

The **A**rea **B**ased **C**hildhood Programme 2013-2017

National Evaluation of the Area Based Childhood Programme: Summary Report

November 2018

The
A T L A N T I C
Philanthropies



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

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Block 1
Miesian Plaza
50-58 Lower Baggot Street
Dublin 2, D02 XW14
Tel: +353 (0)1 647 3000
Fax: +353 (0)1 667 0826
Email: contact@dcya.gov.ie
Web: www.dcya.gov.ie

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Minister's Foreword

As Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I am very pleased to publish this report presenting the final findings of the National Evaluation of the Area Based Childhood Programme 2013-2017.

Since becoming Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, I have made it both a personal and political priority to make real progress in improving outcomes for our children and in addressing child poverty in our society. If we are to make Ireland a better country in which to grow up and raise a family, we need to ensure policies aimed at addressing intractable problems are informed by best practice in the field.

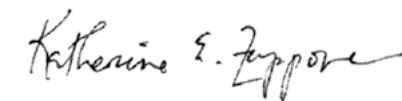
Evaluation findings from programmes such as the Area Based Childhood Programme present us all with an opportunity to identify what works to improve outcomes for children experiencing disadvantage, so that we can ensure the services we provide for children, young people and their families can have maximum impact.

This evaluation report has found that over the period of investment made by my Department and The Atlantic Philanthropies, the ABC Programme made a positive contribution in the lives of children and their families; improving relationships between parents and children, increasing children's readiness for school and improving children's social and emotional well-being.

The report offers insights into local models of service delivery and the impact innovative, evidence-informed approaches, delivered through strong interagency working can have on the social and emotional well-being of our children and their families. It notes the value of collaborative working relationships within communities, within and across disciplines, and across the breadth of services connected with children and young people's services. Importantly, it highlights mentoring, training and joint events, as contributing to changes for practitioners and service managers.

This evaluation offers important learning for all of us, at a local and national level. Such learning supports the significant work of my Department in the area of prevention and early intervention. The progress of implementation of Better Outcomes Brighter Futures and the scaling-up of Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) have added considerably to advancing this agenda. It is critical however that the learning of what works best for children in the area of prevention and early intervention is actively applied across all levels of the system to maximise the impact of investments. This is being done through the current work in my Department under the Quality and Capacity Building Initiative (QCBI). Such an initiative, being led by Government, is unique internationally in the prevention and early intervention domain.

We will continue to work to ensure that these initiatives and interventions inform both policy and practice so that those working with and for children, young people and their families are supported in doing the right things, in the right way and at the right time.



Dr Katherine Zappone, TD
Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

Summary of Key Findings from the National Evaluation

Overall, the national evaluation found evidence that the ABC Programme made a positive contribution to:

- Improved outcomes for children and families
- Changes for practitioners and service managers participating in the Programme
- Changes to service planning and delivery.

The evaluation also explored the costs associated with implementing the ABC Programme.

What's Changed for Children and Parents?

- Improved relationships between parents and children
- Increased school readiness for children aged between two and four years old
- Improvements in children's social and emotional well-being.

What's Changed for Practitioners and Service Managers?

- Local models of service delivery changed with new or adapted interventions being implemented, and practitioners adopting new or changed professional ways of working
- Practitioners and service managers developed increased capacity to collect evidence and data, and greater understanding of its value. There was more evidence and data available, and greater use of it to inform service planning and delivery
- Interagency working changed with new and strengthened relationships between practitioners, strengthened agency-to-agency working, and increased recognition and appreciation by practitioners and service managers for different types of interagency working
- The ABC Programme activities, such as mentoring, training and joint events, were frequently cited as contributing to changes for practitioners and service managers
- Challenges to change included: securing the buy-in of practitioners, service managers, decision-makers and service users; having sufficient resourcing and time to enact change; and engaging all key stakeholders in change processes.

What's Changed in Strategic Planning and Service Delivery?

- Use, or greater use, of evidence and data to inform strategic planning and service delivery
- Greater use of implementation, mainstreaming and sustainability plans
- Evidence-based/informed interventions adopted or/and perceived as likely to be embedded in local service delivery
- Consortium structures supported more effective strategic planning and service delivery locally
- Less evidence of strategic planning and service delivery changing at the national level
- Challenges to change included: a lack of shared understanding of what was meant by 'mainstreaming', what successful mainstreaming would look like, what elements of the Programme would be mainstreamed and by whom.

The Costs of the ABC Programme

For the ABC areas, for 2015, 2016 and 2017:

- Total expenditure by the areas was €22.6million, comprising funder investment of €16.9 million and leveraged resources of €5.7 million
- Direct intervention costs accounted for 64 per cent of total spend annually
- Areas spent 30 per cent of expenditure on parenting interventions, 33 per cent on child health and development interventions, and 33 per cent on children's learning interventions.

Introduction and Background to the ABC Programme

This summary report presents the final findings from the national evaluation of the Area Based Childhood Programme (ABC Programme). The ABC Programme is an area-based prevention and early intervention initiative. It targets investment in evidence-based/informed interventions to improve outcomes for children and families living in areas of disadvantage in Ireland.

The ABC Programme supports services for children and families living in areas of disadvantage where outcomes are significantly poorer than they are for children and young people living elsewhere in the State. The Programme also aims to embed effective practices in mainstream services and ensure that services being delivered have the most impact, are timely and accessible, and have the potential to become mainstreamed and sustainable.

The ABC Programme was funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and The Atlantic Philanthropies, with an investment of €30.7 million between 2013 and 2017. As of July 2018, the ABC Programme had received funding from DCYA to continue the Programme to late 2018, across the ABC areas.

The ABC Programme is delivered in 13 areas, led by consortia who coordinate the planning and delivery of services in their area. These areas are: Ballyfermot, Ballymun, Bray, Clondalkin, Dublin Docklands, Dublin 5 and Dublin 17 (one area), Dundalk and Drogheda (one area), Finglas, Grangegorman, Knocknaheeny, Limerick, the Midlands¹ and Tallaght West.

Examples of interventions delivered through the ABC Programme include:

- Parent and family supports, e.g. *Parents Plus*, *Triple P*, *Strengthening Families*
- Community-based ante and postnatal care and education, e.g. *Preparing for Life*, *Up to 2*
- Supporting the implementation of *Aistear*, *Síolta* and *HighScope* in early years settings
- Supporting transitions from early years settings to primary schools
- Promoting social and emotional development among children, e.g. *Roots of Empathy*, *PAX Good Behaviour Game*, and the *Incredible Years* suite of interventions
- Promoting youth mental health and well-being, e.g. *FRIENDS Programme*
- Supporting literacy and numeracy among school-aged children, e.g. *Doodle Den*, *Early Numeracy Programme*, *Wizards of Words*, and *Write to Read*
- Supporting oral language development for children aged up to seven years, e.g. *Happy Talk*.

The Centre for Effective Services (CES) was tasked by the funders to undertake the national evaluation. The ABC areas contributed to the national evaluation, in many ways, including through data collection. CES would like to thank the ABC areas and all stakeholders for their assistance and support in interpreting the national evaluation findings. The national evaluation of the ABC Programme covers the period 2015 to 2017.

About the Evaluation

The evaluation questions, their associated sub-questions, including key policy questions, and how these questions were articulated in the national evaluation of the ABC Programme are summarised in Figure 1.

The framework for the national evaluation was designed by CES in 2014 with advice from the Expert Advisory Group (EAG). The final design enabled the exploration of the evaluation questions and related sub-questions using a variety of data sources and approaches, as outlined in Table 1. Further details on the evaluation design can be found in the Main Report of the national evaluation of the ABC Programme, www.dcy.gov.ie.

Figure 1: ABC Programme evaluation objectives and questions

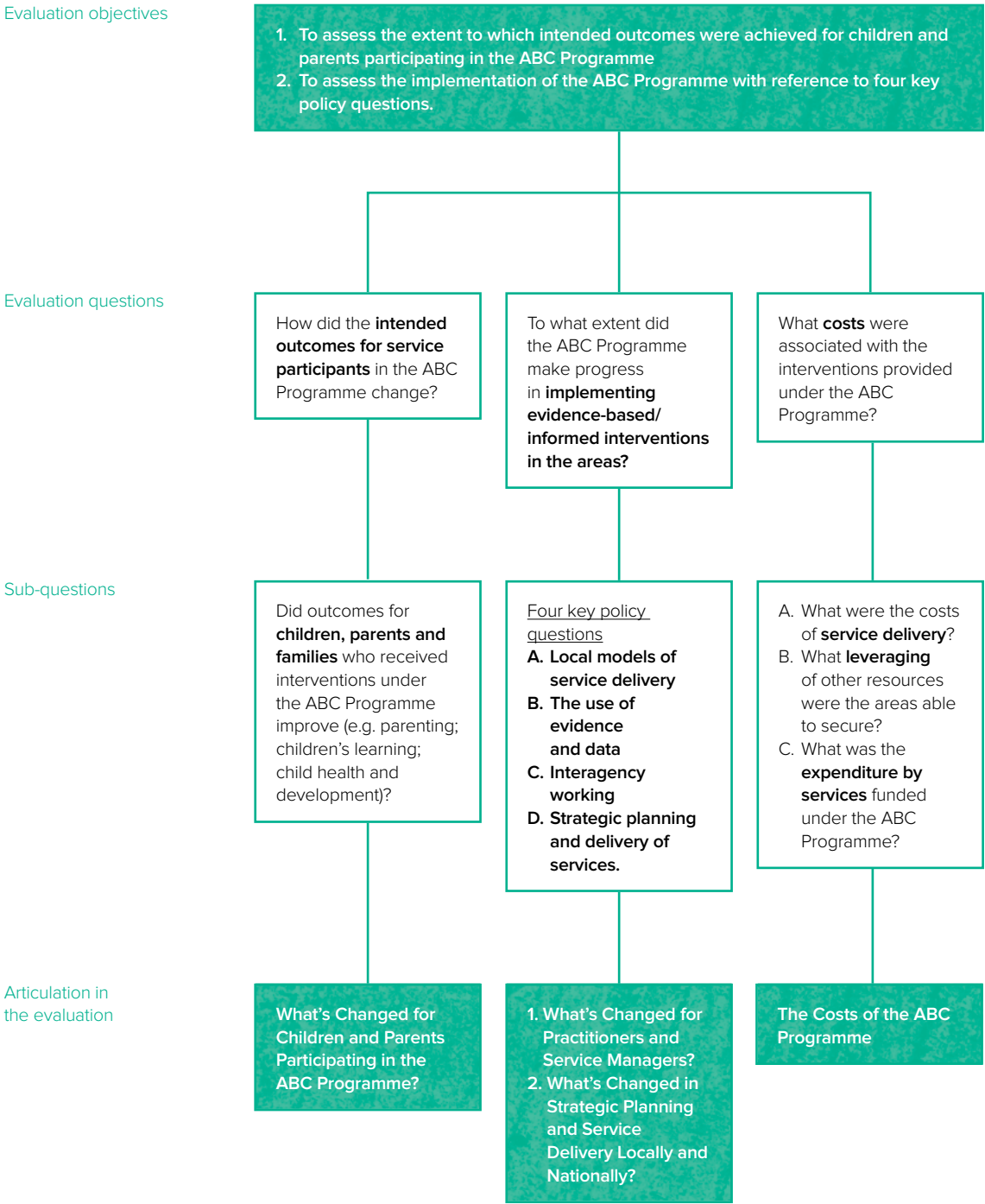


Table 1: Summary of methods and data sources used to answer the key evaluation questions for the national evaluation of the ABC Programme.

Evaluation question(s)	Evaluation approaches and sources of data
What's Changed for Children and Parents?	<p>Primary approach Analysis of outcomes data collected using a shared outcomes measurement framework between September 2015 and July 2016, and September 2016 and July 2017. The measures selected were suitable for use across multiple interventions and areas, were research-validated, reliable and had been used in previous Irish research. A set of core measures were agreed, and areas could also choose to use a range of discretionary measures.</p> <p>Supporting evidence Data collected between December 2016 and June 2017 from interviews and focus groups, and web-based surveys involving local, regional and national stakeholders.</p>
What's Changed for Practitioners and Service Managers? Policy questions (A) to (C) What's Changed in Strategic Planning and Service Delivery, Locally and Nationally? Policy question (D)	<p>Primary approach Analysis of the data collected from interviews and focus groups, and web-based surveys involving local, regional and national stakeholders between December 2016 and June 2017.</p> <p><i>Profile of surveyed practitioners and service managers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 355 practitioners and 110 service managers completed the web-based survey, including: teachers, early years practitioners, and family support staff. They provided early years services, group-based parenting interventions and home-visiting interventions, amongst others. <p><i>Profile of consortium members</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 188 consortium members from across 12 areas completed the web-based survey; and most of them fulfilled multiple roles within their consortium, e.g. membership of a subcommittee or managing staff delivering interventions.• Surveyed consortium members worked in family support services, early years services, primary schools, and public health services, among others. <p>Supporting evidence Documentary analysis used to confirm findings from the primary approach.</p>
Cost Analysis	<p>Primary approach Quantitative analysis of the cost data received from the ABC areas for 2015 to 2017.</p> <p>Supporting evidence Data from interviews and focus groups collected between December 2016 and June 2017.</p>

ISSUES TO KEEP IN MIND ABOUT THE EVALUATION DESIGN

The ABC Programme is a complex, systems change initiative and as such, there were some limitations relating to design of, and the analyses completed for, the national evaluation, including:

1. This was a national evaluation, based on national-level data. It was concerned with findings for the ABC Programme as a whole and it did not examine individual interventions or areas.
2. It was not possible to construct comparison groups for this evaluation. Any differences in the outcomes achieved for parents and children could have been the result of factors such as children’s natural development, or other policy initiatives. However, by way of context, *Growing Up in Ireland* study data were used to locate the findings relating to children and parents in trends within the national population. While the changes to the delivery of services could have been the result of other policy initiatives, the CES evaluation team was able to explore the Programme’s potential contribution to these changes.
3. Outcomes data from the national evaluation did not cover the full extent of interventions offered by each area.
4. This evaluation was based on self-reported data. Any differences in outcomes for children and parents, or alterations to the delivery of services, were reported by the people who were either receiving the interventions or involved in their delivery. However, documentary analysis was used to triangulate emerging findings.
5. There were missing data for some elements of the evaluation, for example, there was a drop in the number of children and parents who participated in the evaluation after the interventions, and some areas did not record all leveraged resources secured. However, all findings were supported by the triangulation of data across methods and sources.

What's Changed for Children and Parents?

This section describes changes observed for children and parents who participated in the ABC Programme evaluation between 2015 to 2016 and 2016 to 2017 in three outcome areas:

- Parenting
- Children’s learning
- Children’s health and development.

There was evidence that the ABC Programme positively contributed to changes in parenting outcomes for parents, and in learning and health and development outcomes for children participating in the Programme.

PARENTING OUTCOMES

Parenting interventions included in the national evaluation were offered in ten ABC areas and typically involved group-based interventions, such as *Triple P Positive Parenting Programme*, *Incredible Years* and *Strengthening Families*, among others.

Child-parent relationships

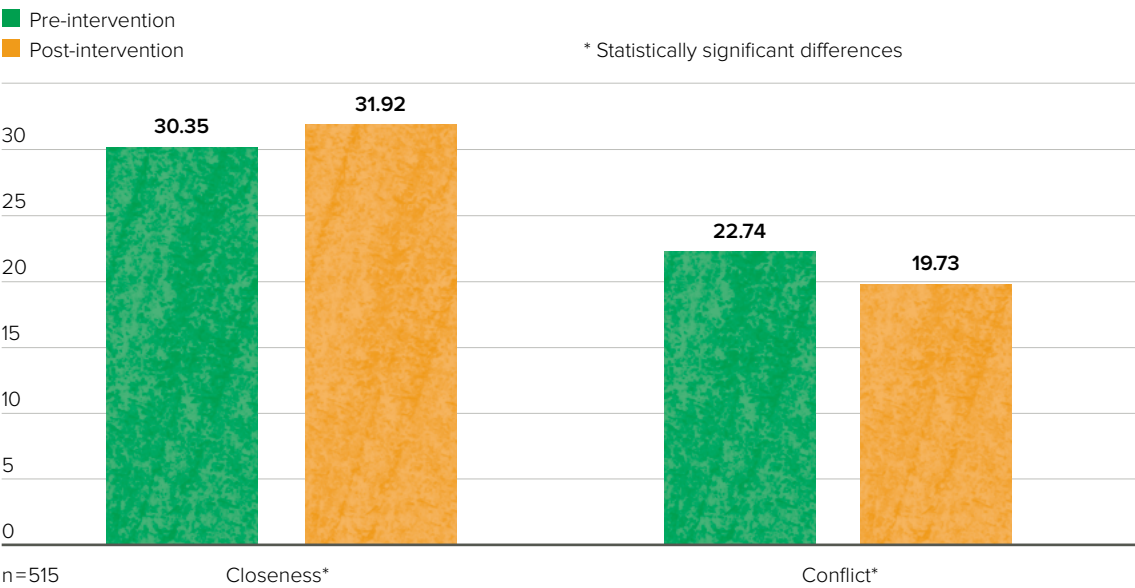
Parents who participated in the ABC Programme evaluation were asked to complete a measure of the quality of the child-parent relationship, the child-parent relationship scale (CPRS). This measure has two sub-scales to assess the ‘closeness’ (the degree to which a parent feels their relationship with their child is characterised by warmth, affection, and open communication) and ‘conflict’ (the

extent to which a parent feels their relationship with their child is characterised by negativity). Across ten ABC areas, 515 parents completed questionnaires both before and after receiving an intervention. The findings from the analysis of their responses pre- and post-intervention are shown in Figure 2.

These data show that the scores for closeness increased, while the scores for conflict decreased following the interventions. Both changes were desirable and statistically significant.

This means that parents who participated in the evaluation reported improved relationships with their children after receiving the interventions

Figure 2: Pre- and post-intervention mean scores for CPRS



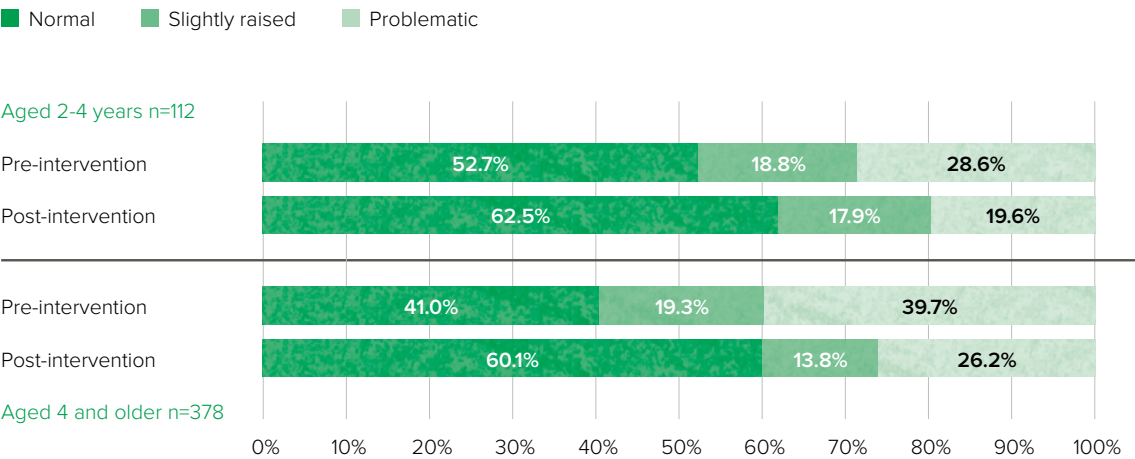
For context, the *Growing Up in Ireland (GUI)* study also measured child-parent relationships using the CPRS. For children aged five years,² the mean national score for closeness was 33.73, and the score for conflict was 14.95 among primary caregivers.

Children’s social and emotional well-being
Parents who participated in the evaluation were also asked to complete the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which assesses the social and emotional well-being of children. This questionnaire has five different sub-scales: one for prosocial behaviours, and four for social and emotional difficulties (conduct problems, hyperactivity, emotional problems, and peer problems). A total difficulties score is calculated, which is the sum of the scores from the four social and emotional difficulties sub-scales.

For children aged two to four years, in seven ABC areas, 112 parents completed the SDQ pre- and post-intervention. For children aged four years and older, in nine ABC areas, 378 parents completed an SDQ pre- and post-intervention. Data from these completed questionnaires were included in the evaluation analysis.

The SDQ defines cut-off scores using the total difficulties score, above which a child’s social and emotional behaviour is considered concerning. These cut-offs can be used to classify a child’s behaviour as either falling within a ‘normal’, ‘slightly raised’ or ‘problematic’ range. The proportion of children in each range for the total difficulties score is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Proportion of children scoring in the different ranges on the completed SDQs



“It’s just a whole change and it’s calmer, much calmer, children are calmer and happy. When children are happy, then staff are happy, and the parents are happy, so it impacts on everybody.”

- Consortium member

In both age groups, the number of children in the ‘problematic’ and ‘slightly raised’ ranges of behavioural difficulty decreased and these movements between the ranges were statistically significant.

This means that parents who participated in the evaluation reported that their children demonstrated improvements in their social and emotional well-being after the interventions.

Parental stress
Seven ABC areas asked parents participating in the evaluation to complete the optional measure, the Parental Stress Scale (PSS), to assess how they felt about their parenting role. The questionnaire was completed by 424 parents at pre- and post-intervention. It was found that there was a statistically significant and desirable decrease in the average score after the intervention, from 40.91 to 35.58.

This means that parents who participated in the evaluation reported a decrease in their stress levels after taking part in the parenting interventions.

Discipline and boundary setting
Four ABC areas asked parents participating in the evaluation to complete the discipline and boundary setting sub-scale of the optional measure, the Tool to Measure Parenting Self-Efficacy (TOPSE). This sub-scale was used to assess how parents felt about their ability to discipline and set boundaries for their children. There were 323 TOPSE questionnaires completed pre- and post-intervention. It was found that parents experienced a positive and statistically significant change in their self-reported abilities to discipline and set boundaries for their children, with a mean score of 34.86 pre-intervention, and 43.94 post-intervention.

This means that parents who participated in the evaluation reported feeling better able to discipline and set boundaries for their children after participating in the interventions.

Other changes for parents
Both local and regional stakeholders reported other changes for parents participating in ABC Programme-supported interventions, including:

- Changes in levels of perceived empowerment and increased confidence
- The development of informal peer networks and supports among parents
- An increased knowledge of, and confidence to engage, local services.

CHILDREN'S LEARNING OUTCOMES

Improving children's readiness for school was the primary focus of the children's learning interventions which were provided in nine ABC areas and included in this evaluation. Typical interventions included a range of professional development supports for early years practitioners, and interventions targeting early literacy and numeracy. Such interventions included were *Zoom Ahead with Books* and the *Incredible Years Early Years Classroom Dinosaur* programme.

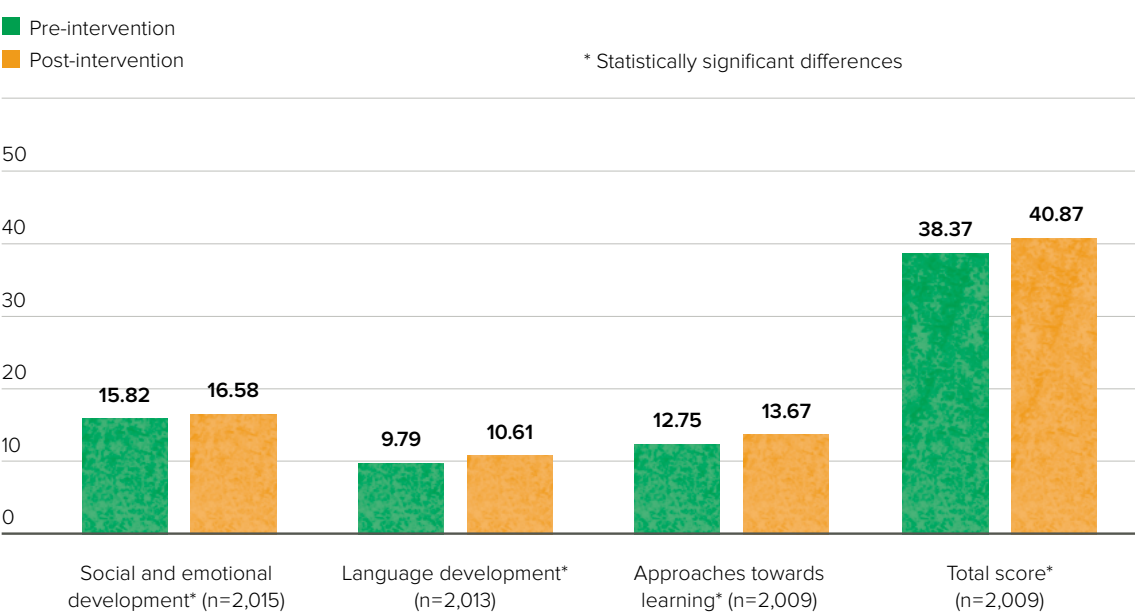
Children's school readiness
Early years practitioners were asked to complete the Santa Barbara School Readiness Scale (SBSRS), the key measure used to assess school readiness for the national evaluation. Practitioners in nine ABC areas completed this measure pre- and post-intervention for 2,009 children.

As shown in Figure 4, there were small but desirable and statistically significant improvements in each of the sub-scales (social and emotional development, language development and approaches to learning), contributing to an increase in the total school readiness score.

This means that children aged two to four years who participated in the evaluation demonstrated increased school readiness after the interventions.

By way of context, an Irish study of 113 preschool children, identified as having school readiness and speech and language problems, reported total mean scores for the SBSRS of 38.66 pre-intervention and 41.26 post-intervention.³

Figure 4: Pre- and post-intervention mean scores on the SBSRS



Social and emotional well-being
Practitioners and parents in a small number of ABC areas completed the SDQ, as an optional measure.

For children aged two to four years, practitioners completed 406 SDQs and parents completed 193 SDQs, and these were included in the evaluation analysis. Statistically significant improvements in overall social and emotional difficulties were found after these children completed the interventions.

For children aged four years and older, practitioners in a small number of ABC areas completed pre- and post-intervention SDQs for 279 children. Practitioners reported desirable and statistically significant improvements in the post-intervention mean total difficulties score.

This means that children in both age groups who participated in the evaluation showed fewer difficulties in terms of their overall social and emotional well-being, after receiving the interventions.

Home learning environment

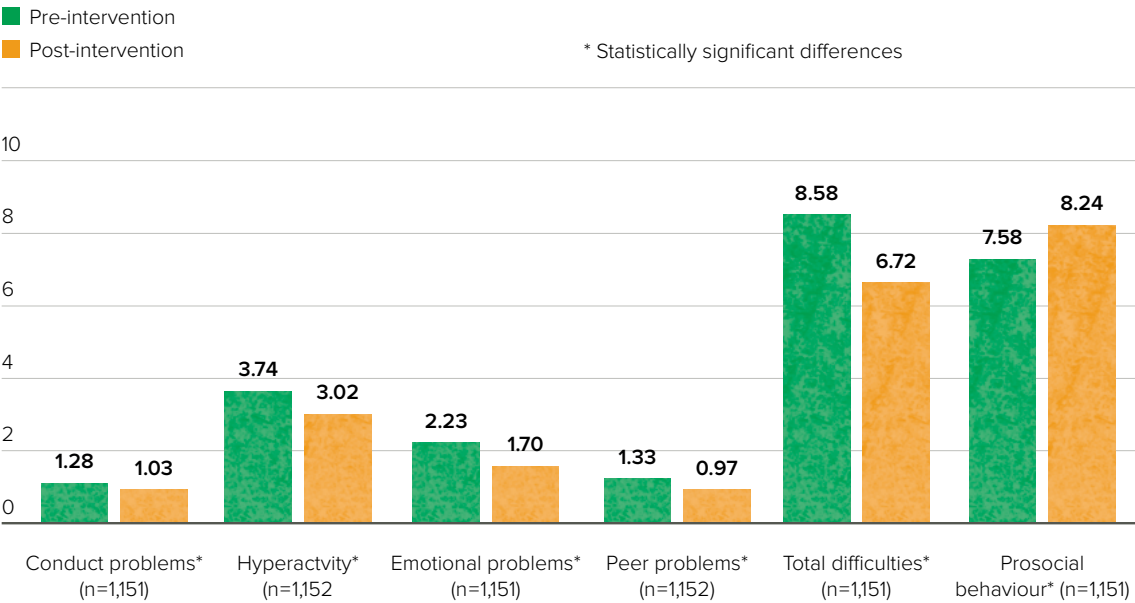
A small number of areas chose to also collect data about the home learning environment, using the Home Learning Environment Measure (HLEM). A total of 251 HLEM questionnaires were completed pre- and post-intervention and included in the evaluation analysis. The mean score for the HLEM increased between pre- and post-intervention from 32.74 to 34.02; a change which was desirable and statistically significant.

This means that parents reported an improvement in the home learning environment for their children after participating in the interventions.

CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Typical children’s health and development interventions provided in seven ABC areas, included in the evaluation, focused on improving the social and emotional development of children attending primary school. They included evidence-based interventions such as the *Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management Programme*, *Roots of Empathy* and the *Incredible Years Classroom Dinosaur Programme*.

Figure 5: Pre- and post-intervention mean scores from teacher-reported SDQs for children aged four and older



Children’s social and emotional well-being

Teachers completed SDQs for 1,152 children aged over four years and older. As shown in Figure 5, teachers reported desirable and statistically significant improvements for all sub-scales, with a decrease of 1.86 in the mean total difficulties score between pre- and post-intervention. Just over two-thirds of children had initial scores in the ‘normal’ range, this rose to over three-quarters of all children post intervention.

Overall, these changes mean that children aged four and older who participated in the evaluation demonstrated improvements in their social and emotional well-being, after the interventions.

What's Changed for Practitioners and Service Managers?

This section summarises findings related to how the ABC Programme contributed to changes for practitioners and service managers participating in the Programme.

There was evidence that the ABC Programme's inputs and activities, such as training and coaching supports, and consortium structures, positively contributed to changes in local models of service provision, use of evidence and data in planning and service delivery, and interagency working.

It is worth noting that data on the implementation of the ABC Programme were collected between December 2016 and June 2017 and, at that time, the status and the extent to which changes had embedded in local implementation systems and/or would continue be sustained was less clear.

“If you look at the local family resource centre, the only evidence-based programme they had was [a parenting intervention]... Whereas, now there’s a whole new suite of evidence-based programmes being delivered.”

- Lead agency representative

CHANGES TO LOCAL MODELS OF SERVICE PROVISION

Local service provision was reported to have changed in three ways across most ABC areas. It was reported that the ABC Programme had contributed to:

- New interventions/services being implemented
- Existing interventions being adapted
- Practitioners adopting new or changed professional approaches or ways of working.

Training and other professional development supports were provided to participating practitioners and managers in the use of evidence-based/informed interventions through the ABC Programme.

As a consequence of changes to local models of service delivery, there was evidence of greater coordination between local service providers, more comprehensive service coverage and/or portfolios of interventions being available in communities which were more appropriate to local needs.

Local and regional service providers across sectors were, for the most part, positively disposed to the ABC Programme, and the new interventions and ways of working that were being supported by it. However, a small number of regional and national stakeholders, providing services across wider geographical areas than those covered by the ABC Programme, reported the challenges they experienced in maintaining awareness of all ABC Programme-supported interventions and in coordinating referrals to and from ABC areas. Local, regional and national stakeholders also reported challenges in avoiding duplication or displacement of effort with existing services.

“Participating in the ABC Programme highlighted the importance of recording data, using outcome measures and using evidence-based interventions. These methods allow for transparency, accountability and ensuring a client’s needs are being addressed”

- Mental health professional

CHANGES IN THE USE OF EVIDENCE AND
DATA IN PLANNING AND SERVICE DELIVERY

There was evidence that the ABC Programme contributed to the following changes amongst practitioners and service managers:

- Increased capacity, especially among practitioners, to collect evidence and data as part of their routine practice
- Greater understanding of the value of evidence and data
- More evidence and data available within the areas
- Greater use of evidence and data to inform service planning and delivery.

As a consequence of these reported changes, local stakeholders noted that there were improvements in service planning and delivery. For example, practitioners and service managers used evidence and data to systematically assess issues within their areas and change planning and delivery accordingly.

While the ABC Programme contributed to positive changes in the use of evidence and data, local stakeholders noted that there were also challenges for practitioners in the use of evidence and data:

- Completing data collection and collation within existing workloads
- The lack of local research capacity in some areas to collect and interpret evidence and data
- Insufficient alignment between the evidence and data collected for the national evaluation, and the data useful for informing local planning and service delivery.

“The ABC project takes up a huge chunk of my working day... even though it’s taking up a huge amount of my time... it’s a much more productive way of working.”

- Consortium member

CHANGES IN INTERAGENCY WORKING

Over the course of the ABC Programme, interagency working was reported to have changed across the areas in the following key ways:

- New and strengthened relationships between practitioners working with children and families
- Strengthened agency-to-agency working, with some examples of new agency-to-agency relationships
- A shift in practice by practitioners and service managers to incorporate more interagency working
- Increased recognition and appreciation for different types of interagency working at the practitioner-to-practitioner and agency-to-agency levels.

Local stakeholders reported that the ABC Programme supports and activities facilitated relationship building and the sharing of information between practitioners, while also contributing to increased practitioner awareness of services in local areas. Local stakeholders also reported that working through consortium structures and having the support of a dedicated lead agency/coordinator enabled more effective interagency working.

There was some evidence of where interagency working brought challenges. In a few cases, the time and effort needed for interagency working impacted negatively on workloads. It was also sometimes reported as difficult to engage the ‘right’ people, in terms of authority and decision-making power, in local consortia.

There were some indications that interagency working at the practitioner-to-practitioner and agency-to-agency levels contributed to more coordinated local services for children and families, for example strengthened referral pathways between different agencies

What’s Changed in Strategic Planning and Service Delivery Locally and Nationally?

This section summarises the findings related to how the ABC Programme contributed to changes in strategic planning and service delivery locally and nationally.

Overall, the ABC Programme was found to have positively contributed to changes in strategic planning and service delivery locally.

It is important to note that evaluation data related to these findings were collected between December 2016 and June 2017 and that DCYA has since been developing the next phase of the ABC Programme.

LOCAL-LEVEL CHANGES

Over the course of the ABC Programme, local service planning and delivery was reported to have changed across the ABC areas in the following ways:

- Use, or greater use, of evidence and data to inform service planning and delivery
- Greater use of implementation, mainstreaming and sustainability plans
- Evidence-based/informed interventions adopted or/and perceived as likely to be mainstreamed and sustained in local service delivery.

Evaluation participants reported that the consortium structures established in the ABC areas, formalised service planning and delivery by acting as platforms to bring interested stakeholders together. Local stakeholders also reported increased levels of implementation, mainstreaming and sustainability planning locally, which they noted supported more effective strategic planning and service delivery.

NATIONAL-LEVEL CHANGES

There was less evidence of strategic planning and service delivery changing at the national level, with limited engagement between Departments and national agencies to embed evidence-based/informed interventions coming from the ABC Programme into national service delivery. However, there were some examples of where such interventions were reported as, or expected to be, embedded in national service delivery.

Evaluation participants reported the challenges in achieving change in strategic planning and service delivery locally and nationally. These included a lack of clarity about:

- What ‘mainstreaming’ meant
- What successful mainstreaming might look like in the context of the objectives of the ABC Programme
- Responsibility for ensuring that mainstreaming of evidence-based/informed interventions occurred.

The lack of key stakeholder buy-in was also reported as a challenge.

These challenges, among others, were reported by stakeholders to have affected the way in which the Inter-Departmental Project Team (IDPT) contributed to the ABC Programme. The IDPT comprised key Government Departments and agency representatives and was established, in part, to facilitate the mainstreaming of interventions and practices delivered under the ABC Programme. There was consensus among the few national stakeholders who commented, that the IDPT did not inform the implementation of the ABC Programme as intended, in terms of inter-Departmental or agency coordination in the national planning of services for children and families.

“Everything we’ve done, you think of the schools, you think of the amount of people that have been trained..., that doesn’t go away once the ABC Programme in the area has disappeared. That’s all there and it has built upon what was already here, and because so many people have buy-in into it, it’s not going to go away.”

- Consortium member

Factors Contributing to Change

The national evaluation found evidence of a range of factors which acted as enablers and barriers to achieving changes for children and parents, practitioners and service managers, and in strategic planning and service delivery.

In some instances, the same factors acted as enablers, and their absence created a barrier, to successful implementation of the ABC Programme. Table 2 summarises the factors most commonly reported by stakeholders as supporting or hindering change and what it was about these factors that made them enablers or barriers.

Table 2: Mostly commonly reported factors contributing to/hindering change in the ABC areas

Changes for/in	Enabling factors	Factors acting as barriers
CHILDREN AND PARENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Securing stakeholder buy-in: from parents and local advocates for the interventions through the use of evidence-based/informed interventions• Relationships: positive relationships between practitioners and service users• Area-based approach: to better identify and address local needs• Past and current policy initiatives and programmes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Area-based approach: excluded service users from outside an 'area' from availing of interventions• Lack of stakeholder buy-in: from parents because of, for example, lack of understanding of the interventions on offer, fear or suspicion of the services, and language barriers.
PRACTITIONERS AND SERVICE MANAGERS		
Local models of service delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of evidence-based/informed interventions: 'tried and tested nature' of such interventions secured practitioner buy-in• Attitudes, knowledge and beliefs: building commitment, confidence, and professional pride of practitioners and service managers in their work• Funding: to provide training, to release staff to attend training, to buy materials and resources required for interventions, and to employ a coordinator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Area-based approach: created environment for potential crowding, fragmentation and displacement of services• Lack of time: to reflect upon practice and models of service provision, and to make long-lasting changes to professional practices• Past and current policy initiatives and programmes: e.g. non-contact time for early years practitioners limited efforts to upskill staff in new ways of working.
Use of evidence and data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Securing stakeholder buy-in: from practitioners/ service managers in the use of evidence and data through sharing experiences of positive outcomes• Attitudes, knowledge and beliefs: building practitioners'/service managers' confidence of, and experience in, collecting/using evidence and data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Funding and human resources: lack of local research capacity to collect and interpret data, staff turnover diluting capacity within an area• Time: to collect and reflect upon evidence and data.
Interagency working	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Area-based approach: to build new and strengthen existing relationships• Funding: to build and maintain relationships, and to release staff for networking opportunities• Lead agency/coordinator leadership to support interagency working in organising meetings etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Human resources: staff turnover and retention hindering longer-term interagency working• Time: to meet, build and strengthen interagency relationships.
STRATEGIC PLANNING AND SERVICE DELIVERY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consortium leadership to develop a shared vision and mission and to encourage stakeholder participation; use of an independent chair of the consortium• Communication and information sharing: to ensure that processes were in place to support communication between stakeholders and to keep the wider service provider community informed about the work in the ABC area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time: to embed evidence-based/informed interventions and learning• Uncertainty over the duration of ABC Programme funding led to difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff• Leadership: at national and regional levels, to achieve long-term change in service delivery across the areas and nationally.

The Costs of the ABC Programme

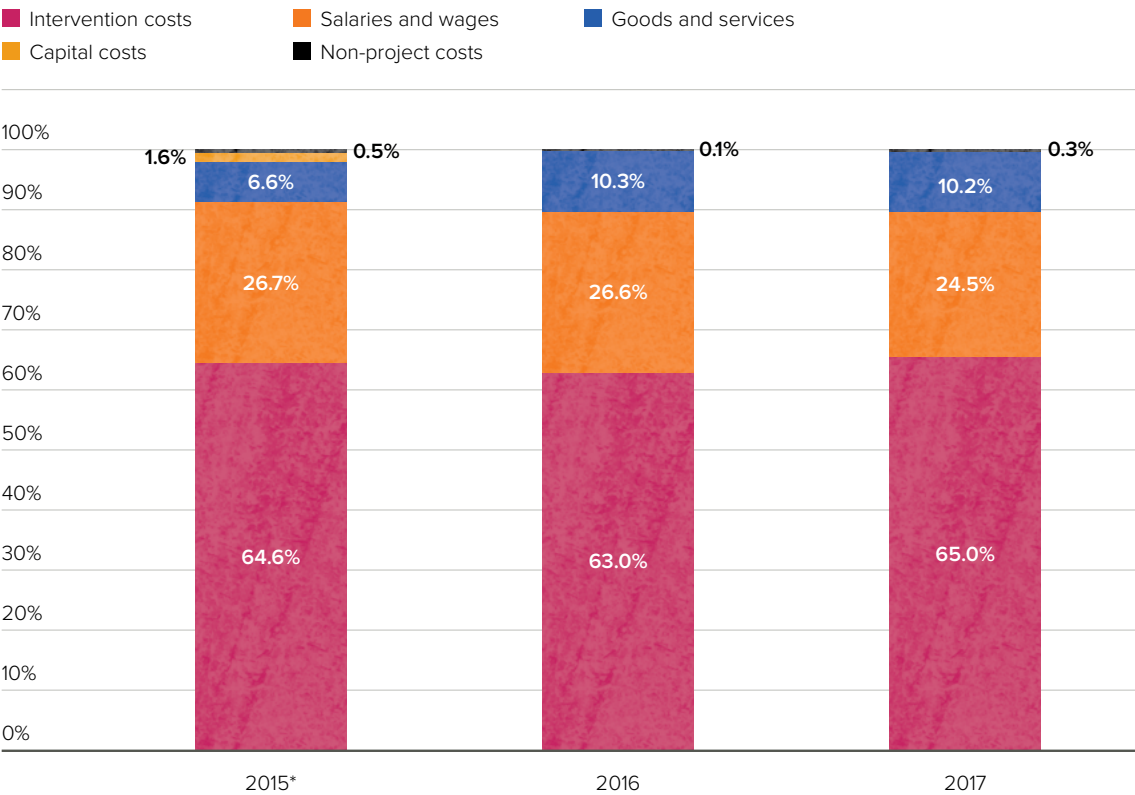
This section provides information about the costs of the ABC Programme between 2015 and 2017. The cost analysis element of the national evaluation focused on answering three questions:

- What were the costs of service delivery?
- What leveraging of other resources have areas secured?
- What has been the expenditure by services funded under the ABC Programme?

COSTS OF SERVICE DELIVERY

The ABC Programme received a total investment of €30.7 million from the Programme funders, DCYA and The Atlantic Philanthropies; €25.9 million of which was allocated to ABC areas for service delivery between January 2013 and December 2017. During the period under review (January 2015 to December 2017), the total expenditure associated with the implementation of the ABC Programme was €16.9 million.

Figure 6: Total costs of service delivery, 2015-2017



* Data collected by three former PEIP areas for the period 1st January to 30th June 2015 not included.

As demonstrated in Figure 6, intervention costs represented approximately 64 per cent of total spend across 2015, 2016 and 2017. However, cross-area analysis shows that there was wide variation within years, in how much areas spent on interventions costs. This variation may be linked to areas having services at various stages of implementation.

Spend on salaries and wages, not associated with delivering interventions, remained constant for the ABC Programme, at approximately 26 per cent across 2015, 2016 and 2017.

A final category of cost, which was substantial from 2015 to 2017, was goods and services. Area spend on goods and services, as a proportion of total spend, rose from seven per cent in 2015 to 10 percent in 2016 and 2017. Again, this is likely related to the stages of implementation across the areas, where as areas progressed in their implementation of services they spent an increasing amount on goods and services.

LEVERAGED RESOURCES

Additional to funder investment (grant funding), areas reported securing at least €5.7 million worth of leveraged resources from consortium and non-consortium partners between 2015 and 2017. Thus, the total cost of areas delivering services through the ABC Programme was €22.6 million between 2015 and 2017. It is worth noting that the amount of leveraged resources recorded for the evaluation is likely to be an underestimate: not all areas provided cost information on leveraged resources secured and some did not record any additional levels of such resources once an amount worth 20 per cent of their grant funding was secured. See the main report for more details, www.dcy.gov.ie

COSTS OF DELIVERING SERVICES INTENDED TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS

The cost analysis explored the direct and non-direct costs of delivering interventions aligned to the three ABC Programme outcome areas for children and parents:

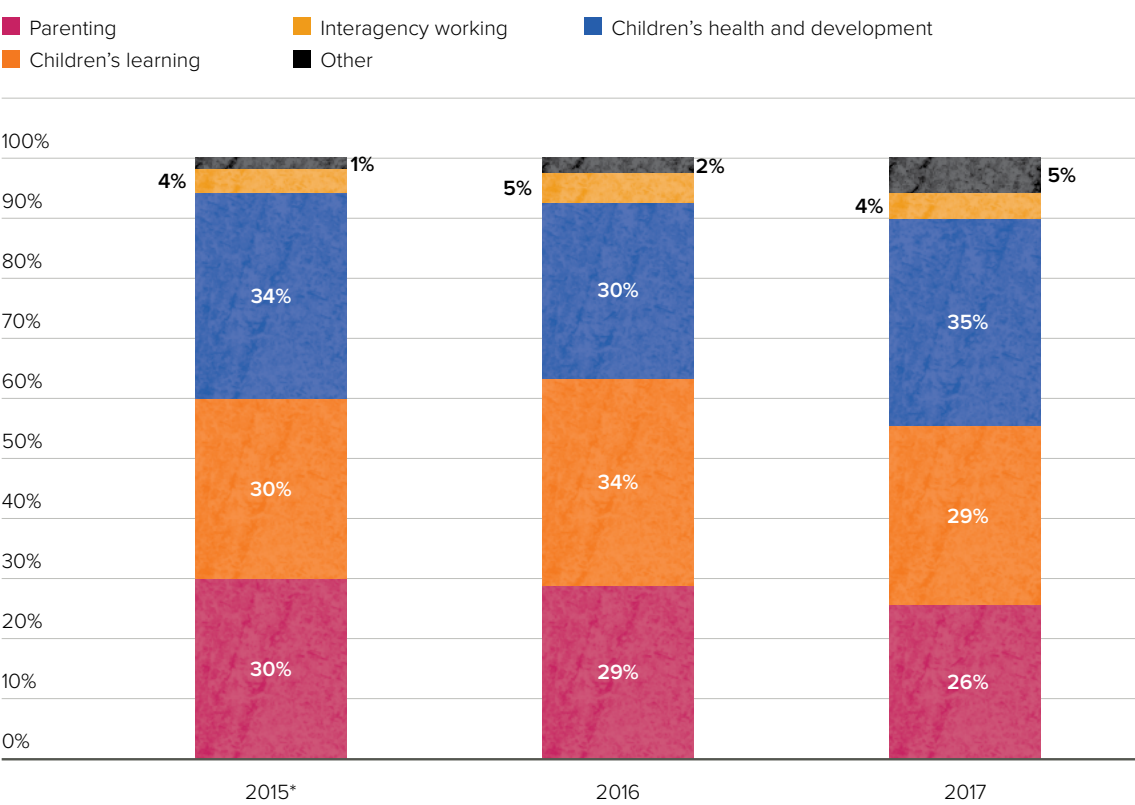
- Improved parenting
- Improved children’s learning
- Improved children’s health and development

At a system-level, the ABC Programme was intended to improve interagency working and areas submitted their calculations of the costs of interagency working in their financial returns.

Spend on delivering interventions aligned to the three outcome areas and interagency working are illustrated in Figure 7.

As shown in Figure 7, across the three years, ABC areas spent, on average, approximately 30 per cent of expenditure on parenting interventions, 33 per cent on children’s health and development interventions, and 33 per cent on children’s learning interventions. Spend by the areas on interagency working accounted for four-to-five per cent of all grant funded-spend for the same period, see main report for further details.

Figure 7: Allocation of costs by outcome area, 2015-2017



* Data collected by three former PEIP areas for the period 1st January to 30th June 2015 not included.

Learning for the Future

This section presents the key learning based on the findings and conclusions of the evaluation. It also includes learning from the evaluation about assessing the implementation and outcomes of complex and multi-site initiatives like the ABC Programme. The learning emerging from, and for, the current ABC Programme can be applied to similar initiatives in the future.

ACHIEVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS

- **Service user engagement and buy-in is critical.** Achieving this buy-in can be aided by ensuring that: interventions address the needs of a community; service provision is tailored to meet specific needs; and services are delivered in appropriate and accessible ways to service users.
- **Targeted universal approaches** to providing interventions can encourage service user uptake.
- **Adopting evidence-based/informed interventions supports service user engagement** and helps to secure the buy-in of practitioners responsible for service delivery.
- **Adopting an area-based approach increases practitioner knowledge** of the availability of other local services and can support practitioners to refer parents and children to services potentially more suitable to meet their needs.
- While **area-based approaches** can support better engagement of service users, it is important to note that this approach **may not always be appropriate or feasible** e.g. taking an area-based approach supports the achievement of outcomes in a select number of individual communities but excludes other communities which might equally benefit from funding.

SUPPORTING CHANGES IN LOCAL SERVICE PROVISION

- **Securing the buy-in of senior managers** across relevant statutory, and community and voluntary sector agencies, and of practitioners and service managers is critical to successfully initiating and embedding changes in local service provision.
- **Leadership** is a key requirement to secure buy-in and is required across different levels of the system including local and regional senior decision-makers, local champions (both professionals and among service users), and service managers and practitioners.
- **The use of evidence-based/informed interventions can encourage** senior decision-makers and local service providers to engage with new or changing ways of working.
- **It is vital that the selected interventions are complementary rather than duplicative**, so that existing effective coordination of services is not adversely affected and that existing effective interventions are not displaced.
- **Supporting local services to make changes requires investment** by funders and service providers in terms of time, human resources and funding.

SUPPORTING GREATER USE OF EVIDENCE AND DATA

- **Supports are required to build the capacity** of practitioners and service managers to use evidence and data more effectively. The importance of supporting the use of evidence and data, coupled with the experience of observing the contribution that the changes to their practice can make for families, can be significant motivators in increasing the use of evidence and data among practitioners.
- **Creating and/or protecting staff** time to collect and input data is important in facilitating the greater use of evidence and data.
- To ensure that data and evidence are relevant to their work, it is important to **involve those directly responsible for delivering services in considering what types of evidence should be used** and the types of data to be collected.
- **Systems and supports should be put in place** to gather evidence and data systematically, and to facilitate the interpretation and sharing of information between agencies.

SUPPORTING GREATER AND MORE COORDINATED INTERAGENCY WORKING

- **Formal structures**, such as consortia and associated subgroups, provide important opportunities and fora in which to build and strengthen relationships.
- **A dedicated coordinator** is useful in supporting the implementation of shared vision, mission and objectives, which an area initiative must develop and refine before and during implementation.
- Consideration should be given to how **practitioner-to-practitioner relationships can become more formalised**, in the knowledge that not all interactions can/ should be formalised.
- **Funding is integral to galvanising and sustaining interagency working** at all levels - strategic and outcome-focused interagency working can be resource-heavy and adds to individual workloads, which suggests that it requires appropriate resourcing.
- Learning from the evaluation suggests that **time is needed to strengthen interagency working**.

SUPPORTING CHANGES TO STRATEGIC PLANNING AND SERVICE DELIVERY

- **Clarity of vision, mission and outcomes** are needed, and it is critical to the achievement of strategic change that these are shared. Time is an important enabler in developing these.
- **Leadership and the commitment** of local and regional decision-makers, lead agencies and coordinators are required to embed and sustain changes in local mainstream services.
- **Supporting the mainstreaming** of learning, interventions or practice approaches requires:
 - **Clear and shared understanding** of what constitutes mainstreaming and sustainability, and what success looks like regarding these processes.
 - **Clarity regarding the scope of mainstreaming** and the degree of system change required.
 - **Identifying the key stakeholders**, locally and nationally, and securing their buy-in.
 - **Clarity on roles and responsibilities** for mainstreaming across all stakeholders.
 - **Mechanisms and processes** by which decisions about mainstreaming are made.

OTHER LEARNING - EVALUATING COMPLEX SYSTEMS CHANGE INITIATIVES

- It is important to recognise that not all outcomes can be easily measured, and therefore, **the choice of outcomes should represent the key outcomes from a programme’s description**.
- If using a shared outcome measurement framework, **selected measures should be: internationally recognised; reliable and validated; short and succinct; and easy to use/score**.
- When using a practitioner-led data collection approach, the **provision of ongoing training, support and time for those collecting data is critical**.
- **By focusing on the national, the key features of a programme’s design can be assessed** and the key enablers and barriers to implementation more generally can be identified. **However, the nuance of individual experiences is harder to capture**.
- **The use of the logic model can be usefully supplemented with some key quantifiable indicators**, to support the analysis of the underlying assumptions and identify what success ‘looks like’, fairly and consistently across multiple areas and/or multiple interventions.

Endnotes

- ¹ Due to the nature of the ABC Programme in the Midlands, this area was not included in the evaluation. For more details, see the main report for the evaluation of the ABC Programme, www.dcy.gov.ie.
- ² Growing Up in Ireland Study Team (2013) Growing Up in Ireland: Key Findings: Infant Cohort (at 5 years) No. 1: Transition to School Among Five-Year-Olds. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute, Trinity College Dublin, Department of Children and Youth Affairs.
- ³ Carr, A. and Hamilton, E. (2013). Daughters of Charity Child and Family Services Survey: Final Report. Dublin: Daughters of Charity.

Further Information

- Further information about the ABC Programme and access to the main evaluation report and other ABC Programme evaluation materials can be found at: www.dcy.gov.ie
- Department of Children and Youth Affairs
Web: www.dcy.gov.ie
- The Atlantic Philanthropies
Web: www.atlanticphilanthropies.org
- Centre for Effective Services
Web: www.effectiveservices.org
- Pobal
Web: www.pobal.ie



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Department of Children
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