gained anything from that day...you're not going to implement anything from that day or you would have just forgotten about it...but actually putting yourself out to carry on, I think you gain a lot more through that.

Manager

Additionally for some practitioners, the accreditation gave them more confidence to communicate with parents about their children's learning and development, and think more in depth about how to work in partnership with parents and share information.

To talk to the parents more about their children's education. You talk about their everyday care all the time, they've eaten this, they've eaten that, they've felt OK, they've not felt OK, they've not drunk a lot today, that's easy, but to talk about their actual education, didn't do so much of. Whereas now, probably, their education and their development, probably talk about that a bit more now and also write more in their diaries about.

Childminder

Probably more confidence with the parents, I've always been fairly confident with the children, but yeah, more confident with the parents... how to deal with any issues that come up, behaviour issues with the children, how to deal with that with the parents, which I may have not dealt with as well as before.

Manager

For other practitioners, the accreditation gave them new knowledge in terms of implementing ideas on how to involve parents and allowed them to reflect on their own practices. This was particularly because keeping a reflective diary as part of the accreditation gave them the opportunity to 'sit down' and think about their own practice and how they would change things. For two practitioners the accreditation motivated them to do further study such as the NVQ Level 4 in Childcare and the Early Years Foundation Stage degree. Additionally, for one practitioner the accreditation highlighted the importance of awareness training on different communities for staff within Children's Centres in order for staff to adopt a more inclusive approach to their practice.

5.3 Impact on Settings

Practitioners identified a number of impacts on their setting as a result of their undertaking the accreditation.

Increased knowledge

For some, the impact on their setting involved sharing knowledge with staff members, encouraging them to communicate more with parents and working together as a team to implement changes in their setting.

I think the impact on the setting again, I think people, they come to me for ideas they ask me questions and I share my knowledge, I cascade information down to my colleagues so we are all doing more or less the same when working with parents, and I think that we all value them more.

Deputy Manager

...it's been good for us to learn new things and think about new things and the actual implementation, the planning, the reviewing, the discussion amongst us and everything is always good...it's quite a large team to manage and everybody wants to have their little say, so it is good for the staff to get together and listen to each other, share ideas, and also for the staff to be able to implement their ideas and feel that they're listened to by me in what they want to do.

Early Years Professional

Two practitioners mentioned the impact of sharing knowledge with other agencies that were in contact with children and families. For example, one practitioner was involved in raising awareness within Children's Centres on the specific cultural needs of children and families from traveller communities and ensuring that staff catered for their needs.

Changes to policy

Additionally, three practitioners mentioned changes to policy being made in settings, as an impact of the accreditation. These included introducing a more informal 'open house' policy for parents to drop in or call a setting at anytime, and changes to food policy by getting feedback from parents on healthy eating.

Communication

Increased communication with parents was also reported by some practitioners as an impact on settings, in terms of working together with parents and looking at ways of meeting individual family needs.

...yes we are listening to parents more and trying to get them more involved and looking at, how to meet individual needs, family needs or looking at the cultural needs, the families with disabilities, I mean how are we catering for those children and their families, and it's not the children, it's they're coming from a family.

Deputy Manager

Increased communication with parents was particularly highlighted in childminders' work. All four childminders interviewed had changed their practices with parents and found new strategies to work with them, such as writing comments down in diaries as opposed to just giving verbal information and giving parents an opportunity to respond in the same manner, and also provided information on the Early Years Foundation Stage.

I write specific questions now in the daily diary and I have two parents who do use that as a means to note things down if, just in case they forget to tell me when we're dropping off, and they do respond, so we, there are things coming and going in that. If a child's had a bad night or, I was going through potty training with a little girl a while back, so mum would write, how she'd done at the weekend and that helped us in the process of potty training, and so that we were doing the same things hopefully.

Childminder

Yeah, so I actually link things to that (EYFS) to give parents a bit more information about that, you educate the parents a little bit sometimes. If you're playing with the puzzle, but you're just playing with the puzzle as a parent aren't you, but I put what it's linking to as to in which development area and things like that, yeah, so I just put things like that.

Childminder

Two practitioners also reported implementing annual questionnaires to gain feedback on partnership work with parents and to collect parents' views on future activities, such as home visits or sessions for parents to come in and teach a particular skill.

However, two practitioners felt it was difficult to identify the impact of the accreditation on their setting since a lot of 'good' work with parents was already underway alongside and as part of the Early Years Foundation Stage. In addition, the capacity to use existing or past work towards the accreditation meant that completely new activities had not always been put in place within the accreditation timeframe.

5.4 Impact on parents

Interviewees felt that parents had benefited from the accreditation-related work in a number of ways. Some practitioners believed that parents were now better informed about their children's learning and the activities that their children were involved in at the settings.

This increased knowledge was closely linked to the work taking place to increase communication between parents and staff. Some practitioners had used home diaries to encourage parents to talk about their children's learning and continue any learning at the weekends, which was said to be successful with some parents. Folders were also used in one setting to encourage communication and monitor children's individual needs and progress that parents could access at anytime – in this case the folders were said to supplement the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

... And I remember one child, she wasn't very good on the computer, so I devised a little thing to help her learn a little bit more, and I was working with the parent and saying, if you can do the same sort of thing as well...

Childminder

Some practitioners also reported benefits in terms of parents approaching staff more to talk to them about their child's learning or activities they were interested in. For example one practitioner reported a parent talking to her about her child's ability to recognise shapes. Additionally, interviewees felt that parents were more open to seeking advice about their children's learning or behaviour and what they could do to improve aspects of their children's development. And in some cases, seeking advice led to wider support from practitioners, such as accompanying parents to hospital appointments and helping them through adoption proceedings.

...You get more verbal replies sometimes, or they might come and say, oh she didn't stop talking about what they've done today, that sort of thing, or they come back and they've said, oh she really enjoyed this.

Nursery Manager

...some parents say they've got children with additional needs and we've accompanied them to some of their appointments at the hospital and things like that, and tried to help them. And then obviously parents that are adopting, we've been involved with the social services meetings and the child psychologist has been into the setting and things like that.

Manager

One practitioner highlighted that her work had enabled families from specific communities to gain access to Children's Centres. A small number of interviewees also suggested that parents had become involved in adult education or NVQ level courses as a result of involvement in PEAL-related activities. For example, one practitioner reported encouraging a mother of five to do an NVQ Level 4 in Childcare to help her become aware of her children's individual needs and be more involved in their learning and development.

A few practitioners were doing home visits and supported home learning. The visits and support consisted of initial introductions to the family, supporting families with special needs, providing a book scheme where parents read to their children and lending equipment such as toys for families who did not have such facilities at home. Interviewees felt the book scheme activity and lending of equipment helped parents to show an interest in their children in a way that was relevant to specific needs and engagement with families.

5.5 Impact on children

Some practitioners reported that building good relationships with parents and creating an environment where parents can get more involved and share information about their children's interests had a positive impact on children's learning and development. For example, adopting this approach was said to help children feel more relaxed and confident, and allowed practitioners to develop activities that children liked or engaged in at home. Additionally, encouraging parents to communicate more with their children about what they did in the setting, about their interests, and what they did on a day to day basis was also felt to assist children's learning and development.

I think it would make it, if they have confident parents, parents who are listening, parents who are supportive, it would be better for all children. Once they've got families who want to be involved, who share with their learning, children's learning and knowing that these are simple things, it's just not taking them home, putting to bed, and listening to, interact with them, you know, on their way to the nursery, whatever they find they can talk about it, to the shop they talk about it and they bring it here we can expand that and we share things together and that would make the children happier to know that we're all working together.

Deputy Manager

I think there's been benefits by the children doing things that they enjoy doing, so they're getting more enjoyment out of it because you're actually doing things that they're interested in at home and introducing things to them that perhaps they wouldn't have done before by sharing this information, and by talking about, just talking generally about things within their life. Like, oh you went to see granddad over the weekend, what did you do then, you can ask them the question because it's there in the book and you know that that's what they've done. So you can share more of their life with them.

Nursery Officer

Other examples of benefits to children included one practitioner working with parents through a case study in order to improve a child's disruptive behaviour in the setting. The practitioner reported that working together with the parent and gaining their support helped to improve behaviour within the setting and had a positive impact on the parent and child's relationship outside the setting. Additionally, some practitioners felt children benefited from practitioners' improved understanding of how to help children's learning and development needs, and subsequent emphasis on these through activities.

Furthermore, those practitioners who supported home learning through a book scheme and lending equipment, reported benefits in terms of children being 'happier' and more 'eager to learn' and being able to communicate more at home with parents. They also suggested children's language skills developed through reading or the equipment they were given to use.

5.6 Future Plans

Most of the practitioners had done a considerable amount of work to engage parents in their children's learning due to the accreditation, but would like to do more given time and funding where appropriate. Some practitioners reported that they wanted to do home visits to help engage parents in their children's learning, and a few were already in the process of talking to parents and setting up visits. Those practitioners who already did home visits commented that they wanted to focus more on learning and development activities within the home, as well as providing general support. One practitioner would like to inform parents more about the Early Years Foundation Stage and involve parents in their children's stages of development. Other future plans revolved around specific activities, which included:

- Getting parents to do shared observations and through means such as disposable cameras
- Video recording 'rhyme time' and staff reading stories to children for parents to see at home
- Using the 'carousel activity' from PEAL training with staff to help confidence in dealing with parents
- Use of 'treasure box' activity with all members of staff
- Involving fathers in their children's learning
- Continuing to draw on PEAL accreditation for families from different communities and build on work already being done with parents

6. Summary and implications

The evaluation drew on interviews from a small number of practitioners who had undertaken the PEAL training and accreditation. An additional two practitioners who had not worked towards accreditation were also interviewed.

The evaluation has shown that practitioners found the training and accreditation very relevant to their work in early years settings, and have been able to use it in planning and implementing strategies to engage parents in their children's learning. The evaluation has explored both interviewees' experience of attending training and undertaking accreditation, as well as the changes they have been able to implement and their subsequent impacts on practitioners, settings and families.

It is useful at this point to revisit the evaluation objectives, which asked:

- How has accreditation affected practitioners' ability to implement change?
- What impact has the accreditation process had for practitioners, settings and families?
- What changes in practice have been brought about as a result of the PEAL training?
- What factors have enabled practitioners to implement those changes?
- To what extent have any positive changes within workplaces been sustained?
- What have been the effects on practitioners, settings, children and families?

6.1 How has accreditation affected practitioners' ability to implement change?

The requirement that all work towards accreditation had to be accompanied by a reflective account provided an opportunity for practitioners to consider their current practices, and the efficacy of activities and approaches in engaging parents in learning. This appears to be a key factor – the time to reflect on settings' and individuals' practices, combined with an impetus to put activities into practice, generated changes and work with parents that practitioners felt would not have happened so soon without the accreditation. Accreditation appears to have been a driver for work to be put into place, providing justification for practitioners that proposed changes would be useful, and speeding up the implementation of such changes. It is quite

possible that some of these activities would not have happened at all without the accreditation process.

It is difficult to unpick the extent to which accreditation was responsible for some aspects of change in practice within settings, since the work has been carried out at a time of great change across the early years sector. From discussions with interviewees it is clear that the values of PEAL link well with other initiatives and drivers in the sector. In addition, the flexibility of the accreditation programme allowed one practitioner to write up past work as evidence of practice. It also enabled a number of practitioners to develop or expand existing areas of work or interests, to incorporate new ideas from the training or the accreditation process. However, most of the accreditation work was new, and most of the practitioners interviewed believed that accreditation was a key factor in the changes implemented.

It should be noted that the practitioners interviewed were often not new to early years work, nor parental engagement work. They were a group of seasoned professionals who wished to develop their practice further, so the PEAL training and learning often reinforced their knowledge rather than added to it immensely. However, even the most experienced interviewees reported they had refreshed their knowledge, and many came across new ideas for working with parents within the training and resources. Interviewees were also all in positions of either authority within settings or with some autonomy, so that they were able to introduce activities or work plans within settings, which may be particularly important within the short timeframe of accreditation.

6.2 What impact has the accreditation process had for practitioners, settings and families?

Interviewees committed themselves to undertaking accreditation for a range of reasons, but primarily because they wished to develop their professional practice, gain new ideas and strategies for engaging parents, and to take the learning from the PEAL training further - to put the ideas generated into practice within their work with families. A few also wished to validate their existing practice.

Interviewees' experience of the accreditation process was mixed, but even those who reported a frustrating lack of support nevertheless completed the accreditation and found it a useful and interesting exercise.

All interviewees had undertaken case study or project work as part of the accreditation, either building on existing work or developing new ways of working to engage parents in their children's learning. They

did this through either working with particular families, or with groups of parents across their settings. A range of work to engage parents was carried out in this way, including working with some hard to reach groups, introducing new activities, and establishing new ways to improve communication between parents and staff, such as using daily diaries. Some practitioners explored ways to support home learning through involving parents in specific activities. A number of practitioners introduced home visits into their work, which they felt had improved relationships with parents and made transitions to settings easier for children. Several settings had also developed or modified policies to reflect an understanding of the importance of parental involvement.

The actual process of undertaking the accreditation meant that existing work with parents was expanded, and a variety of new activities and practices were put into place, with subsequent impacts for settings' practices. Parents had been involved in many of these activities and strategies, which practitioners felt impacted positively on their engagement with their children's development.

6.3 What changes in practice have been brought about as a result of the PEAL training?

It is difficult to distinguish between the changes made as a result of attending PEAL training, and those put into place as part of or as a result of the accreditation process.

As well as interviewing practitioners who had completed the accredited PEAL work, the evaluation also initially planned to carry out up to ten interviews with practitioners who had not undertaken accreditation, but who had nevertheless made attempts to put the learning from PEAL training into practice. The difficulties described in section 2.1 meant that only two such interviewees were recruited to the evaluation. This is not to say that PEAL learning has not been put into practice in settings receiving training, as can be seen in the earlier evaluation of PEAL trainees (Willmott & Shaw, 2008²) as well as within the accounts of these two interviewees³.

However, it is clear that accreditation was a driver for changes in practice in a way that training may not have been. As discussed, the opportunity to reflect on practice allowed practitioners to plan, develop and implement practices to suit the needs of their particular parents or

² Willmott and Shaw (2008) **Early Learning Partnership Project (ELPP) Strand 3 workforce development: Evaluation of Parents, Early Years and Learning (PEAL) training. London: NCB**

³ See Appendix A for more detail.

groups of parents. While it is not possible to distinguish entirely between changes made as a result of accreditation and those already in the pipeline or being introduced prior to accreditation, practitioners reported a number of changes. These included:

- New or modified policies reflecting commitment to engaging parents in children's learning, and keeping parents at the forefront of the planning agenda
- Physical changes to settings to be more welcoming for families
- Sharing learning with colleagues and raising awareness of ways to work with parents
- Liaising with other agencies around issues to engage parents
- Supporting parents to understand how and what children are learning
- Introducing setting to home diaries, shared observations and information
- Increasing communication with parents on a day-to-day basis, by being more accessible and actively listening to parents
- Introducing home visits for new entrants
- Specific activities for children and parents

6.4 What factors have enabled practitioners to implement those changes?

The evaluation has shown that accreditation itself helped to motivate practitioners to implement changes within their settings. The opportunity to reflect on their practice and work with families enabled interviewees to introduce new ways of working, or modify existing practice. In some cases it also gave them new tools for work with parents. A number of practitioners felt that accreditation provided them with the confidence or justification for the work they did with parents, and were able to implement new activities as a result.

Several interviewees indicated that they had in the past been hesitant to involve parents but now felt empowered to do so by the learning from PEAL. The fact that they were undertaking the PEAL accreditation could even be used to justify their approach with parents.

A small number of interviewees indicated other factors that had helped, such as a move to a new building and the current requirement to engage parents linked to the EYFS and the 'Parents as Partners' programme. Practitioners may also have been assisted by the fact that they were all in positions where they had some autonomy to introduce changes in practice.

6.5 To what extent have any positive changes within workplaces been sustained?

Many of the strategies implemented by the practitioners continued once accreditation itself had been achieved. For example, the new or modified policies are in place, physical changes are set, and initiatives such as setting to home diaries, home visits and activities for children and parents continue. Interviewees who had undertaken case study work with specific families to address an identified need felt they would use this approach again with other families in future if such needs arose.

Underlying all of the work undertaken by the practitioners, and indeed permeating all the discussions between the interviewees and the evaluation team, is an understanding of the importance of engaging parents in their children's learning. Even where interviewees spoke of practical changes, it was clear that these were made because interviewees felt it is important to involve parents in children's learning. While many of the practitioners already subscribed to the core values of PEAL and indeed may be why they were attracted to the training and accreditation in the first place, many have shared that knowledge with colleagues and parents and reported a change in ethos among others. This commitment to the values of PEAL means that many practitioners are dedicated to continuing the work put in place and wish to implement more changes, given time and resources.

6.6 What have been the effects on practitioners, settings and children and families?

The changes that were implemented within settings had an impact for practitioners, settings, parents and children. Practitioners reported increased confidence in working with parents, personal development, as well as new knowledge and motivation to go further with activities or indeed further training.

Overall, the learning from PEAL broadened practitioners' outlook on parental engagement, especially their understanding of the pressures on parents which may limit their involvement. The values of PEAL were already accepted by many practitioners, but the subsequent awareness raising among staff and colleagues meant that in some cases the ethos of a setting was thought to have changed fairly substantially. Increased knowledge within settings was a key impact identified by interviewees. Staff were encouraged to communicate more with parents, and generally staff worked more closely to engage parents in children's development. This was supported with changes in policy in a handful of settings (including those of the two interviewees who did not undertake accreditation). Practitioners also

reported increased communication with parents, mainly on a day-to-day basis but also sometimes in terms of consultations about planned activities.

Interviewees felt the changes implemented as a result of accreditation had also impacted positively on parents and children. The increased accessibility of staff meant that parents were able to talk to them more readily about their children's learning or more general development. Interviewees suggested that work with parents had enabled some to become more involved with their children's learning through play. Adopting these approaches was thought to have benefited children too. Several interviewees gave examples of specific work carried out with parents which they felt had improved a child's development or behaviour.

For those practitioners we interviewed, we have found a clear commitment to the involvement of parents in their children's early learning. PEAL training and accreditation has supported these practitioners to take new ideas forward and to put strategies and plans in place to support both their own practice and that of their settings. There are encouraging signs that work to engage with parents has continued after training and accreditation and that it will continue to do so. Practitioners have also observed positive impacts for parents from the changes they have implemented, which we may anticipate will have longer-term impacts for their children.

Appendix A

The experience of practitioners who did not undertake accreditation

The evaluation has shown that the process of undertaking accreditation provided a real opportunity for practitioners to reflect on their practice and to carry out activities from the training. Accreditation acted as both a driver and justification for change. The experience of those who undertook accreditation is somewhat unique, primarily because they had a specified period of time where PEAL learning was a focus within their work. Those practitioners who did not undertake accreditation had a different experience of putting PEAL learning into practice. Nonetheless, they also attended PEAL training and were able to take ideas and learning back to their settings. This appendix provides a summary of the issues discussed during interviews with the two practitioners who had attended PEAL training, but who had not undertaken accreditation. Their workplaces were identified as settings where PEAL-related work had been implemented, by the Local Authorities who had commissioned their training.

Using this summary to draw conclusions about the experience of those not undertaking accreditation should be done with caution however, given the extremely limited numbers (two) of interviewees in this category. However, an exploration of their experiences provides an overview of how they were able to implement change and what impact they were able to identify from PEAL learning.

Interviewees and settings

Both the interviewees were managerial staff within Children's Centres. They had undertaken PEAL training in November 2006 and early 2008 respectively. One had attended the 'train the trainer' training alongside colleagues, with a view to rolling out the training to all core staff in the Children's Centre.

Both settings already carried out work to engage parents, as part of usual working practices within the settings, but one respondent said that this was dependent on staff as some were more experienced in this than others.

The interviewees reported that they had attended the training in order to access new ideas on how to encourage parent participation. Ultimately they wanted to use the training as an impetus to spread these ideas throughout staff teams, and to support the Local Authority's 'Parents as Partners' programme.

Neither respondent was themselves interested in undertaking accreditation, though one suggested staff in her setting may be interested in future if time allowed. The other suggested that staff prefer to undertake work leading to qualifications of NVQ Level 4 or above.

Implementation of PEAL training and learning

The extent to which PEAL had been rolled out or embedded in the settings varied somewhat between the two interviewees, but centred around policy change and raising staff awareness.

Policy

Both settings had used the learning from PEAL to make a number of policy-related changes. These included:

- Using PEAL's quality standards as a planning and evaluation tool to identify gaps in their services
- Developing a 'professional values policy' for staff, setting out changes to working practices and 100% commitment to parents and children
- Creating a 'welcome policy' to support new parents and children
- Introducing a new staff uniform
- Developing a briefing for visiting staff on the setting's policies and practices on working with parents.

One setting had also found the PEAL training materials and package useful as a 'back up' or justification for the setting's practices during a transition in managerial responsibility (coming under the direction of a neighbouring primary school), a change which was challenging some of the initiatives in place. The other interviewee stressed that PEAL was particularly useful as a planning tool, given that it links well with EYFS and ECM outcomes.

Information sharing

In one setting, such changes in policy had been communicated to staff and parents, thereby sharing information and knowledge around the importance of parental engagement. The other interviewee had worked with colleagues to deliver training across the core team in her Children's Centre, so that all staff, including the administration team, had received the PEAL training.

Activities

As well as sharing PEAL learning with staff, this interviewee listed a number of new practices inspired by PEAL, including parent groups using cameras and pictures to discuss children's learning, baby yoga, courses with parents around music and craft activities, and about creating memory boxes. A move to a new setting, with its inherent planning, had created opportunities for the setting to put such activities into place.

The other interviewee reported that her setting was already doing a lot around parental engagement, and so had not implemented many concrete changes following the PEAL training.

Impact

For practitioners

For the individual interviewees, the PEAL training had not provided new information, but acted as a 'refresher' and an opportunity to reflect on practice. One interviewee said the ability to use the quality standards as a planning tool was a key impact for her, and the aspect she had used the most in her work.

For settings

Both interviewees said that a key result of the policy-related changes and staff training was increased staff awareness around the importance of parental engagement and ways to do this effectively. Even in the setting which had not introduced any new activities, staff were now more aware of how to engage parents and deal with different situations. The other interviewee, following provision of PEAL training with all core staff, reported that staff were now much more aware of parents' needs and how to engage with them, such as being more welcoming in the morning, and talking to them more than in the past. She believed this was particularly the case for staff who did not have much prior experience of working with parents.

This raised awareness is closely linked to an understanding of the ethos of PEAL. While for the interviewees themselves, the learning from the PEAL training was a 'refresher' and an opportunity to reflect on practice, this was not necessarily the case for those staff with whom they subsequently shared the information. One interviewee in particular felt that staff had learnt and developed a great deal and changed their outlook about parental engagement. She reported that the training had 'enthused' the whole staff team.

This interviewee also felt the PEAL training had greatly impacted on practice within the setting, suggesting that while some of the changes would have happened anyway, they would not have been so comprehensive across the setting.

For parents and children

Both interviewees thought parents would be more aware of children's development, EYFS and how staff work with children within settings as a result of the work carried out. This may mean parents engage more with their children at home to support their development. One practitioner felt the centre's work has increased parents' confidence and skills around play, and given them 'permission' to play with their children. She spoke of working with one parent and child around issues of speech delay and behaviour, where staff spent more time talking to the mother, encouraging her involvement in activities, including camera work at home. The mother reported she was now much more able to get involved in her child's play, had more ideas for activities and more understanding of her child's likes and dislikes. This also appears to have improved the child's behaviour and speech. The same practitioner also suggested that a small number of parents in her setting who had been involved in some of the activities had increased in confidence, and some had subsequently joined the centre as volunteers. While it is not possible to say that PEAL caused this, it is clear that parents in the setting are strongly encouraged to be involved in their children's learning.

Future plans

Both interviewees felt their centres would continue with existing activities and policies, looking for ways to consult with parents effectively and engage them through different means. One stated that her setting is completely committed to work to engage parents in children's learning. Both indicated they would like to carry out more activities to encourage parental engagement in future, including:

- developing a 'potted' version of the training so can deliver to volunteers who do not have enough time to go on a full day's training
- Developing tools to use at home to evaluate child development
- more outreach in children's homes, supporting them with the activities they do in the centre

Summary

The main body of this evaluation report showed a significant amount of work taking place within the scope of the PEAL accreditation. These two interviewees illustrate that a number of changes have also been made even where practitioners have not been working towards accreditation. While it is not possible to generalise from these findings, given only two practitioners were interviewed, but we can say that these two managers in positions of some authority within their settings, were able to implement a number of policy and training-related initiatives. These seem to have improved their engagement with parents within those settings, with increased staff awareness and changes in outlook, increased parental knowledge and confidence, and increased engagement with their children's learning.

Appendix B

PEAL interview guide – Accreditation contacts

[40-45 minutes max, including intro and any questions]

Before interview

Explain purpose of interview

Explain confidentiality and data protection

Permission to record

Any questions?

Section A: Background information [5 mins]

QUESTION	PROMPT / PROBE
A1 What type of setting do you currently work in?	Children’s Centre Private Nursery Voluntary Nursery Independent Nursery Pre-school Early Excellence Centre Childminder Other (probe) Probe – what services/provision does the setting provide and number of staff and their roles
A2 What is your current post?	Children’s Centre Manager Family Support/Outreach Worker Teacher Headteacher Nursery Nurse Nursery Assistant Nursery Manager Childminder Early Years Advisor Other (probe)
A3 Does your role involve?	Direct work with children? Direct work with parents? Direct work with parents and children? Other? (probe) – If childminder probe no. of children, full-time/part-time/after school
A4 When did you undertake the PEAL training?	Probe for the month & location of training
A5 Prior to PEAL training, in what ways or to what extent did you or your setting already engage parents in their children’s learning?	Probe – if engaging parents, what work was underway or being planned prior to PEAL training; if not engaging parents, probe why
A6 Briefly, what were you/your setting hoping to gain from the PEAL training?	Probe expectations of the training. Prompts skills, knowledge, examples of practice, support in developing their own/settings programme of work etc.

Section B: Accreditation (10 mins)

QUESTION	PROMPT / PROBE
<p>B1 Can you tell me about the accreditation process. When did you start the accreditation? Which accreditation did you undertake?</p>	<p>Probe - Level 3 – City and Guilds/Full accreditation</p> <p>What it involved? (what had to be put into practice?) Specific activities</p>
<p>B2 Why did you decide to do the PEAL accreditation?</p>	<p>Prompt</p> <p>Develop own skills/ knowledge/practice/ To gain recognition of skills/ learning via a recognised/accredited course To develop skills to build on practice back at their setting</p>
<p>B3 What were you hoping/expecting to gain from the accreditation?</p>	
<p>B4 <u>VERY BRIEFLY</u> How did you find doing the accreditation?</p>	

Section C: Implementation of PEAL training (15 mins)

QUESTION	PROMPT / PROBE
<p>C1 What changes have you made as a result of the accreditation?</p>	<p>Prompts Have your own practices changed? (probe if yes, how, if not, why) Have your setting's practices changed? (probe if yes, how, if not, why)</p> <p>Have you made use of a) exercises from the training guide itself b) the PEAL Reader c) practice example cards? c) materials specifically for family workers and childminders (probe how have used, with who, e.g. in staff meetings, supervision etc). How helpful have you found these resources (both individually and use in the setting)</p> <p>If manager – explore with them how they implemented the changes in their setting as a manager. What did they do to implement changes in their setting? Prompt: development of settings policies/ developing staff training/ physical changes to the setting/ building on ways of working, for example, introducing key workers etc</p> <p>Additional prompts if necessary What have they got from PEAL training that they have been able to use? Resources/practice examples Knowledge of engaging parents Confidence to make changes Attitudes and understanding of issues/practice around engaging parents</p>
<p>C2 What helped you/your setting to make these changes?</p>	<p>Probe nature of success to date , who involved Prompt - why do you think you were successful in these instance(s)</p>
<p>C3 To what extent did these changes happen as a result of the accreditation?</p>	<p>What would have happened without the accreditation?</p>

<p>C4 Have you faced any barriers or difficulties in implementing the changes you wanted to make in</p> <p>1) Your own individual practice?</p> <p>2) Your setting?</p>	<p>Probe nature and extent and how the individual/setting may have worked around them.</p> <p>Prompt</p> <p>Difficulties sharing materials or learning with colleagues Issues with embedding changes across staff team(s) Issues around higher ownership of parenting work Time/resource issues Probe, any other issues?</p> <p>How overcame them?</p> <p>Any changes that were prevented? (what, how and future plans)</p>
<p>C5 Moving away from changes you have put in place as a result of the PEAL accreditation...PEAL want to know...</p> <p>1) To what extent, if any, has the learning from the PEAL accreditation changed your own outlook on working with parents?</p> <p>2) To what extent, if any, has the learning from PEAL accreditation changed the outlook in your setting?</p>	<p>Probes for A & B as appropriate: Reflective learning/own development Values and principles (own and or setting) Relationships with parents/children</p>

Section D: Impact of PEAL training (15 mins)

QUESTION	PROMPT / PROBE
Impact for practitioner	
<p>D1 What do <u>you</u> feel you have gained from the accreditation?</p> <p>D2 What difference, if any, has the accreditation made for you (compared to just undertaking the PEAL training)?</p>	<p>Probe nature and extent of impact</p> <p>Prompts</p> <p>Skills</p> <p>Confidence</p> <p>Motivation in involving parents at your setting</p> <p>Knowledge/greater understanding of parental involvement in children's learning</p> <p>More insight into parents needs, strengths and abilities</p> <p>More confidence in ability to address barriers to parental involvement</p> <p>Ideas and tools to develop own practice</p> <p>Own professional development etc</p>
Impact for the setting	
<p>D3 What has been the impact of the accreditation on your setting?</p>	<p>Probe nature and extent of impact and what evidence/monitoring and evaluation</p> <p>Prompts</p> <p>Work to engage parents</p> <p>Changes to physical setting</p> <p>Effects on staff – changes to their work, new responsibilities, workforce development</p> <p>Changes to policy</p> <p>Changes to practice, activities, ethos</p> <p>Confidence to effect change</p> <p>What else planned for the future?</p>

Impact for parents and children	
<p>D4 What benefits, if any, do you think there have been for:</p> <p>1) Parents</p> <p>2) Children</p>	<p>Probe If practice has changed after training, are parents more confident in getting involved in their children’s learning, accessing the physical setting, any difference in behaviour, attitudes, or other impact or changes noted?</p> <p>Probe – how they’ve got parents communicating more about their children and how this impacted on the settings work with the children?</p> <p>Probe – do they support home learning? i.e. do home visits/ lend equipment – what difference has this made on parents knowledge of learning and confidence in teaching their child/ and to talk openly to the setting about their child’s learning</p> <p>As a result do the settings notice any changes in the child?</p> <p>What evidence? How do you know? Monitoring and evaluation</p> <p>What next signs of change do you expect to see in the future?</p>

Section E: Closing section

QUESTION	PROMPT / PROBE
E1 What are your plans for engaging parents in their children's early learning in the future?	How? What will this depend on?
E2 Are there any other comments you'd like to make about the PEAL accreditation?	

End of interview

Appendix C

PEAL interview guide for LA contact nominees

[40-45 minutes max, including intro and any questions]

Before interview

Explain purpose of interview
 Explain confidentiality and data protection
 Permission to record
 Any questions?

Section A: Background information [5 mins]

QUESTION	PROMPT / PROBE
A1 What type of setting do you currently work in?	Children’s Centre Private Nursery Voluntary Nursery Independent Nursery Pre-school Early Excellence Centre Childminder Other (probe) Probe – what services/provision does the setting provide and number of staff and their roles
A2 What is your current post?	Children’s Centre Manager Family Support/Outreach Worker Teacher Headteacher Nursery Nurse Nursery Assistant Nursery Manager Childminder Early Years Advisor Other (probe)
A3 Does your role involve?	Direct work with children? Direct work with parents? Direct work with parents and children? Other? (probe) If childminder probe no. of children, full-time/part-time/after school
A4 When did you undertake the PEAL training?	Probe for the month & location of training

<p>A5 Prior to PEAL training, in what ways or to what extent did you or your setting already engage parents in their children's learning?</p>	<p>Probe – if engaging parents, what work was underway or being planned prior to PEAL training; if not engaging parents, probe why</p>
<p>A6 Briefly, what were you/your setting hoping to gain from the PEAL training?</p>	<p>Probe expectations of the training. Prompts skills, knowledge, examples of practice, support in developing their own/settings programme of work etc.</p>
<p>A7 Have you considered undertaking the PEAL accreditation?</p>	<p>Probe – why they want to do it / or why not – what has stopped them from doing it?</p>

Section B: Implementation of PEAL training & learning (15 mins)

QUESTION	PROMPT / PROBE
<p>B1 What changes have you made as a result of the PEAL training and subsequent learning?</p>	<p>Prompts Have your own practices changed? (probe if yes, how, if not, why) Have your setting's practices changed? (probe if yes, how, if not, why)</p> <p>Have you made use of a) exercises from the training guide itself b) the PEAL Reader c) practice example cards? c) materials specifically for family workers and childminders (probe how have used, with who, e.g. in staff meetings, supervision etc). How helpful have you found these resources (both individually and use in the setting)</p> <p>If manager – explore with them how they implemented the changes in their setting as a manager. What did they do to implement changes in their setting? Prompt: development of settings policies/ developing staff training/ physical changes to the setting/ building on ways of working, for example, introducing key workers etc</p> <p>Additional prompts if necessary What have they got from PEAL training that they have been able to use? Resources/practice examples Knowledge of engaging parents Confidence to make changes Attitudes and understanding of issues/practice around engaging parents</p>
<p>B2 What helped you/your setting to make these changes?</p>	<p>Probe nature of success to date, who involved Prompt - why do you think you were successful in this instance(s)</p>
<p>B3 To what extent did these changes happen as a result of PEAL?</p>	<p>Probe - what would have happened without PEAL?</p>

<p>B4 Have you faced any barriers or difficulties in putting ideas into practice around involving parents?</p>	<p>Probe potential barriers for both individual and setting. Probe nature and extent and how the individual/setting may have worked around them.</p> <p>Prompt</p> <p>Difficulties sharing materials or learning with colleagues Issues with embedding changes across staff team(s) Issues around higher ownership of parenting work Time/resource issues Probe, any other issues?</p> <p>How overcame them?</p> <p>Any changes that were prevented? (what, how and future plans)</p>
<p>B5 Moving away from changes you have put in place as a result of the PEAL training...PEAL want to know...</p> <p>1) To what extent, if any, has the learning from PEAL changed your own outlook on working with parents?</p> <p>2) To what extent, if any, has the wider learning/ethos of PEAL changed the outlook in your setting?</p>	<p>Probes for a & b as appropriate: Reflective learning/own development Values and principles (own and or setting) Relationships with parents/children</p>

Section C: Impact of PEAL training (15 mins)

QUESTION	PROMPT / PROBE
Impact for practitioner	
C1 What do <u>you</u> feel you have gained from the PEAL training?	Probe nature and extent of impact Prompts Skills Confidence Motivation in involving parents at your setting Knowledge/greater understanding of parental involvement in children’s learning More insight into parents needs, strengths and abilities More confidence in ability to address barriers to parental involvement Ideas and tools to develop own practice Own professional development etc
Impact for the setting	
C2 What has been the impact of the PEAL training on your setting?	Probe nature and extent of impact and what evidence/How do they know – monitoring and evaluation? Prompts Work to engage parents Changes to physical setting Effects on staff – changes to their work, new responsibilities, workforce development Changes to policy Changes to practice, activities, ethos Confidence to effect change What else planned for the future?

<p>C3 What benefits, if any, do you think there have been for:</p> <p>1) Parents</p> <p>2) Children</p>	<p>Probe If practice has changed after training, are parents more confident in getting involved in their children's learning, accessing the physical setting, any difference in behaviour, attitudes, or other impact or changes noted?</p> <p>Probe – do they support home learning – i.e. do home visits/ lend equipment – what difference has this made on parents knowledge of learning and confidence in teaching their child/ and to talk openly to the setting about their child's learning/</p> <p>As a result do the settings notice any changes in the child?</p> <p>What evidence? How do you know? Monitoring and evaluation?</p> <p>What next signs of change do you expect to see in the future?</p>
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Section D: Closing section

QUESTION	PROMPT / PROBE
D1 What are your plans for engaging parents in their children's early learning in the future?	How? What will this depend on?
D2 Are there any other comments you'd like to make about PEAL?	

End of interview