Early Years: professional development and leadership (closed)

This grant-funding round closed on 16 March 2018. Thank you to all those who put the time and effort into submitting your ideas for our consideration. We will be in touch with applicants in due course.

Summary

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) and Department for Education (DfE) are looking to fund and evaluate early years education projects focused on professional development and leadership, in order to improve the learning and development of children from low income families aged 0–5.

The aim of this funding round is to provide support for initiatives focused on professional development and leadership in the early years. This could include, for example:

- how settings use evidence from research to inform their practice,
- professional learning between and within settings,
- how staff monitor and assess children’s development and use this to inform their practice, and
- focused training and support in relation to key outcomes (see scope below).

We are open to ideas that can demonstrate clear theory of how the approach will lead to improvements in practice, and ultimately learning outcomes, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Scope

We are interested in proposals that will:

- Support high quality professional development, and leadership in the early years, including in Reception;
- Through these changes, improve practice quality, and children’s outcomes in early language and literacy development, early numeracy, and/or self-regulation; and
- Narrow the development gap between socio-economically disadvantaged pupils and their peers at (or before) age 5;

We will prioritise bids that have strong theory or evidence that they are likely to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged children, and that are ready to be evaluated.

We will consider both formative evaluations for earlier-stage initiatives, and impact evaluations of more developed ideas.

We are also interested in approaches that have been successfully evaluated internationally and could be adapted for settings in England.

Criteria

Proposals should:

- Focus on improving the learning of disadvantaged children in England through supporting professional development and leadership. See ‘scope’ above.
- Be informed and supported by strong theory of change or evidence of impacting on educational outcomes, particularly language and literacy, early numeracy and/or self-regulation. We would like applicants to outline how their proposal applies the findings of rigorous research from wider literature.
- **Be practical, cost-effective and scalable.** Our aim is to identify approaches that, if shown to be successful, could be taken on by schools, nurseries, PVIs, children’s centres, or other early years providers. Therefore we are only interested in developing and testing initiatives that are practical and cost-effective to deliver.

- **Be willing and able to be independently evaluated.** We will appoint an independent evaluator, and work with successful applicants to design an appropriate evaluation plan. Note that this does not need to be included in your project plan and budget.

**How to apply**

To submit an application, please register via our website and complete the online form. Guidance notes for the form are available below.

Please note that once you have logged on to EEF’s online application system, there is a specific application form for the Early Years funding round.

The funding round is open from 14 December 2017 until Friday, 16 March, 2018. We expect to make final funding decisions in June 2018.

**FAQs**

**Does the intervention need to cover all the sciences?**

In either round, your project would not have to cover student or teacher knowledge in all areas of science. However, it is worth considering that the projects will be measured against broad outcomes. For example, if your project team had identified Physics pedagogical knowledge as a major area of challenge for science teachers, then we may reasonably expect to see a change in science teacher retention if we targeted only this area. Similarly, if your team has identified osmosis as a significant challenge for students, we may reasonably expect to see improvements in Science GCSE outcomes if this was taught better; the project would be measured against this sort of outcome, rather than a test covering only osmosis.

**Can the funding cover staff and product development costs?**

Staff costs are likely to constitute the majority of your budget, including staff time spent on recruiting schools and delivering training etc.

In terms of funding development of new materials, we generally expect your programme materials to already have been used and developed, even in the case of pilot studies. It may be the case that you need to adapt your existing resources to fit the project, and we can fund small amounts of product development where important for project success. It also may be the case that there is a good reason for developing a new programme, for example the wider evidence suggests that the approach is likely to be beneficial, but there isn’t a programme to get this into schools (an example of this is formative feedback). However, as a guide, we would not expect this to constitute a high proportion of the funding.

**How much matched funding are applicants expected to secure?**

As a general rule, we expect applicants to source 5-50% of their total programme costs from other sources. This could come from a variety of sources, including: funding from other funding bodies, staff time contributions, schools involved in the project paying some of their costs or contributing staff time. The amount you self-fund is flexible, depending on the nature of the project and your organisation. Please note that for-profit organisations would be expected to make substantial contributions.
My project isn’t ready for funding yet. Are there any plans to repeat these rounds?

There are no current plans to repeat either the Improving Science Education round or the Science Teacher Retention round. The EEF usually runs two general application rounds per year. Science programmes with evidence that they are likely to improve the science attainment of students would be eligible to apply in future general rounds.

Who is responsible/has ownership for publications?

As with EEF grants usually, the delivery team are responsible only for the delivery of the intervention and a separate evaluation team are appointed to conduct the evaluation of the trial. This evaluation is subject to Crown copyright. During the set-up process we work with the delivery and evaluation teams to agree any additional publications either or both teams may wish to pursue in relation to the trial. With our permission and in agreement with the evaluation team, the delivery partner may produce their own reports that can be published any time after our original evaluation report. If the delivery partner would seek to collect additional information from trial participants to support their own research, this would need to be agreed during the set-up process. We would advise applicants to limit additional data collection as this can be burdensome to participants and lead to drop-out.

Regarding the Improving Science Education round, are you only interested in directly addressing the holes in the research identified in the Literature Review?

No. The report identified the most promising areas for further exploration, but the EEF and Wellcome are open to other ideas. The onus is on the applicant to present a convincing case as to why it would be most beneficial to do something else.

Is there a minimum proportion of schools that should be in England?

The Science Teacher Retention round funds activity in England only. The Improving Science Education round can include regions elsewhere in the UK. Programmes should be relevant to English schools, and a sizeable proportion of activity should take place in English schools, due to the EEF’s funding being exclusively for the benefit of these students. If a project were to take place in, for example, some Scottish schools, it would probably be advisable to have a reasonable proportion of schools recruited from Scotland in order to render any adaptations necessary for the Scottish syllabus worthwhile. As a guide, applicants may want to avoid proposing much under 50% of activity to take place in England.

In the application form, there is a question about taking the programme to scale. How much could a programme reasonably cost schools after the trial grant?

We generally use a school’s per-pupil Pupil Premium budget as a guide for the costs that a school could reasonably be expected to pay for a programme. If schools would struggle to pay for a programme, and there is no obvious other source of funding, we would have concerns about its potential scalability. When thinking about scalability we also take into account a programme’s feasibility and whether the training could be scaled to a greater number of schools (for example is it manualised? and it there a mechanism by which schools could receive training from someone other than the original developer). It is good if projects think about these issues early on, although they do not need to have all the answers when applying.

What types of improvement are suitable outcome measures?

For the Improving Science Education round, the primary outcome should be an attainment outcome. Generally we prefer nationally administered tests (e.g. Science GCSEs), but if this is not appropriate for your age group, a measure of general science attainment could be administered. The evaluation team assigned to your project would work with
you to decide the exact measure, so it is not necessary for you to have considered this before applying. We are interested in other outcomes that are central to your improvement model and usually would measure these as secondary outcomes. These outcomes will depend on the nature of your intervention, and could include scientific reasoning, teacher confidence, or progression to A Level study. Similarly, for the Science Teacher Retention round, the primary outcome is teacher retention in science teaching in the UK. Secondary outcomes could include teacher wellbeing, subject knowledge confidence, or retention in challenging schools, again depending on the nature of the intervention. During the set-up process, we would work with the delivery and evaluation teams to decide suitable outcomes and relevant measures.

Where a project has multiple outcomes (for example, improving both student attainment and teacher confidence), how will the success of the project be judged?

Our trials usually specify one primary outcome. This would likely be attainment for the Improving Science Education round, and teacher retention for the Science Teacher Retention round. Therefore, success, and the first key conclusion of the trial would be based on that outcome. However, during the set up process, we would also decide on any secondary outcomes, which would be reported at the time of publication. We may also decide to follow the outcomes of pupils as they progress to further key stages, which would later be added as an addendum to the report, and publicised appropriately.