

Background

We know the importance of the early years and the impact the pandemic has had on young children as well as the adults who care for, support and teach them. As such, we have designed a COVID-19 recovery programme for early years focused on supporting practitioners and leaders, who are key to addressing the effects of the pandemic on the youngest children.

This work builds on reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) which became statutory in September 2021 and supports our aims of improving outcomes and closing the attainment gap at age 5.

The Department for Education (DfE) **Early Years COVID-19 Recovery: Experts and Mentors programme** will support early years practitioners, leaders and whole-settings. Experts and Mentors will provide bespoke support face-to-face and virtually to help meet individual settings' needs and priorities. The offer to settings will include leadership support, coaching for leaders, mentoring for practitioners and whole-setting support, depending on need. The pilot of this programme is underway, and we will be rolling out across the country from September 2022.

The Programme

Online child development training

We will launch a new, universal online child development training offer to upskill practitioners and improve their knowledge of child development so they will be better able to support children in their care, particularly those whose development may have been impeded due to the covid pandemic. The new online child development training will build on the existing EYFS reforms online service - [Help for Early Years Providers](#). Further resources will also be made available on this site.

Experts and Mentors

Some eligible settings will be able to access additional support in the form of an 'Expert' and 'Mentor'. The Expert will provide three days leadership or whole setting support, which will take place within the allocated setting. A Mentor will also be available to support an individual or small group of practitioners, as they complete a new online child development training package, as well as providing more general support focusing on improving practice and curriculum to support children following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mentoring will be remote, usually over Teams or a similar platform. Each local authority will also be allocated an Area Lead that will provide support, coordination and quality assurance for the Mentors and Experts in their locality.

We have today launched the Expression of Interest process for those wishing to apply to be Experts, Mentors or Area Leads for the national programme. The link to the application form can be found [here](#).

Eligibility

The online training package will be universally available to all settings. For additional mentoring and expert support, settings must meet one or more of the following criteria:

- been judged as Requires Improvement (RI) or inadequate in the last 3 years
- high numbers of children in receipt of EY Pupil Premium
- high numbers of children with SEND
- high numbers of children taking up the disadvantaged 2-year-old offer

The Pilot

The programme is currently being piloted in the Lancashire and West Yorkshire and the North RSC regions. We have recruited Experts, Mentors and Area Leads in those areas and they are currently undergoing training through our delivery partner, Hempsalls. Settings in the pilot regions will receive support during the summer term (April – July 2022).