

## Talking Time<sup>®</sup> Evaluation Study Setting Information Sheet

**Are you concerned about the oral language development of your preschool children?**

**Would you like to develop the professional expertise of your early years team in supporting oral language?**

Children need good language skills to do their best at school and become confident and successful learners. Many preschool children do not have the language skills they need to access the curriculum, with children from areas of social disadvantage at greatest risk of delay. Children who enter Reception with poor language skills struggle with literacy and are at risk of social and behavioural difficulties.

The *Talking Time*<sup>®</sup> programme will help you to prioritise support for children's oral language through evidence-based professional development for your early years team.

**We are looking for 130 settings in parts of the North West, East of England, London, and West Midlands to take part in a research study evaluating the *Talking Time*<sup>®</sup> programme. Schools with nurseries and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) group settings are eligible.**

### What is Talking Time<sup>®</sup>?

*Talking Time*<sup>®</sup> is a universal oral language programme for pre-school children aged 3 to 5. It supports Early Years practitioners to deliver engaging, structured small-group activities to children and enhance oral language through high-quality interactions. Although manualised, the programme is designed to be **flexible and adaptable** to suit individual children, settings and contexts. It has three main elements:

1. A flexible intervention programme
2. A practitioner manual (including activity plans and conversation prompts) and 5 core storybooks
3. Staff professional development: training + modelling, coaching and mentoring

Children take part in two 15-minute activities per week during regular provision, for up to 20 weeks. Activities take place in small groups (up to 5 children) of mixed language ability. The three evidence-based *Talking Time*<sup>®</sup> activities are designed to promote **high-quality conversations** with children.

- **Story Conversations:** shared storytelling and conversation using illustrations in storybooks as prompts;
- **Word Play:** games and guided role play designed to develop vocabulary breadth and depth;
- **Hexagons:** narrative discussion and retelling based on photos of real situations and routines likely to be familiar to children within their lives and local areas.

Through professional development (see Table 1) and reflection, staff are supported in tailoring plans and prompts to meet the language needs of their children. The aim is to gradually decrease reliance on programme materials so staff feel equipped to own, adapt and embed the programme to suit their children and setting. *Talking Time*<sup>®</sup> has already been shown to support children's oral language in other research studies, including significant impacts on staff practice, children's talk in groups and children's vocabulary.

## What is the *Talking Time*® evaluation study and who is funding it?

As part of the [Department for Education's Early Years Recovery Programme](#), four EY Stronger Practice Hubs (SPHs) (Liverpool City Region & Beyond, REACH Out, Thrive Together and A Brighter Start) and the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) are collaborating to fund Early Years settings' access to evidence-informed programmes, and study the impact on practice and child outcomes. The aim is to support education recovery following the pandemic and develop our understanding of effective professional development in the early years. The National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) have been selected to evaluate the impact of *Talking Time*® on child language skills and staff practice as part of a larger trial, due to take place in 2024/2025.

Settings are invited to receive funded professional development (PD) through the *Talking Time*® programme delivered by the University of Oxford. Participating settings will be randomly allocated either to the intervention group (who will receive *Talking Time*® from Autumn 2024) or the control group. The control group will not receive the programme but will receive a financial incentive as a thank you for their participation. This can be used to purchase the programme and some accompanying professional development at a later date. Random allocation is the fairest way to decide which settings receive the programme and the best way of evaluating impact on children's outcomes. All settings (regardless of group allocation) will take part in research activities, including child assessments, from September 2024 - July 2025. The research will help refine *Talking Time*® and allow us to find out whether it is ready to be provided to more settings and children.

## How will my setting benefit from participating?

All participating settings will be contributing to evidence on effective practice for oral language development; and will receive a thank you of £150 for supporting an assessor to visit the setting to conduct child assessments at the start of the study and £250 for supporting repeat assessments at the end of the study. Intervention group settings will receive programme materials, including 5 picture books, a manual with flexible plans and conversation prompts for *Talking Time*® sessions, and ideas for reinforcement activities in continuous provision. The elements of the PD are shown in Table 1. Staff will be offered training and support by an expert mentor to build capacity for oral language support.

| Activity   | Description   | Timing  |
|--|---|---|
| Introductory sessions  | Welcome visit (face-to-face in the setting)   | Nov- Dec '24  |
| 3 x 1.5hr twilight workshops<br>(all staff delivering)   | Online training to introduce staff to the three <i>Talking Time</i> ® activities, the manual and materials, and reflective framework for ongoing professional development.  | Jan– April '25  |
| 4 x 1hr in-class mentoring<br>( <i>Talking Time</i> ® leads i.e. practitioners leading delivery) | These practical, supportive sessions build confidence and expertise in leading <i>Talking Time</i> ® activities and using tailored language-supporting interactions to enhance each child's oracy skills. Later sessions support planning and adaptation for sustainment. | 3 sessions<br>Jan– April '25<br>1 session<br>May-June '25 |
| 3 x 1hr video mentoring<br>(the team's pedagogical lead for <i>Talking Time</i> ®)               | These online sessions support programme leadership, planning, adaptation and sustainment. These involve shared reflections on <i>Talking Time</i> ® sessions video-recorded by one participating staff member.  | 3 sessions<br>Feb-May '25                                 |
| Weekly individual reflection   | In addition to the PD support, practitioners are asked to engage in weekly professional reflection on their language enhancing practices.   | Throughout  |

The PD is underpinned by a framework of evidence-based language-supporting strategies designed to support staff in refining their practice. It aims to support staff in:

- implementing *Talking Time*® confidently and effectively;
- learning to apply strategies flexibly and intentionally to meet children's individual language needs;
- adapting and embedding *Talking Time*® longer term in a way which suits your context and children.

The EEF will reimburse intervention group settings approximately 50% of their staff's time/cover cost to complete the professional development activities. Intervention group settings that complete the PD activities will be provided with £7.50 per hour per person for attendance at each PD activity. Settings randomly allocated to the control group will receive the thank-you payment of £1000 for engaging with the research project.

## What does participation in *Talking Time*® involve?

**Intervention group settings** will be asked to support all participating staff, ensuring they are able/have time to:

- deliver the intervention to children twice a week for 15 minutes during regular provision, across the duration of the programme
- commit to the full range of PD components
- (pedagogical lead only) record videos of themselves leading *Talking Time*® groups for the video mentoring element of the programme and to understand how staff deliver the programme
- engage in a weekly individual professional reflection on their language enhancing practices
- complete weekly records of implementation e.g. register of pupil attendance in sessions
- engage in a discussion with the evaluation team after implementation (also applies to senior leaders)

**All settings** will be expected to:

- agree and sign the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)
- consent to random allocation and commit to their assignment as either intervention or control group
- share information about the project with parents, offering to answer any questions and ensure as far as possible that parents understand they have:
  - the chance to withdraw their child from language testing; and
  - the option to consent (or not) to the video/audio recordings
- share setting and child information with the evaluation team, including participating staff's school contact details, child name, date of birth, languages spoken, scores on language assessments and receipt of Early Years Pupil Premium
- support the evaluation team to complete language assessments (Sept-Oct '24, June-July '25)
- support participating staff to audio record themselves leading four small-group activities: two at the start and two at the end of the study. This will allow us to establish current practice and assess changes over the course of the project.

Senior leaders in some settings, regardless of allocation to the intervention or control group, will be asked to participate in interviews with the evaluation team.

## What is the timetable?

| Term            | All settings   | Intervention settings   | Control settings        |
|-----------------|--|---|-------------------------|
| Jan-June '24    | Register for interest/sign-up; online briefing   |   |                         |
| Autumn '24      | Distribute parent information/consents<br>Child assessments and audio-recording<br>Informed of random allocation                       |   |                         |
| Late Autumn '24 | £150 payment for supporting an assessor to visit your setting to conduct child assessments   | Welcome visits  | Business as usual       |
| Spring '25      |  | PD sessions + mentoring<br>Begin intervention                             | Business as usual       |
| Summer '25      |  | PD sessions + mentoring<br>Continue with intervention<br>Staff interviews | Business as usual       |
| Late Summer '25 | Child assessments and audio-recording<br>£250 payment for supporting an assessor to visit your setting to repeat the child assessments | Payment for settings that complete the PD activities                      | £1000 thank you payment |

## How will data be protected?

All personal data gathered as part of this study will be treated with the strictest confidence and used and stored in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (2018) and the Data Protection Act (2018). Full details of data protection will be available should you agree to participate. Parents of all children in participating classes will be asked to provide consent for their child's participation in video and audio recording activities. At no point will individuals in the recording be identified by name. Full details on data protection are available in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and associated privacy notices.

## Who can take part?

**130 settings are being recruited – 65 will be allocated to the ‘intervention group’ and 65 to the ‘control group’.**

### Geography:

- Settings will be recruited from local authority areas within the remit of Liverpool City Region & Beyond (NW region), REACH Out (East of England), Thrive Together (WM region) and A Brighter Start (East London) Stronger Practice Hubs.
  - NW: Liverpool, Sefton, Knowsley, parts of Lancashire (Burnley, Chorley and Rossendale)
  - Yorkshire & Humber: Calderdale, Kirklees, Wakefield
  - West Midlands: Walsall, Shropshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Telford& Wrekin, Sandwell, Dudley, Wolverhampton
  - East of England: Hertfordshire, parts of Essex (Brentwood, Harlow, Epping Forest, Basildon, Castle Point), Thurrock, Bedford, Luton, Central Bedfordshire, Southend
  - London: Camden, Barking and Dagenham, Westminster, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, Enfield, City of London, Redbridge, Brent, Islington, Barnet, Haringey, Harrow, Havering, Kensington and Chelsea

If you are in area for one of the Hubs listed above, but in a different local authority and would like to be involved, please contact us. If we can identify several settings in your locality, we may be able to extend to your area.

- Settings located in disadvantaged areas will be prioritised.
- Ideally, settings will be geographically clustered, to support the logistics of face-to-face mentoring and the development of *Talking Time*<sup>®</sup> communities of practice. Your distance from other interested settings will be a factor for selection to the programme. The location of our mentors means we may not be able to cover all geographical areas.

### Setting type:

- Nursery schools; schools with nursery classes; and private, voluntary and independent group settings
- Settings with 10 or more children (age 3-4) attending for at least 15 hours of provision per week
- Settings are **not eligible** if they are participating in another SPH funded programme delivered in the 2024-2025 academic year including allocation to the control group for one of the other SPH trials (Early Talk Boost, One Programme, EYCP, Concept Cat, Communication Friendly Settings).

### Staff:

- Staff in the nursery class/3-year-old room of each setting. Settings will identify **two** practitioners (*Talking Time*<sup>®</sup> leads) to lead the majority of sessions and receive the in-class mentoring. One will also receive the video mentoring. Mentored staff will be supported to share their learning with the rest of the team.

### Prioritisation criteria:

We welcome all applications but, where demand is high, we will be prioritising those settings:

- in geographically clustered areas
- serving a higher proportion of families eligible for the Early Years Pupil Premium

Prior to confirming your place on the project, we would speak with you to make sure the *Talking Time*<sup>®</sup> delivery model works for your setting, and for the research element. Our aim would be to support two *Talking Time*<sup>®</sup> leads who deliver the programme to a class or room of children universally (i.e. to all children in that class/room). If you are a larger setting or have a larger staff team, we would work with you to identify a 'study' class or room for focus. You are welcome to implement the programme in other classes or rooms and, indeed, we would encourage this. We can support you in discussing how best to cascade your learning from the professional development support we provide. However, we will not be able to offer mentoring for staff in these additional classes or rooms. Please let us know when you express interest if you have questions about how *Talking Time*<sup>®</sup> might work within your setting.

## Next steps

### To ask questions

Contact:  
[talkingtime@education.ox.ac.uk](mailto:talkingtime@education.ox.ac.uk)

### To express interest

Complete [an expression of interest form](#)

### For more information

Visit our project webpages:  
<http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/talking-time>