**Early Market Engagement Event 10 November 2021**

*289039/1009004 - Early Years: accredited Level 3 training for Special Educational Needs Coordinators*

**Attendee comments and Q&A**

* **Based on some providers’ experience, the level of uptake by staff working in the PVI sector is unlikely to be 5,000 during the recovery period. This target seems too ambitious given everything else that’s going on.**

**DfE response:** We are aware that our offer is ambitious but think this level of upscale in training and qualified SENCOs is vital to try and redress the balance of progress between children with SEND and children without, given how important SENCOs are to setting responses to children with SEND. We don’t have national data on the number of qualified SENCOs in PVI settings. But we do know through qualitative data that we are far from having national coverage of one qualified SENCO per PVI setting.

We’re also aware of the disconnect between school-based EY provision, which is covered by the requirement on schools to have a QTS designated as SENCO, whereas some PVI settings potentially have no qualified SENCO. This is why we are proposing an ambitious training offer.

We are also keen that the scale of reach should not be at the expense of training quality.

* **There is huge appetite in the PVI sector for SENCO training, and always has been, because practitioners want to know how to better work with children with SEND. The issue is capacity, in terms of staff being released and cover being found and paid for – this is where the greatest funding need is. Nursery owners are not necessarily willing to spend the money to release staff to attend.**

**DfE response:** we’re aware of this issue and also acknowledge the strong demand for SENCO training in the sector. The costs for the training provider will be covered under the programme.

* **How will the programme work in relation to LAs’ existing SENCO training programmes? Would future trainees be obliged to take part in the national programme? Could funding be provided to LAs and ringfenced for SENCO training? This would help to ensure the DfE offer was complementary to LAs’ local offer and was not working in competition. It would also give LAs the option to source and commission training suppliers themselves, locally, rather than relying on a national level training offer.**

**DfE response:** We know that in some LAs, training for PVI providers is already being run on this basis with some training programmes designed by providers in conjunction with the LA.

We envisage that the national programme would be complementary and add value to local training programmes already in place. It is not at all our intention that this training offer should compete with or replace what is already available but rather be additional.

We will consider further how to complement rather than compete with LA-level and other local SENCO training offers, and will engage with LAs on this point.

* **Delivery model for the training should be mindful of existing arrangements e.g. nursery groups that span more than one LA may continue to seek consistent training from one provider, some providers have delivery models that are tailored to local circumstances.**

**DfE response:** it is absolutely not our intention that this training offer will compete with or replace what is already available. Rather, our hope is to provide additional training that will add to the overall training offer available to PVI SENCOs whether this is within a single LA or cross-LA.

* **How will the new SENCO training impact on suppliers’ existing delivery plans and arrangements with local authorities? Will this be a national training offer that cuts across existing local offers?**

**DfE response:** This offer is not intended to replace existing training provision. Instead, we are seeking to make a significant contribution to increasing the availability of SENCO training.

We also know from previous stakeholder engagement that universal, high quality early language CPD is very much needed in in all settings and is complementary to SENCO expertise. Our thinking is to link this initiative with settings that are receiving the Professional Development Programme in early language and early maths training. This would deliver much more impact for children.

* **Is there a risk that smaller training providers will be squeezed out of the process and not considered for tender, due to their size?**

**DfE response:** The purpose of our early market engagement is to speak with the market to understand views and concerns in terms of design and delivery of the training offer and then develop a realistic and achievable tender that it is attractive for all organisations in the market to bid for. We are very open to consortia bids if that is the best way to achieve a scaled-up training offer with quality.

* **Will there be any support available for organisations which have never put in a bid before e.g. support for bid writing?**

**DfE response:** It would be inappropriate for DfE to provide any form of bid support to suppliers but there are private organisations who offer this type of support. We are able to assist in linking up organisations who wish to make a consortium bid.

* **Will the SENCO qualification be compulsory?**

**DfE response:** The SENCO L3 qualification will not be compulsory in PVI settings and childminders.

* **Will the supplier(s) own both the design and delivery or just the delivery of the Level 3 qualification?**

**DfE response:** Suppliers will own both the design and delivery. Suppliers will need to deliver training that leads to a full Level 3 SENCO qualification accredited by an Ofqual-registered awarding organisation delivering the L3 early years SENCO qualification specification. It will be up to suppliers to decide how they can best achieve this.

**DfE also noted** that the following comments were made at the event:

* LA training and support for early years settings is a postcode lottery. Some LAs have a strong offer for their settings, some settings might only get an annual visit from an area SENCO and receive no training at all.
* There is likely to be better uptake through locally offered training than through a national offer. DfE could set up a consortium of smaller scale suppliers across the country who LAs could choose from to deliver SENCO training in their locality.
* Any new training would also need to work in the context of some EY SENCOs having already received some form of training (including prior to the rollout of the Level 3 qualification specification) e.g. local authority training. A new training offer would need to be mindful of this.
* New SENCOs should be offered a clear training path.
* Several suppliers were open to consortia bids.