



Humber and North Yorkshire
Health and Care Partnership

Early Talk for York update and business case March 2023

This paper provides a background and update on the 'Early Talk for York' approach that has been underway in York since 2019. It also lays out future plans and the case for ongoing commissioning to allow these to happen.

Summary

Early Talk for York is meeting its primary objective of improving speech, language and communication outcomes for all children but particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The 'gap' in the original pilot area has closed from 34.5% (2018) to 2.5% (2022) and outcomes for all children have risen above national averages for the first time ever. Outcomes for children with SEND are also improving. All of these improvements have continued through the pandemic window when all other groups (locally and nationally) have seen a decline in outcomes. Speech language and communication outcomes at age 5 are strongly associated with later outcomes, such as social emotional and mental health, literacy levels and employment prospects.

As well as improving outcomes for children, Early Talk for York has made significant improvements to the early years system as a whole – with greater integration and service improvements across the diverse sector. All of this has been validated by multiple Ofsted inspections, the Care Quality Commission and a Local Government Association peer review. York is attracting a significant amount of interest nationally in this programme of work. A small scale independent evaluation, jointly commissioned with the University of York is underway and plans are being developed to bid for funding for a large scale, independent evaluation of ETFY across the next 3 years.

In January 2023 ETFY achieved the collection and analysis of standardised screening outcomes for early years aged children across the city for the first time ever. This data demonstrates that there remains a significant need for Early Talk for York to continue with 41% of children aged 2 - 5 not currently developing at age-appropriate levels in speech, language and communication and highlights a significant 'disadvantaged gap' by age 2 with 60% of children eligible for funded places already behind where we would expect them to be.

Scale up of the approach continues at pace, approved by the Early Years Partnership Board and the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education at the decision-making session in November 2022. Current commissioning arrangements, which centre around the support of Speech and Language therapists from York Hospital, expire in August 2023. In order to sustain ETFY effectively, a total of £100k per year is required. This would allow the commissioning of 1.5 FTE Speech and Language therapists and a small project maintenance grant.

Without this support, it will become increasingly difficult to maintain the scale up of Early Talk for York and it's likely that the system will find it harder to respond to the needs of children identified and referenced above. As well as hindering a programme that has demonstrable and significant impact, it would be reputationally damaging for the local partnership to withdraw from this programme now.



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Background

York has a long-standing challenge around outcome gaps between disadvantaged children and their non disadvantaged peers. This is significantly evident from the early years. (2017 Gap = 26.2% 3 year average up to 2018 Gap = 23.9%).

There is a strong evidence base to support the selection of communication and language as a priority because of its fundamental nature and relationship with lots of important indicators (literacy skills, mental health, employment).

The gap in attainment in Communication and Language in 2018 was 17% across the city and 34.5% in the pilot area.

Early Talk for York was jointly commissioned by City of York Council, York Schools and Academies Board, Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group, York Hospital and providers (NB not all of this is 'money into a pot' e.g. the average cost to a school to facilitate their team to be trained could be anything up to £2500).

Speech Language and Communication (SLC) is one of the top 3 primary needs for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities in York (the other two being Social Emotional and Mental Health and Autistic Spectrum Condition where SLC is often also a factor).

Our intention in setting up Early Talk for York (ETFY) in 2019 was to close the attainment gap in Communication and Language (CL) strands of EYFSP using a strengths based approach (building on effective practice in the city already) and evidence based (with research informing decision making). We identified three headline priorities:

1. Strategy and commissioning – uniting the early years sector around a common outcome to develop better partnerships, strategic decision making and commissioning arrangements.
2. Workforce development – ensuring those working with children and families have the knowledge, skills and tools to provide the right level of support at the right time.
3. Communications and community – sharing Early Talk for York with parents and carers so they could support the aims of the project in the home learning environment.

The initial ETFY project proved successful, its extension across the city is driven by the system approach to improving preventative approaches and early intervention: both partnership between health and education *which includes private, maintained and independent sector at pre-school level) alongside the Universities and Research School to validate and inform the future commissioning.

Activity so far

The core activity has been:

- Training practitioners through an accredited training programme and supporting them to cascade the training.



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- Using a standardised tool for universal assessment and diagnosis of needs.
- Ongoing support from other professionals, including speech and language therapists.
- Working in partnership with parents and carers.
- Developing a strengths-based communications campaign.
- Facilitating peer support and challenge.

We have also carefully attended to evaluation of the pilot – to inform the ongoing development of the approach as well as to ensure we understand the impact. We used a control group of schools to develop a quasi-experimental approach to understanding impact.

Using our evaluation information we devised a three step approach to ETFY to support the phased scale up of the approach. This three step approach breaks down the activity (above) into stages to be tackled in turn – to help more organisations get involved in a progressive way.

Currently, 29 schools, settings and childminders across the city are involved in the full Early Talk for York approach. This is approximately 1200 children aged 2 – 5 years and many more children aged 0 – 2 years.

104 (90%) schools and group-based settings are now using the standardised screening tool to universally screen children (the first step of Early Talk for York) with many childminders also doing the same via a library lending service. This is at least 3700 children aged 2-5 years and many more children aged 0 – 2 years.

7 schools have worked closely with City of York Council's Family Learning team to work directly with families to support the development of the home learning environment. This work has been independently evaluated by Huntington Research School and this shows a promising model emerging around parental engagement and this work will continue in 2022-23.

The University of York continues to support the implementation of Early Talk for York by providing volunteer, specially trained student placements. The academic year 2022 – 23 will have seen more than 110 'York Students in Schools' students placed in early years settings across the city. The University is also exploring how placements in Early Talk for York schools and settings can be embedded into some of their relevant taught programmes.

City of York Council's Healthy Child Service has continued to develop its practice in line with the Early Talk for York principles and has now trained all practitioners in the use of the Early Language Identification Measure which is being used to universally screen all 2 years olds at the mandated contact, supporting the development of the integrated health check. The team is currently working with approximately 60 families where speech, language or communication difficulties have been identified through screening.

Impact and outcomes

Our evaluation has supported to demonstrate **impact at a number of levels:**

- **System**
 - Focus on Communication and Language, core of small number of quality aspects, consistency across the sector
 - A greater understanding of the pathway with much more happening to support children with additional needs before they require specialist support



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- Better join up e.g. settings with Healthy Child Service, Family Learning
- Helped develop new work e.g. 2 year old integrated review
- Development of Speech and Language (SLC) Hub – peer to peer support model currently with 28 members.
- Informed the service transformation of the SLT team at the hospital
- WellComm data collection = understanding need across the city (Jan 2023)

- **Organisational**

Ofsted have noted the impact of ETFY in several settings that have been inspected, where there are fully trained and skilled staff teams, equipped with appropriate resources, confident in their knowledge understanding and responses e.g. One professional reported: *“Our staff in (Early Years Foundation Stage) are now more confident in identifying when children may have a speech and language need, which is allowing us to support the children, with relevant interventions. The staff are now more confident at knowing how to support these children, and when they should refer them to a speech and language therapist.”*

- **Individual professionals**

Lots more individuals (at least 52) with advanced and accredited qualifications in Communication and Language many of these (28) are founding member of the SLC Hub which provides additional advice and support for implementation as well as training for peers across the sector. 6 practitioners have confirmed they are willing and able to provide additional intense support to peer settings.

- **Child**

- EYFSP data outcomes (see Appendix 1)
 1. Outcomes for non disadvantaged children in ETFY are above national for the first time ever and very close to city non disadvantaged average
 2. Outcomes for disadvantaged children in ETFY have improved dramatically. In 2018 there was a 34.5% point gap between disadvantaged (ETFY) and non disadvantaged (National). In 2022 this gap is 2.5%
 3. Disadvantaged children in ETFY are the only group not to have experienced a dip in attainment during the high COVID window (and their attendance was slightly lower than city and control group). The control group schools (closely matched) dipped very significantly.
 4. Non disadvantaged in ETFY had a dip during COVID but this was shallow and they are the only other group to be above pre pandemic levels in 2022.
 5. Children with identified SEND in ETFY group – outcomes have risen from being in line with York SEND to and below National SEND to 14% above York SEND, 29% above control group SEND and 9% above National SEND.
- WellComm data outcomes consistently demonstrate children making progress Settings that universally screen to identify children who need support are able to use the toolkit the put appropriate interventions in place as well as use data from the assessments to identify any themes to further embed support into provision. Settings report good progress for those children involved in WellComm interventions. For example, one Primary School setting involved in ETFY,



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reported that when they rescreened the 24 children who had scored in red or amber and were involved in interventions, only 6 didn't achieve a green score for their age related section. Another common report from settings is that the WellComm is particularly useful for those children who score in the amber section as the WellComm interventions can support these children to make progress with their SLCN without requiring additional support from specialist services.

Likely impact

Despite our best efforts, there are limitations to what we can evaluate about Early Talk for York however, our Theory of Change is based on good academic evidence and we have a variety of qualitative data sources that tell us that impact can be seen in other areas:

On specialist services:

- The quality of referrals into children's speech and language therapy services is improving. This is particularly because of the wide use of the standardised screening tool – the findings of which are frequently being used to further evidence referrals. This means that triage of referrals by the hospital team is more informed and likely to be more accurate.
- There is some evidence of children being removed from waiting lists because the broader range of intervention has been successful in helping them to make good progress.
- There is a greater understanding of specificity of need for specialist services. The wider system is more effectively supporting children with communication and language needs, however support for speech is aspect that is proving more challenging. As a direct result, specialist services have commissioned training on supporting children's speech development.

On longer term outcomes for children:

- It is well evidenced that children's speech, language and communication outcomes age 5 are predictive of a range of future outcomes including literacy skills, social and emotional development and employment prospects. For example, children with poor language skills at age 5 are 6 times less likely to reach the expected standard in Literacy at age 11 and nearly twice as likely to have mental health difficulties even when controlling for other known factors.
- ETFY helps tackle the known issue of under identification of children's speech, language and communication needs which research demonstrates is significant in young people with mental health needs as well as for young offenders.

Current needs

- In January 2023, the Early Talk for York team were, for the first time ever in York, able to gather data on children's speech, language and communication development from across the early years population. In total around 3000 children's assessments from the standardised screening were gathered and analysed, mostly of the age 2 – 5 population.
- The analysis shows that 41% of children are currently not where they would be expected to be in their speech, language and communication development with more than half of these children significantly behind. For the 2 year old population, nearly 60% of those eligible for funded places are not at expected levels of development, compared to 40% of their peers. This is 'the disadvantaged gap' being illuminated at a very early age.
- The analysis also demonstrates that need is more prevalent in some areas of the city than others and that some schools and settings have high proportions of children with



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higher levels of need. This analysis is already informing the targeting of the further scale up of ETFY in a way that was previously not possible, due to a lack of city-wide data. It will also be used to support the early years partnership consider any locality responses outside of schools and settings.

Next steps

- The Early Years Partnership have approved the further scale up of ETFY and agreed that the relevant commissioning must be in place in order that this happens. As previously described, this could be a joint commissioning arrangement with health, CYC and education. This was approved at the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education at the Decision Session on 8th November 2022.
- We are on track with plans to take 30 more group-based settings into the full approach (Step 3) during 2023.
- We are also on track to take a significant number of childminders (up to 30) through to Step 3.
- We have worked with the University of York to commission an independent evaluation of the way in which the standardised screening assessment is being used across the city. The findings of this evaluation will be used to inform the future direction and support for this work from September 2023 onwards. This has been funded by [The York Policy Engine](#) at the University.
- We are in the process of working with a number of academics at the University of York and University of Sheffield to scope an independent evaluation of the full Early Talk for York approach. We will be submitting a bid to the Nuffield Foundation in March 2023 which would propose an extensive, 3 year process and impact evaluation of the programme.
- We are working with our partners at Nesta to further develop the community focused strand for children not in settings and predominantly focused 0 – 2. The emphasis of this work will be on strong parent/caregiver-infant bonding as the foundation for good SLC outcomes. This is in line with the EY partnership's strategy.

Finance and future commissioning

- To get to this point an upfront expenditure of £220k has been made with a further £80k committed to the end of the 2022/23 academic year. There are other 'hidden' costs of staff time and investment made by many of the organisations involved.
- The original start up funding is sufficient to cover upfront training for the city wide scale up work (circa an additional £91k).
- The ongoing costs associated with commissioning a 1.0 FTE Speech and Language Therapist are circa £57k/annum. As the programme of work is scaled, it is likely that additional therapist support would be required to ensure city wide coverage and modelling of the same intensity of support for all, right the way across the city would equate to around 6 FTE therapists. Scale up plans have been developed that do not rely entirely on specialist support and are also drawing upon the increased expertise of peers in the early years system to support each other. However, it is anticipated that some support from specialists will always be necessary to maintain momentum and impact. Current commissioning arrangements for this support are currently secured until 31st August 2023. From this date onwards, Early Talk for York would benefit from 1.5 FTE Speech and Language therapists ideally on a longer term or more permanent basis.



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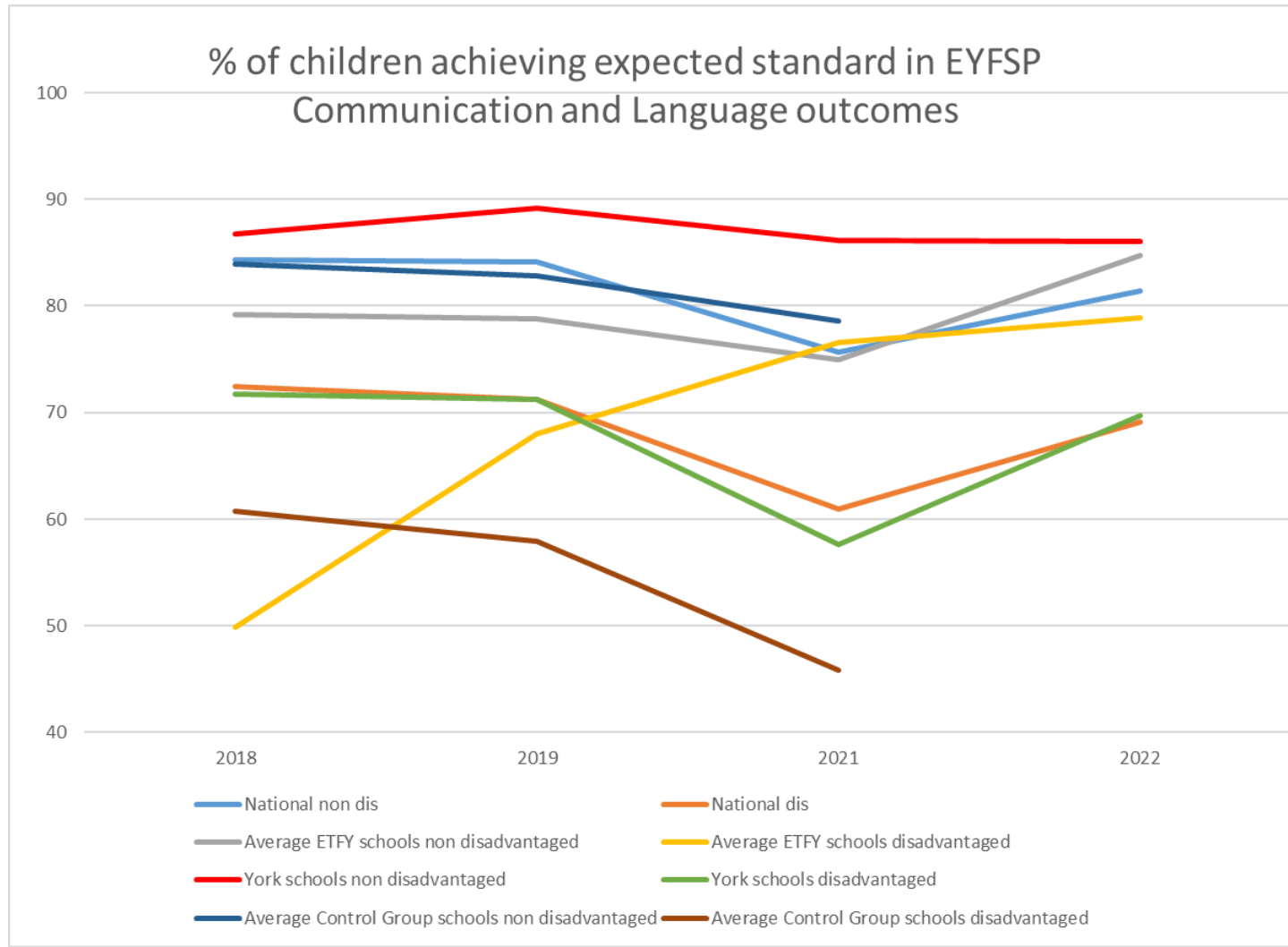
The leadership team of the therapy services at York Hospital are passionate advocates for Early Talk for York and are keen to emphasise how their work aligns with their ongoing transformation journey. They support the premise that the specialist support should continue to be commissioned from their team because of the ongoing benefits of better integrated across the local system.

- This development work is happening at a time when all parts of the early years sector are under significant pressure. So far, the project team have managed to mitigate for much of these pressures by both responding dynamically as they arise as well as pro actively working to keep Early Talk for York a key priority. This has been made possible by access to the project budget and it is anticipated that an ongoing annual budget of £10k per year would enable this to continue. This would be used to ensure responsiveness to ongoing training needs, refreshing resources and running events that keep Early Talk for York high profile across the city.
- City of York Council remain committed to ensuring that the core team that facilitate the collaborations and administrative aspects around Early Talk for York continue to do so moving forwards.
- Taking all of the above into account, from 1st September 2023 to keep Early Talk for York we need to commission 1.5 FTE speech and language therapists (based on current costs circa £90k) and annual ongoing support for the smooth running of Early Talk for York of £10k, in total circa £100k.



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Appendix 1





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