

## Appendix A: Opportunities and Recommendations

The content of this paper is organised into **two categories**:

- 1) Supporting **the early years sector and broader communities** in which anchor institutions are based.
- 2) Supporting **existing and prospective employees** of members of LAIN.

For each section, a summary of key relevant issues is provided, followed by examples of good practice across LAIN, identified gaps and opportunities, and a set of recommendations.

Priority recommendations are shown in **bold**.

Recommendations are organised into three **types**:

- **Establish**  
For good practice that is not currently being delivered by members and could be adopted.
- **Extend**  
For existing good practice that is being done by a few members and could be more commonly adopted across the network.
- **Enhance**  
For existing good practice that is being commonly delivered but could be improved.

### 1) Early Years (EY) Sector

#### Key challenges faced by the sector:

- High running costs (including rents, staff wages, council tax and business rates)
- Chronic underfunding
- Workforce crisis due to, for example, high levels of stress/burn-out amongst staff, low pay, an ageing workforce, difficulty in attracting male staff, legal certification requirements, lack of status and recognition for workers and unclear career progression opportunities
- Barriers to entry arising from qualification requirements introduced to professionalise the sector
- Changes to demand post-pandemic (location/schedules)
- Additional capacity and capability requirements to deliver services for children with additional needs and 'children of the pandemic'.
- Concerns about ability to meet forecast increase in demand as new government entitlements come into force, due to the above.

#### Existing good practice:

Organisations including NHS Trusts and Camden Council are providing financial support to the sector to create entry level roles and build skills through transfer of their unspent apprenticeship levy to early years providers. To date, St Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust (GSTT) has transferred in the region of £1.5m and Camden Council has transferred over £70k in the last year. Both GSTT and Camden Council have indicated that the process is straightforward and are committed to continuing.

Organisations outside of LAIN have made arrangements with EY providers to use their spaces for nursery provision at a discounted rate, including for mixed model provision that is open both to their own staff and to members of the local community.

## Gaps and opportunities:

### *Apprenticeship Levy Transfer*

- The EY sector has confirmed that transfer of levy to providers is a helpful support, and there is evidence of some providers voluntarily offering discounted places to the staff of organisations transferring levy.
- As well as mainstream EY providers, other providers offering vital childcare support to parents, especially those supporting children with additional needs, would benefit from the transfer of levy to grow and develop their workforce.
- Organisations transferring levy can set their own criteria for providers to meet including, for example, operating within a specific geographical area or minimum pay requirements (however, given the current challenges of the EY sector, there is value in criteria remaining light-touch to minimise barriers to use).
- LAIN can also raise awareness of the opportunity to transfer unspent levy funds and influence organisations outside of LAIN to prioritise providers of childcare for their levy transfer.
- As advised by the sector, there are some challenges and limitations including:
  - Levy is currently restricted to covering the costs of training only
  - Not enough providers know about levy transfer or understand how they can benefit from it
  - Apprentices often require tech equipment such as laptops for their learning, which can create barriers and further costs to deliver training
  - The Apprenticeship Service digital account (maintained by central government) is not easy to use and can create a barrier for providers to access funds.

### *Funding pressures*

- Given London-based providers face particularly high rents, the sector would benefit from access to available spaces across the network offered at discounted rates. 'Mixed model' arrangements would benefit members' own staff who could access on-site provision during their working hours, as well as benefitting the local community.
- There is a complementary opportunity for members to work together in a new way and collectively lobby the government as a network for greater support of the EY sector, as well as (where opportunities arise) amplifying the sector's concerns around the need to carefully balance removing barriers for entering the EY workforce with ensuring pathways are in place for developing a skilled and sustainable professional workforce.

## Recommendations:

### Extend

- **Members to transfer unspent apprenticeship levy funds to providers of EY education, special needs education, holiday clubs and activity centres if not doing so already.**
- Members to consider providing surplus tech equipment, such as laptops, to the sector to support apprentices (and providers).

### Establish:

- **Members to explore opportunities to offer suitable underused spaces across their estates to EY providers at discounted rates.**
- **LAIN to consider opportunities to collectively lobby on behalf of the sector to reduce risks of closures and inadequate provision, most notably on:**
  - **Increasing central government funding for the sector**
  - **Providing discounts or exemptions from business rates<sup>1</sup>.**

*Specifically on changes needed to maximise the reach and impact of apprenticeship levy transfer, LAIN could also influence central government on the need to:*

- Extend the criteria for the application of transferred levy to cover a broader range of costs beyond training.
- Improve the user experience of the Apprenticeship Service.
- Raise awareness of levy transfer opportunities amongst large businesses and EY providers through marketing and communications.

Collective lobbying would represent new territory for LAIN but is something that the Task and Finish Group was keen to propose as an opportunity to pursue in parallel to other recommendations listed in this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike in Scotland and Wales, early years providers in England are not exempt from business rates, nor are they eligible for discounted business rates offered during the pandemic (which are still offered to other sectors).

## 2) LAIN members' existing and prospective employees

### Key challenges

- High costs of childcare
- Availability of and access to early years education and childcare
- Gaps in central government support offers e.g., no universal financial support for children under the age of 3, no universal support for parents who are job-seeking or in training
- Difficulty in navigating a complex and disjointed support system to benefit from offers
- Conflicting schedules for work and childcare
- Impacts of pregnancy, parental leave and flexible working arrangements on job prospects, job and financial security and career progression
- Fears and perceptions around parental leave and flexible working arrangements - affecting requests for and take up of these offers (particularly amongst men)
- New mental, emotional and physical health challenges and support needs during pregnancy and post-partum
- Lack of pastoral support and understanding from employers, notably line-managers.

### Existing good practice, gaps and recommendations

In line with key issues faced by parents, the recommendations in this section are organised into **five** themes:

- a) Flexible working**
- b) Financial support**
- c) Parental leave**
- d) Pastoral support**
- e) On-site or local provision**

Given the significant impact that raising awareness of employer benefits internally and externally can have, specific recommendations to increase the visibility and improve communications of available parental support are included within each theme.

Ahead of developing and implementing new offers, it is recommended that members test the impact of parental benefits currently provided, particularly amongst under-represented groups, and use these findings to inform the prioritisation of new initiatives.

When considering new initiatives, particular consideration should be given to addressing the needs of underrepresented groups including parents of children with additional needs who face unique challenges.

## a) Flexible working

### Existing good practice:

The majority of LAIN members offer various forms of informal or formal flexible working, subject to the role and upon discussion and agreement with managers. This includes opportunities to work compressed or adjusted hours (flexitime), work on a part-time basis, term-time only, annualised hours, work 'smartly' and work remotely.

Camden Council in particular is demonstrating a commitment to increasing the quality and quantity of flexible arrangements through its partnership with Timewise, which includes exploring how site-based / front-line roles can be made more flexible.

The Metropolitan Police Service is the first police force in the country to implement a part-time police officer course to allow individuals to join policing in a different way.

### Gaps and opportunities:

- Employees who benefit from more family-friendly flexible working arrangements are typically those in desk-based roles working office hours, rather than site-based or shift workers.
- Despite significant demand for quality part-time roles amongst parents (particularly mothers), the number of roles advertised as part-time, including job-share, term-time and annualised hours opportunities, is low. This further decreases in more senior level roles, with knock-on effects on mothers' career progression opportunities and lifetime earnings.
- Creating more part-time opportunities would not only enable more mothers to (re)join the workforce, but also unlock financial support for childcare from central government which requires parents to each work a minimum of 16 hours weekly earning at least the National Minimum Wage or Living Wage.
- The government is also introducing the right to request flexible work from Day 1 for all employees, removing the current 26-week qualifying period.
- Negative perceptions exist around working less than full time or otherwise flexibly, reducing the number of flexible working requests particularly amongst male employees. This gendered stigma reinforces the expectation of women to take on the role of primary caregiver and exacerbates gender gaps and inequalities in the world of work.
- Employers often fail to provide sufficient information upfront about flexible working opportunities to prospective and existing employees – again impacting the number of requests made by existing employees, as well as job applications from mothers looking to (re)join the workforce.
- There is concern around how flexible working requests are being balanced by line managers, particularly when dealing with multiple requests in one team, leading to inconsistencies in practice and workload management. Similarly, there is inconsistent support for flexible working more broadly across management leading to unequal experiences.
- It is important that flexible work opportunities should be adaptable and provide staff with the opportunity to scale up their hours over time as childcare pressures are reduced (if they want to).

## Recommendations:

### Enhance:

- **Members to carry out an initial stocktake of flexible working in practice across their respective organisations, and implement regular monitoring thereafter, to better understand how flexible working is being applied both formally and informally, what's working well and areas for improvement. This should include information about, for example, how people are working flexibly (informally), formal flexible working requests in place, number of declined requests and associated reasons<sup>2</sup>.**
- **Members to consider all options for how each role could be made flexible, such as through term-time only hours, compressed hours, part-time, job-share etc, during job design and creation, as part of a commitment to increase the number of flexible - and especially part-time - roles available.**
- **Members to promote a positive culture towards flexible working and improve capability to implement arrangements by:**
  - **Establishing flexible working as the default for all roles unless managers can provide a clear rationale as to why this is not possible and requiring managers to flag resource requirements for roles to be made flexible if needed (this inverts the current model used by most organisations in which employees must justify their case for flexible working)**
  - **Encouraging more male employees to take up flexible working opportunities**
  - **Encouraging senior leaders to role-model flexible working**
  - **Improving managers' capability to manage requests and implement flexible working through consistent messaging, training and performance reviews to ensure managers are held accountable for the effective implementation of flexible working requests.**

### Establish:

- **For roles that are typically inflexible such as shift or site-based work, members to trial new practice (with input from experts as needed), for example, increasing workers' input into their working patterns / team-based rostering to increase their flexibility.**

*Note: Camden Council may be able to share learnings and insights on this in the future based on its partnership with Timewise.*

### Increasing visibility and improving communications:

- *Members to improve the visibility of flexible working opportunities by including information and specifying options for how each role can be made flexible at point of advertisement, publicising their flexible working policies externally (e.g. via their websites, LinkedIn and recruitment platforms), and ensuring this information is easy to find internally for existing staff as well (e.g. on the intranet).*
- *Members to test and increase the visibility and accessibility of flexible working case studies where these exist or develop case studies (of varying seniority and gender) to demonstrate how roles are being made flexible in practice to prospective and existing employees.*

<sup>2</sup> Employers can only refuse on the basis of statutory reasons set out by the government outlined here: [Flexible working: After the application - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/flexible-working-after-the-application)

## b) Financial support

### Existing good practice:

An interest-free childcare deposit loan scheme to support parents with upfront costs is offered by various members of the network including the GLA, Transport for London, Metropolitan Police Service and Camden Council. The Mayor of London, in partnership with single parent charity Gingerbread, has also produced a [toolkit](#) to support other employers to similarly implement the scheme and enable more parents to access early education and childcare.

Some members also offer a regular and/or emergency contribution towards the cost of childcare for staff in lower grades. For example, London Fire Brigade currently offers a monthly contribution and SOAS, University of London offers a weekly contribution (up to a maximum of 44 weeks per annum).

A small number of members enable staff to sell varying amounts of annual leave in exchange for a fixed day rate payment which parents can choose to put towards childcare or other costs. This is particularly effective for those with generous annual leave allowance.

Similarly, staff of some members can access to discounts at shops and services, which may support with managing household costs.

For organisations that have partnered with local nurseries to provide places or offer on-site provision for employees, including some NHS Trusts and universities, staff are able to make significant cost savings through the [Workplace Nursery Scheme](#). These are in the form of tax relief (between [£2-9K](#) annually) generated by fee payment through salary sacrifice, as well as bespoke discounts offered by providers.

To alleviate childcare-related financial pressures on its workforce, [Kings College London has partnered with Busy Bees nurseries](#) to provide discounted childcare for its employees (20% off fees plus additional benefits) and provides discount codes for holiday clubs – the latter at no fee to the organisation.

To note, many members had previously offered childcare vouchers to all eligible employees, providing a level of tax relief and assistance with childcare costs through salary sacrifice. Although those who signed up before 2018 are still able to benefit, this scheme is closed to new applicants and has been superseded by central government's Tax-Free Childcare Scheme.

To support their staff to better understand and access financial support options from central government, some members also signpost to and promote childcare information through, for example, dedicated intranet pages. The Mayor of London has developed a [toolkit](#) in partnership with Coram Family and Childcare specifically aimed at helping employers with this.

### Gaps and opportunities:

- The majority of LAIN members do not offer direct financial support in the form of interest-free loans, contributions or annual leave trade-in.
- Organisations that do offer financial support do not sufficiently publicise this externally, for example, on their websites or in job advertisements.
- Many parents do not fully understand their entitlements from central government due to the complexity of the landscape.
- Given the complexity of eligibility requirements, staff are not all currently entitled to financial support from central government, and this is not due to improve significantly within the next 12-24 months (with some gaps in support persisting).
- Awareness of the Workplace Nursery Scheme remains low, impacting the number of parents benefitting from much more significant savings through tax relief.

## Recommendations:

### *Extend:*

- Members to review and improve their financial support benefits for staff with a view to incorporating offers such as interest-free childcare deposit loans, annual leave trade in and regular contributions for staff on lower grades (if not already available).
- **Members to consider partnership opportunities with providers that either enable staff to access early years provision at discounted rates in their local area or (for members with high numbers of on-site staff) enable staff to make cost savings via the Workplace Nursery Scheme from access to on-site or local workplace provision.**

### *Establish:*

- Members to review and identify relevant groups (amongst prospective and existing staff) that are not currently entitled to financial support offered by central government, with a view to considering options for how these gaps can be addressed.

### *Increasing visibility and improving communications:*

- *Members to review and improve communications to existing staff on any employer-led financial benefits, as well as provide clear and easily found signposting to resources such as [Childcare Choices](#) and [Childcare Calculator](#) which are designed to support parents to navigate and understand their governmental entitlements. The Mayor's toolkit can also assist with this.*
- *Members to improve visibility of financial benefits to prospective employees by ensuring these are easily accessible on their websites.*



## c) Parental leave

### Existing good practice:

Entitlements for maternity, paternity and adoption leave pay vary widely across the network, ranging from statutory to much more enhanced offers. Thames Water, for example, offers enhanced maternity/adoption leave of 26 weeks at 100% pay and 13 weeks at 50% pay (with the remainder unpaid), and enhanced paternity leave of 4 weeks at 100% pay and 2 weeks unpaid.

A range of more competitive leave options offered by some members to parents include dependency leave (paid emergency time off for care), unpaid parental leave, neo-natal care leave and paid time off for fertility treatment.

Practice in certain organisations such as Camden Council and Thames Water ensures enhanced offers are available to all staff, regardless of length of service provided they meet the minimum requirements for statutory maternity pay<sup>3</sup>. This has been referred to in **Appendix B** as 'Day 1 eligibility'.

Some members also offer optional paid 'Keep in Touch' (KIT) days (up to 10) which can be used by staff during their maternity/adoption leave to attend training/events/meetings, work or discuss return to work arrangements without their rights and entitlements being affected.

### Gaps and opportunities:

- Improving pay entitlements during maternity/paternity/adoption leave is proven to be an effective recruitment and retention strategy for employers and demonstrates commitment to employee wellbeing and inclusivity.
- It is noted that some members are already in the process of reviewing their policies, including the London Fire Brigade, London Chamber of Commerce and Industry and King's College London.
- Significantly fewer members offer enhanced paternity leave, with most offers being in line with statutory entitlements.
- Much like flexible working, there are negative perceptions reported around men taking up leave offers, such as shared parental leave which supports women to return to work sooner if they would prefer to do so.
- For many members, entitlements vary according to the employee's length of continuous service, meaning newer employees are not able to benefit from enhanced offers and creating barriers for new employment and career progression amongst women.
- KIT days are not consistently offered to employees on paternity, adoption or shared parental leave, and employees are not always given ownership of how these are taken (subject to managerial discretion).

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<sup>3</sup> 26 weeks' of service from their start date to any day in the 'qualifying week' (15 weeks' before the expected week of childbirth) or matching week in the case of adoption.

**Recommendations:**

***Extend:***

- **Members to review the leave entitlements they offer including eligibility requirements against best practice within the network and more broadly, with a view to improving and aligning to more competitive and supportive practice including Day 1 eligibility.**
- Members to offer 'Keep In Touch' days to staff during maternity, paternity, adoption and shared parental leave and ensure employee ownership of how these days are taken.
- **Members to consider how male employees can be better encouraged to take up shared parental leave.**

***Increasing visibility and improving communications:***

- *Members to improve the accessibility and specificity of information about leave entitlements externally (so it is visible to prospective employees), as well as ensure this information is easy to find internally for existing staff.*

#### **d) Pastoral support**

##### **Existing good practice:**

Members commonly offer free access to the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), a confidential service for staff to discuss issues (including those relating to family) with qualified counsellors.

Peer-led networks for parents and carers are fairly common across the network, offering an informal space for parents to build community at work and share advice and experiences through regular meetings and informal drop-in sessions/catch ups. Some members have also established buddying schemes amongst parents for additional support.

The Metropolitan Police Service demonstrates particularly good practice in providing pastoral support through its Met Baby programme, aimed at expectant and new parents as well as line managers. The programme supports staff through 1:1 expert advice on HR processes and policies such as leave entitlements, risks assessments and workplace adjustments, as well as through access to transitional coaching and developmental workshops. The programme is supported by dedicated case managers and advisors, as well as the Met Baby app, and has exceeded engagement targets and received very positive feedback from both expectant/new parents and line managers.

Certain members including Thames Water offer a phased return to work after parental leave, supporting parents to adjust to their new routine and childcare arrangements during this period of transition. Aforementioned 'Keep In Touch' days are similarly helpful in supporting parents in this way.

##### **Gaps and opportunities:**

- Pastoral support is largely provided to parents through independent peer-run networks, which - when in place - are not always well-supported (e.g. through executive sponsorship) within organisations to address the needs and concerns of parents.
- Line managers are a key source of pastoral support and guidance for staff, yet often lack the knowledge or structure to provide quality support and information.
- There is a lack of clarity about benefits, HR processes and policies which creates unnecessary stress for new and expectant parents.
- Greater pastoral support is particularly needed in the time periods before, during and after parental leave when staff are experiencing and adjusting to new routines, new mental, emotional and physical health challenges, and worries about the impacts or perceptions of leave or new working arrangements.

**Recommendations:**

**Enhance:**

- **Members to review their peer-led parent and carer networks to ensure they have executive support and establish peer support networks where these are not already in place.**

**Extend:**

- Members to establish and communicate a 'support journey' for expectant and new parents with set touch points aligned to the needs of parents in different phases.
- **Members to develop and implement guidance and support (e.g., training for line managers) to better support their staff through their journey as parents.**

*Increasing visibility and improving communications:*

- ***Members to create dedicated and easily accessible materials such as guides or dedicated intranet/internet pages for both prospective and existing staff to support parents to understand all related support and entitlements (covering leave options, pastoral and financial benefits), as well as signpost to external tools and information for existing staff.***

## e) On-site or local provision

### Existing good practice:

Within LAIN, on-site or local early-years provision (via partnerships with locally based providers) is offered by some NHS Trusts and affiliated universities to employees. For higher education institutions, this provision can have an added benefit of supporting their students with childcare, as exemplified by LSE's nursery partnerships and the UCL Day Nursery. In rare cases including St Thomas' Nursery (Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust) which is open from 7am to 7pm, extended hours are also in place to accommodate shift workers.

For staff of organisations that have enrolled in the Workplace Nursery Scheme, these arrangements are particularly valuable due to the scheme enabling staff to make cost savings through tax relief when payments are made via salary sacrifice. Additionally, providers often offer discounted rates to staff.

In terms of on-site provision for mothers, some organisations including the GLA and Camden Council provide private on-site facilities for breastfeeding and expressing milk.

### Gaps and opportunities:

- For organisations with high numbers of regular on-site staff such as NHS Trusts, on-site provision or access to a reserved allocation of places at local providers remains an effective way to support parents with pre-school age children – both practically and financially.
- An opportunity to maximise this may include expanding provision to include early mornings and evenings, to better accommodate shift workers where this is not already available.
- Noting that some on-site nurseries closed during the pandemic and have not re-opened - possibly due to changes in demand – any on-site provision should be available to the local community (including students for universities and higher education institutions) as well as staff (mixed-model) to promote sustainability.
- Another opportunity to consider is a movement towards more local site-based jobs that would enable staff to work in closer proximity to their child/children's early years provider and/or school(s).
- Given existing spaces, such as first aid rooms, can double up as dedicated on-site facilities for mothers, improving on-site provision for breastfeeding and expressing milk is considered a straightforward task for facilities management teams in the short-term.

**Recommendations:**

**Extend:**

- **Members with a high number of site-based staff and/or students to test the demand for partnering with local providers or offering on-site provision (where space allows) that is also available to the local community on a secondary basis (mixed model).**
- Members to seek input from shift workers to test the demand for expanded on-site early years provision to cover early mornings and evenings if this provision is not already in place.
- Members to identify private on-site facilities for mothers, for example for breast-feeding and expressing milk, and ensure relevant information is shared and remains easily accessible to staff.

**Establish:**

- Members to consider opportunities for localising site-based jobs to enable parents to work in closer proximity to their child/children's early years provider and/or school(s).

**END**