

Evidence Informed Case Study: West Yorkshire Early Years

Celebrating collaboration successes throughout the region

At a glance

Y-PERN Policy Fellow Tom Haines-Doran and a team of researchers worked with West Yorkshire Combined Authority to evaluate the Early Years sector in the region and take action on the findings of the report.

Key Metrics



3
POLICY LEVERS IDENTIFIED



200
WORKERS RECEIVED TRAINING



ONE
NEW NETWORK BUILT

POLICY PROBLEM



Y-PERN worked closely with West Yorkshire Combined Authority on identifying areas where academic expertise could be most useful in designing their Economic Strategy and Local Growth Plan. Following further engagement, the Combined Authority and Y-PERN identified early years education as a key policy priority for regional inclusive growth. With the aid of further funding from UKRI's Policy Support Fund, Dr Haines-Doran led an interdisciplinary team of academic researchers (Karen Arzate Quintanilla, Dr Lilith Brouwers, Dr Jo Burgess, Dr Aimee Code, Dr Amy Creaser, Dr Erin Dysart, Dr Jack Simpson and Dr Claire Smithson) to explore the Combined Authority's 'policy levers' for improving West Yorkshire's early years offer.


A CONNECTED APPROACH



The research team organised three round tables with representatives from West Yorkshire's local authorities, early years sector representatives, and early years academic experts. The round tables were combined with desktop research to create a 'systems map' of the early years offer in the region. This helped the research team understand the main challenges facing the early years offer, and the Combined Authority's main policy levers available to help the sector improve.



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I welcome this first of its kind report from Y-PERN, and we are already taking action to respond to the recommendations. We must now address the concerns of a workforce that is undervalued and underpaid, and of families who deserve consistent and high quality childcare services.



Tracy Brabin, Mayor of West Yorkshire



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POLICY CHANGES AT WEST YORKSHIRE COMBINED AUTHORITY

The research team's report found that high-quality early years education can transform the life chances of children, reducing entrenched inequalities at the earliest opportunity. Affordable and available childcare enables greater parental and carer participation in the labour market, especially for women. It is therefore central to Combined Authority's aspirations for regional inclusive growth.

The sector in West Yorkshire is struggling to provide the high-quality and accessible early years services families need. The privatised nature of the system means that there are deficits in provision in lower-income areas, and private ownership extracts wealth, which could otherwise be utilised to improve outcomes. Providers are also struggling to recruit staff to fill positions, thanks to poor pay/ working conditions, and inadequate training – especially in providing for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and very young children.



The Combined Authority has limited powers in Early Years, and cannot fix problems such as lack of funding and ownership models on its own. However, the Y-PERN research team identified three policy levers which the Combined Authority could engage in order to improve the early years offer: political leadership and advocacy; information, data sharing and systemic analysis; and the creation of a West Yorkshire workforce plan.



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PROJECT OUTCOMES

Y-PERN will continue to engage with the Combined Authority as it develops and implements its Early Years policy.

Workforce Plan

Based on Y-PERN's engagement, West Yorkshire Combined Authority has launched a workforce plan strategy, partnering with the Bradford Birth to 19's Institute for the Early Years to work alongside practitioners and academic experts in devising a West Yorkshire workforce plan which promises to tackle the urgent challenges around recruitment and retention head-on.

Skills Bootcamps

West Yorkshire Combined Authority has already acted on the report recommendations by targeting more of its skills bootcamp funding to improve training for 200 Early Years workers in SEND and younger children training.

“We are really excited to be doing this work with the Combined Authority. As a team of Early Years professionals, who are passionate about improving the workforce and in turn improving outcomes for children, we have genuine interest in this work and the drive to ensure that the positive impacts of this project are maximised.”

Christian Bunting, Executive Director, Bradford Birth to 19

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