



Every Child a Talker - Evaluation Summary Report

An evaluation summary of Worcestershire's ECaT programme delivery and outcomes 2009-2013

1. What is ECaT?

Every Child a Talker (ECaT) is a universal level programme designed to improve the skills of the early years workforce in supporting speech, language and communication development; raising children's achievement in early language as measured against the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. Initially launched as a national project by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in 2008, funding was assigned to Local Authorities with relatively poor results against language elements of the Foundation Stage Profile. Worcestershire was deemed eligible and received funding to deliver speech language and communication training and support to a number of early years settings.

ECaT is a 12 month programme delivered by early language consultants (speech and language therapists and specialist teachers) working alongside identified practitioners in nominated early years settings. Delivery has varied between local authorities; in Worcestershire settings receive training and on-going support for staff members, resources to facilitate change in the environment and an assessment of all children's language and communication skills in the setting.

2. ECaT in Worcestershire

Worcestershire implementation of the Every Child a Talker project has incorporated two days of Language for Learning training. The Language for Learning "theory into practice" model provides participants with practical strategies for supporting children in their settings and includes a focus on adult-child interactions and supporting communication in the setting. In addition to training, "cluster" meetings facilitate discussions on ECaT, identification and good practice three times over the year, with visits to the settings at least three times during the year to support staff members.

The nationally-funded ECaT programme was delivered to 40 Worcestershire settings over three "waves" (ECaT 1/2/3) between 2009 and 2011. When central government funding for the project ceased in 2010, strong evidence of successful results secured Worcestershire County Council funding to continue and an additional 63 settings benefitted from a further three waves (ECaT 4/5/6). A further 40 settings will receive ECaT during 2013/14. In total, 143 Early Years settings will have received ECaT input in Worcestershire by 2014. This represents just over one third of the estimated 400+ nurseries and other early years settings in the county.

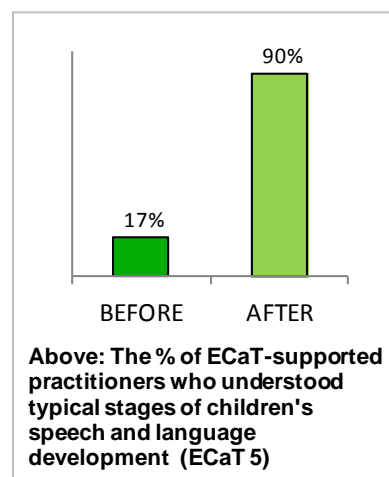
All ECaT programme delivery has been accompanied and supported by monitoring and assessment. Following strong evidence of success in the first 3 waves, positive impact has continued to be observed and is increasingly well documented.

3. The impact of ECaT

Upon commencement of the ECaT programme, initial assessment of children’s language skills found high proportions of children in supported settings being deemed “at risk” of speech, language or communication delay. Furthermore, self-evaluation materials found that practitioners did not have an understanding of children’s speech, language and communication and lacked the confidence to either identify children’s needs in relation to language and communication or discuss these needs with colleagues and parents. There was clearly a pressing need for training and intervention. Results following ECaT implementation have been highly positive as detailed in the key outcomes below.

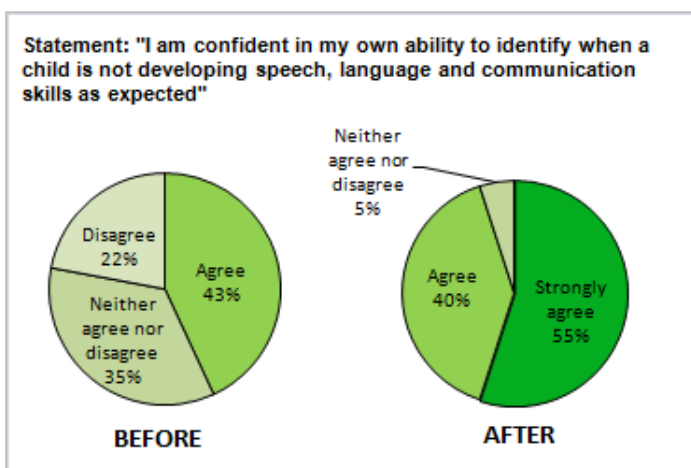
Key outcome 1: Improved practitioner knowledge and confidence

Since its inception ECaT has dramatically increased the awareness of language issues across the early years workforce. During last year’s programme, the proportion of ECaT-supported practitioners who felt that they understood the typical stages in speech, language and communication development increased five-fold from 17% at the start of the ECaT programme to 90% by the end of the programme.



"This has made me more aware of the range of problems encountered by children and made me stop and think about how I use language"

Feedback has provided evidence that ECaT greatly improves practitioners’ knowledge and confidence in identifying when children are not developing speech, language or communication skills as expected.



The proportion of ECaT-supported practitioners who felt confident in this area more than doubled over the course of the programme, from 45% at the start of the ECaT programme to 95% by the end.

"[The ECAT programme has] made me more confident in identifying problems early"

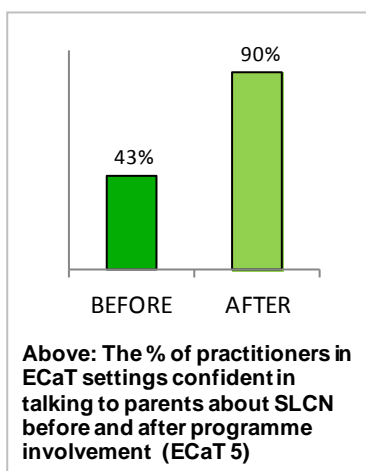
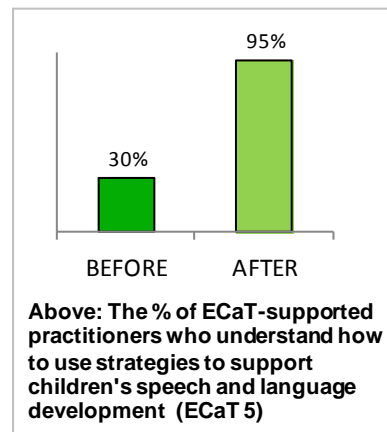
The proportion of practitioners confident in talking to their colleagues about children’s speech, language and communication skills doubled from 44% to 95% over the course of the ECaT programme. In addition, the proportion of professionals feeling able to provide clear and relevant information about a child’s progress increased dramatically from 17% to 95% by the end of the year.

Key outcome 2: Better support for children and their parents

Evaluation clearly demonstrates that professional competence is increased significantly through the ECaT programme, and that practice is improved as a result.

Supporting children

Practitioners in early years settings supported by ECaT identified a significant increase in their ability to deliver positive strategies to support children's speech, language and communication development. At the beginning of the programme, just under a third (30%) of practitioners claimed to have an understanding of such strategies, increasing threefold to 95% of practitioners by the end of the year. Practitioners also reported significant increase in their understanding of how to promote a communication-friendly environment.



Supporting parents

Professionals in ECaT-supported settings reported they felt low levels of confidence in talking to and advising parents on children's speech, language and communication at the beginning of the programme and high levels of confidence by the end. Recent data showed the proportion of setting staff feeling confident in this area doubled from 43% to 90% over the 12 month programme.

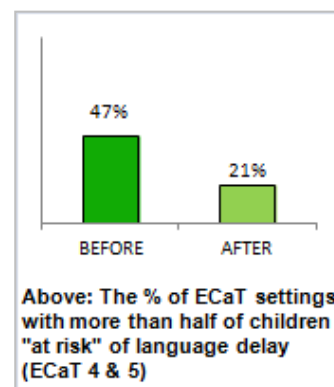
"Prior to ECaT I would not have felt as confident about giving a parent this sort of [language development] advice"

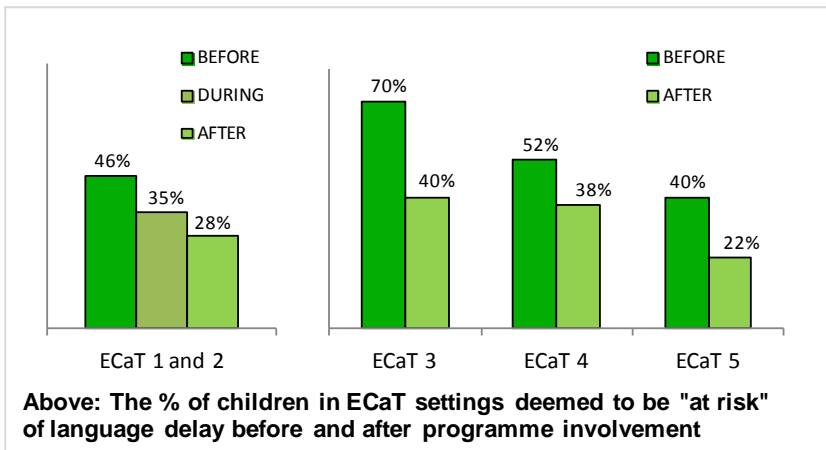
"Following joint observation of, and a discussion with my early language consultant about [named child's] speech and language, I felt more confident to raise concerns with his mum. It turned out that she was anxious too, but didn't want to say anything!"

Key outcome 3: Improved outcomes for children

As part of the ECaT programme, all children in settings were monitored and assessed for language ability before and after the project year and those identified as "at risk" of language delay received support and intervention as appropriate.

Year-end reassessments demonstrated significant reductions in the number of children at risk of language delay following ECaT support. During the most recent phases (ECaT 4 and 5), almost half of the 36 settings enrolled had 50% or more of their children assessed as "at risk". This had been considerably reduced to 1 in 5 settings by the end of the programme. During ECaT 5, the number of children deemed to be "at risk" across 18 supported settings dropped to half over the course of the programme.



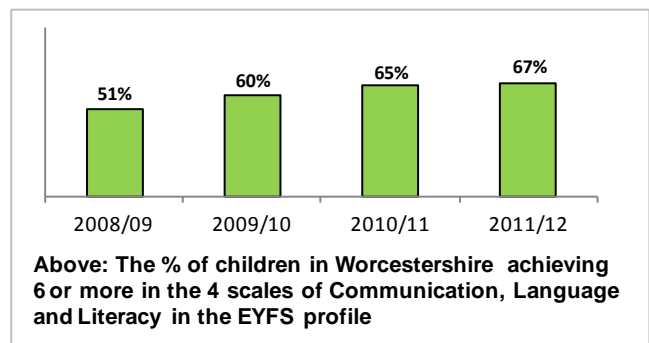


Data collected from all five completed waves of ECaT in Worcestershire showed consistently that by the end of each 12 month project, far fewer children were assessed as being "at risk". Virtually all settings enrolled on the programme have seen a decrease in this figure over the year.

"Children now have a better understanding of language, better speech sounds and talk, most at the expected level and some ahead"

"[We now have] more children joining in, including selective talkers and children with speech difficulties"

The ECaT programme improves outcomes for children whose language or communication is behind that of the expected level for their age at the beginning of the project. In addition, it has been observed that all children benefit from strategies and activities in the programme, including those with typical speech, language and communication skills for their age. It is suggested that ECaT has contributed to Worcestershire's continuous upward trend in Early Years Foundation Stage Profile results over the past four years.



"[We have seen an] improvement in the speech, language and communication abilities of all children in the setting, not just those with speech, language and communication difficulties"

4. Ongoing need

The demonstrated impact of ECaT on staff competency in early years settings and on young children's language acquisition is significant and positive. The work of ECaT, however, is not yet done. Whilst ECaT has evidenced great improvements in speech, language and communication support and outcomes across the settings previously supported, there are over 400 early years settings in Worcestershire; approximately 260 settings are still waiting to benefit from the programme. If these remaining settings have similar circumstances to those enlisted in ECaT 5, currently there are potentially 2,000 children at risk of language delay who would benefit from support, of which perhaps 800 might not be deemed "at risk" within 12 months if their needs are addressed.

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