

<b>Pilot Evaluation Summary</b>	
Pilot Intervention Recipients	Parents and carers of children in Reception and Year 1 who have/have had a social worker
Pilot Evaluation participants	Parents and carers (all parents and carers enrolling for the course – parents/carers of around 300 children are expected to be invited. Take-up is not yet known.) Programme developers (3-6) Delivery partner managers and tutors (approximately 40) School staff (10-15) LA staff (10)
Number of pilot sites	Approx 50 schools
Protocol Date	29 January 2021
Version	1

## Summary

This document outlines the pilot evaluation of Our Skills. Our Skills is a family literacy programme which aims to increase the educational attainment and life chances of children in Reception or Year 1 who have a social worker or who have had one in the last six years (CWSW). It involves ten weeks of 2-2.5 hours of delivery. Each session is designed to involve around 90 minutes of delivery attended by one or more parent/carer per child, and around 30 minutes of joint parent/carer child interaction. (In the pilot trial, these may be delivered in two separate sessions.) The programme is delivered by tutors from delivery partner organisations such as local authority adult education teams and voluntary sector organisations, who are family literacy tutors trained in the programme. The programme involves content on home literacy practices, children's learning, and how literacy is taught in primary schools in England. School staff will also be asked to input. Eligible parents/carers will be identified and recruited to the programme by schools.

Our Skills is an adaptation of Family Skills, an in-person group-based programme delivered in schools for families with English as an additional language, and has been re-designed for the parents/carers of CWSW.

The evaluation was initially planned as a randomised controlled trial (RCT) and trial delivery of Our Skills initially intended to be delivered in-person. In January 2021, it was decided that it should be reframed as a pilot evaluation, because the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on schools impacted on school recruitment and meant that alternatives to in-person delivery were needed. In addition, national school-based learning assessments that were planned to be the RCT primary outcomes were cancelled. Our Skills was further adapted to be

appropriate for entirely online or hybrid delivery. Delivery of Our Skills in the pilot evaluation is now expected to be entirely online.

The pilot evaluation aims to establish the feasibility of delivering Our Skills online to the intended population (including whether the content and approaches are acceptable and appropriate to parents/carers), whether it has evidence of promise, and whether it is ready for trial. It will test and refine the programme theory as set out in the draft logic model.

Programme delivery will run from February half-term to May half-term, that is from the second half of February to the end of May 2021.

## **Project Background**

### **Rationale for Our Skills**

Children and young people who have had a social worker often cite education as playing an important role in their lives (All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked after Children and Care Leavers, 2012; Kelly, 2017). However, there are sizable attainment gaps between children who have a social worker and their peers. At age 7, the 'attainment gap' in reaching expected standards is approximately 25-30% for those children who (currently or previously) have had any social worker intervention (Berridge et al., 2020). In Berridge et al (2020) and for this research, we classify children with a social worker as those children who are or have in the last six years been designated as looked after children and those with a child protection plan (CPP) or child in need plan (CiN).

There is increasing policy attention on children in care, for whom there are the 'Pupil Premium Plus' and 'Virtual Schools' to help close the educational gap, and there is increasing policy recognition of the educational needs of children who have a child protection plan or child in need plan. The Virtual School Head is a statutory role for each local authority, established by the Children and Families Act (2014), responsible for the education of all children in care and adopted children in that local authority (Drew & Banerjee, 2019). There is additional educational funding through the 'Pupil Premium Plus', which has increased to £2,345 per pupil in 2020-2021 for children in care or children who have ceased to be in care because of adoption, a special guardianship order, or a child arrangement order. There are recommendations that the Pupil Premium Plus and the assistance of the Virtual School be extended to children who have a child protection plan or child in need plan given their educational achievement gaps as well (Berridge et al., 2020).

Improving the engagement of parents/carers and home learning environments may improve the educational outcomes for children who are disadvantaged, including children with a social worker (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2013). The home learning environment is shown to have powerful effects on literacy and numeracy in early primary school for the general population (Melhuish et al., 2008). Given the Covid-19 pandemic, the home learning environment has been particularly pertinent for recent educational progress (Andrew et al., 2020; Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020). For children in care, educational disadvantage has been found to be linked to their previous home environment and the difficulties that led to entry into care (Sutcliffe, Gardiner, & Melhuish, 2017). Focussing on the home learning environment in their subsequent home, such as with their foster carer, may offer a protective factor against negative educational outcomes. Some educational interventions delivered by the foster carer within the home setting have been shown to have positive educational outcomes (Evans, Brown, Rees, & Smith, 2016). Likewise, focussing on the home learning environment may improve the educational outcomes for children who have had a social worker but are not in care (Sutcliffe et al., 2017).

Family Skills, a family literacy programme originally designed to support the home learning environment for families with children in Reception for whom English is an additional language (EAL), has been shown to have potential for CWSW in the last six years (Sanders et al., 2020). Programme development was led by Learning Unlimited, working with the Campaign for Learning and the UCL Institute for Education. An independent evaluation of Family Skills, carried out by NatCen Social Research and funded by the Education Endowment Foundation, Bell Foundation and Unbound Philanthropy, found that children whose parents attended Family Skills may have made an additional month's progress in literacy attainment (Husain et al., 2018<sup>1</sup>). What Works for Children's Social Care carried out an exploratory subgroup analysis of data from the Education Endowment Foundation's RCTs and their results indicate that Family Skills resulted in an additional four months' progress on literacy attainment for CWSW, compared to the control group (Sanders et al., 2020). The vast majority of schools receiving Family Skills said that they would recommend it to other schools, highlighting that it provided a good opportunity to build home-school links and engage parents and carers in their children's learning.

The programme is being redesigned as Our Skills to focus specifically on the needs of CWSW, whether EAL or not, and for online delivery given Covid-19. There is clearly overlap between the two populations, and families with CWSWs face some of the same barriers to engagement in learning as EAL families. However, programme developers had to undertake significant adaptation in programme content and in implementation strategies, including requirements to liaise with schools to sensitively recruit the caregivers of CWSW and for delivery in pairs or clusters of schools where applicable.

The evaluations of Family Skills highlighted implementation challenges, particularly in relation to low take-up and need for intensive family recruitment; retention; duration of sessions; identifying the optimal time of day for delivery, and the need for more liaison between tutors and schools (Cara, 2018; Husain et al., 2018). The evaluation also highlighted the difficulty of and demands on the schools in completing additional literacy assessments for the evaluation (Husain et al., 2018).

The programme developers are working with stakeholders to adapt the programme, but the February 2021 delivery will be the first test of the redesigned programme. The pilot evaluation has been designed to be proportionate to this stage of programme development, and to the current stresses placed by Covid-19 on schools.

## Content and delivery

### Logic model

A logic model has been developed to understand the mechanisms of the programme activities, and the hypothesised outcomes of the intervention (Appendix 1). This was completed primarily through two workshops led by What Works for Children's Social Care with Learning Unlimited, Campaign for Learning, CEI, and BPSR.

As outlined in the draft logic model, Our Skills aims to improve the confidence, knowledge, home literacy practices, and relationships with schools for caregivers of children with a social worker in order to improve these children's educational attainment and life chances. It also aims to increase understanding within schools of parent/carer roles and needs.

---

<sup>1</sup> Family Skills was delivered across England by 64 expert local delivery partner organisations working with 155 primary schools.

## **Programme recipients**

The Our Skills intervention is a customised, bespoke version of Family Skills for raising the achievement of children who have/have had social worker input/support. Eligible children typically will be identified as those who have in the past 6 years been classified as Children in Need (CiN), been subject to a Child Protection Plan (CP), and/or classified as 'Children Looked After' or 'Looked After Children' CLA/LAC . The programme is designed for use in mainstream schools with children working towards the national curriculum in Reception and Year 1 classes.

## **Our Skills format, materials, locations, dosage, and adaptations**

The content of Family Skills has been updated and adapted for Our Skills, following consultation with stakeholders whose work involves children and families with social care support. Key areas of adaptation are:

- The logistics of delivery, including the time of day, scope to deliver the parent/carer-child interaction session separate from the main session, scope to bring children and caregivers from different schools together in the same course
- Reduced content aimed at speakers of other languages (ESOL) and some inclusion of references to social work
- Differentiation in content for families that include speakers of other languages (ESOL)
- Differentiation in content based on the needs of the child, including tailoring by phonics levels and year. Guidance will be provided in the toolkit, and tailoring is to be led by school professionals.

The model is based on 10 x 2-2.5 hour sessions plus a school tour, a trip to the library and a talk by a member of staff. The first part of each session for parents and carers only is 90 minutes long including a 10-minute break. This is followed by short joint adult/child activities for approximately 30-40 minutes followed by a 10-minute recap and review for adults only. When delivered online, sessions may need to be delivered in two parts, e.g. adult only input may be most convenient for participants during the school day, whereas the intergenerational joint activities may need to be scheduled outside the school day, e.g. after school or at weekends.

Schools will be asked to provide input in four sessions (approximately 15-20 minutes each time), with the option of providing input in two more sessions. A teacher or Teaching Assistant is planned to join for Session 4 on reading with children, for session 7 on learning through play, for session 9 including a short talk about the school and introduction to the school website, and for session 10 – a celebration and review. There is an optional short talk by the school staff member about how reading and phonics are taught in school and an optional virtual or face-to-face tour of the school. (There is also an optional physical or virtual visit to a library.) Some courses will have all families from the same school and some, where the number of families in schools are low, will bring together families from different schools within the same locality. In the latter case, where possible, teachers or teaching assistants from each participating school will be invited to deliver a session on phonics and model shared reading.

The Our Skills course includes:

- Reading strategies and phonics
- Home literacy practices and oral traditions - including storytelling, songs, rhymes and, where appropriate, making the most of bilingualism.
- Families learning together and learning through play
- Education approaches and the culture of schools

Metacognition, with specific emphasis on building resilience, approaches to developing effective learning strategies, making the most of bilingualism, effective communication and positive parenting will be embedded throughout the programme.

With online delivery:

- additional time may be needed for some activities
- the session may need to be delivered in two parts, e.g. adult only during the school day and the intergenerational part of the session after school or at weekends.

Session times can be extended up to 2.5 hours. Each session will lead to suggested home activities for families to do together.

There is a programme toolkit which sets out session coverage and includes ideas and resources, including for differentiation for both children and adults, and for inclusion of families for whom English is a second language (ESOL). The toolkit is divided into 4 main parts:

1. Introduction to the Our Skills project and course
2. Getting ready to implement Our Skills
3. The Our Skills course content (10 sessions) + optional library visit, school tour and a reading and phonics talk
4. Appendices

The toolkit was finalised in January 2021. Content will be introduced, practised, reviewed and developed cyclically in each course, in order to support and reinforce learning and accommodate irregular attendance by families who may be facing other pressures and commitments.

### **Delivery model and processes**

Our Skills is delivered by qualified Family Learning tutors based in delivery partner organisations, including local authority adult education teams and voluntary sector organisations. These tutors will receive training about Our Skills through two 2.5 hour sessions.

Recruitment of delivery partners is being done by Learning Unlimited and Campaign for Learning using existing contacts from Family Skills project and other national Family Learning networks and organisations as well as using a snowballing strategy. The project has been advertised on social media and through network emails. They have also led a series of webinars for delivery partners.

Recruitment of schools began in September 2020, when the evaluation was intended to be an RCT. It is now expected that around 50 schools will participate in the pilot evaluation,

which requires the engagement of up to 20 national providers and up to 30 tutors depending on the number of courses delivered by each tutor.

School recruitment is done through a multi-pronged strategy, led by Learning Unlimited and Campaign for Learning, and supported by What Works for Children's Social Care. Delivery partners are involved in school recruitment as they already have some established contacts in the community. In combination with the recruitment of the delivery partners, Virtual Schools<sup>2</sup> have been approached to provide schools nominations for participation in the project and thousands of schools have been emailed directly. School recruitment has been particularly targeted at: disadvantaged areas and priority regions across England, typically large cities with high numbers of target children, e.g. Yorkshire (Bradford and Sheffield), the Humber (Hull), North West (Manchester), West Midlands (Birmingham), East Midlands (Nottinghamshire), and London including Croydon; higher than average achievement gaps for children; high numbers of families with social care support/social workers; and, higher than average free school meal (FSM) take up.

Recruited schools are asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the programme and evaluation. Schools not recruited by a delivery partner will be matched with a delivery partner based on geographical location and delivery partner capacity.

Schools will be asked to work with the delivery partner to recruit target parents and caregivers. As outlined in the MoU, recruitment approaches can include:

- School, Virtual School and social work professional liaison and support to signpost individual parents and caregivers to the Our Skills course and encourage them to consider signing up to it.
- 1-to-1 pre-course conversations, with parents/carers with eligible children in the target group to provide a clear outline of the course content, the benefits of participation and to discuss digital access and any support needed, if the course is being delivered virtual.
- An invitation letter and information sheet about the Our Skills course sent or given to people individually (template provided in the Our Skills toolkit).
- An optional personal invitation from children to invite their parents/caregivers to join the course (template provided in the Our Skills toolkit).
- A highly visible and accessible, friendly contact for the parents/carers in the school – learning mentor, TA, inclusion manager, member of the administration team who can talk to parents and caregivers individually about the course.
- A whole school approach to recruitment, ensuring all staff know about the Our Skills course and can support and encourage families to participate, while being aware and mindful of the privacy and discretion required.

Delivery partners will be trained and supported to use consistent parental engagement processes and a standardised delivery model. The training will be done in stages. The first stage will introduce delivery partners (managers and family learning tutors) to the project and

---

<sup>2</sup> As Virtual School Heads are responsible for the education of children in care and children who have ceased to be in care because of adoption, a special guardianship order, or a child arrangement order, there is significant overlap with the target population. Some Virtual Schools have been involved in passing information or in recruiting schools for the Our Skills Programme.

discuss family recruitment strategies that will have to be discreet and individualised. The next set of training events will engage tutors specifically and consider an introduction to the teaching on the programme and then discussion of separate programme units. The exact format of the training will be discussed and agreed at the first introductory meeting. Tutors will be supported throughout the programme delivery by the project team by Learning Unlimited and Campaign for Learning. This will involve bringing together groups of tutors to discuss delivery, and a senior Campaign for Learning staff member being available to provide responsive support and advice where this is requested.

### **Pilot Evaluation Aims**

It was initially anticipated that Our Skills would be evaluated through an RCT using statutory assessment data, implementation evaluation and cost analysis. The evaluation has been re-scoped as a pilot evaluation because of challenges arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, including the recruitment of schools and the cancelling of statutory assessments in schools. The evaluation aims to test the feasibility of Our Skills, using programme data, delivery record and observation of delivery, a survey of changes in home literacy environments, focus groups with the programme developers and semi-structured interviews with parents/carers, tutors, delivery partner managers, and school and LA representatives. A cost analysis will not be undertaken because the atypical implementation context would limit its external validity.

The purpose of this pilot evaluation is to evaluate the implementation of Our Skills as an online programme. This will inform the next phase of evaluation of Our Skills, involving scaled-up delivery and an RCT.

The pilot evaluation will build on findings from the evaluation of Family Skills. It will test the feasibility of identifying, and encouraging take up by, the parents/carers of CWSW, the feasibility of online delivery, and the acceptability and appropriateness of the programme content and delivery to families and schools. It will provide early insight into the perceived impacts of Our Skills for parent/carers' attitudes and confidence, family literacy practices, children's learning, and relationships between parents/carers and schools. It will capture change in parent/carers' confidence and engagement with their children's literacy learning – from the start to end of the course and three months after.

The research questions and methods for the pilot evaluation are set out below. Findings from the pilot will be published in a report in early 2022.

### **Research questions**

The pilot aims to address the following three research questions.

1. **Evidence of feasibility** – Was it feasible to implement Our Skills as an online programme for the parents/carers of CWSW?
  - a) Did the programme reach the intended audience and what implementation strategies were used?
  - b) Was the programme delivered as intended, what adaptations were made and why?
  - c) Was the programme acceptable to and appropriate for parents/carers and schools?
2. **Evidence of promise** – What evidence is there that Our Skills can have a positive impact on family literacy environments and children's attainment?

- a) What perceived impacts were identified by parents/carers and by schools?
  - b) Is there evidence to support the outcomes and mechanisms of change in the draft theory of change?
  - c) Was there any evidence of potential unintended consequences or negative effects?
- 3 Readiness for trial** – What if any further work is required for Our Skills to be ready for trial?
- a) Can Our Skills be delivered consistently across delivery partners and schools?
  - b) Are any changes needed to the programme materials, resources and implementation strategies including training?
  - c) What aspects of the programme delivery should be addressed in fidelity criteria?

The pilot evaluation does not include a counterfactual and will not measure impact: all evidence about potential outcomes will be exploratory only based on the perceptions of those involved. It will not support conclusions about the effectiveness of the intervention, but it will provide a basis for the development of outcome measures in subsequent evaluation.

The evaluation will take place at a time when schools are experiencing significant disruption due to Covid-19. Where possible, the evaluation will seek to identify aspects of implementation that are specific to this context compared to a more typical delivery context.

### Outcomes

The evaluation will involve:

- Analysis of programme data to assess participation and attendance rates for schools and families
- A survey of parents/carers and interviews with parents/carers to assess changes in home literacy behaviours
- A delivery record, observation, focus groups with developers and interviews with parents/carers, tutors, schools and LAs to assess feasibility of delivery, adaptations made, acceptability and appropriateness

Research question	Indicator	Method
<p><b>Evidence of feasibility</b></p> <p>Was it feasible to implement Our Skills as an online programme for the parents/carers of CWSW?</p>	<p><b>Reach and implementation strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of schools to whom Our Skills was offered, number taking part, and reasons for non-participation</li> <li>• What strategies were used to identify and approach schools?</li> <li>• What strategies were used to identify and approach eligible families</li> </ul>	<p>Programme data</p> <p>Programme data, Interviews with tutors</p> <p>School, and LA interviews</p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of families to whom Our Skills was offered, number taking part</li> <li>Reasons for parent/carer participation and non-participation</li> <li>Proportion of families completing the programme and factors influencing non-completion</li> </ul>	<p>Register data and parent/carer interviews</p> <p>Parent/carer interviews</p> <p>Register data, parent/carer interviews</p>
	<p><b>Delivery as intended and adaptations made</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How was the programme adapted to parents/carers of CWSW and in light of earlier evaluation findings (Cara, 2018; Husain et al. 2018)?</li> <li>What types of adaptations were made by delivery partners and why?</li> <li>Were school staff involved in programme delivery and what enablers and barriers were identified?</li> </ul>	<p>Programme developer focus groups</p> <p>Observation, tutor delivery checklist and tutor interviews</p> <p>Tutor and school interviews</p>
	<p><b>Acceptability and appropriateness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the range of views among parents/carers about the acceptability of the programme and its fit with family norms, culture and context?</li> <li>What is the range of views among school staff about the acceptability of the programme and its fit with literacy teaching and schools' approaches to parent/carer engagement?</li> <li>What other interventions do schools provide to support home literacy environments for this population?</li> </ul>	<p>Parent/carer interviews</p> <p>School interviews</p> <p>School interviews</p>
<p><b>Evidence of promise</b></p> <p>What evidence is there that Our Skills</p>	<p><b>Potential impacts</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the range of perceived impacts identified by parents/carers?</li> </ul>	<p>Parent/carer interviews</p>

can have a positive impact on family literacy environments and children's attainment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is there measurable change in parent/carer perceptions of children's enjoyment of reading and in parents'/carers' literacy behaviours, knowledge, confidence and attitudes, immediately and three months after the course ends?</li> <li>What is the range of perceived impacts identified by schools?</li> </ul>	<p>Parent/carer survey</p> <p>School interviews</p>
	<p><b>Mechanisms</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do delivery partners report increased awareness of family needs and expertise in meeting them?</li> <li>Do parents/carers report increased understanding of phonics and how it is taught, and increased communication with schools?</li> <li>Do parents/carers report increased knowledge and confidence in supporting children's literacy and changes in behaviours?</li> <li>Do parents/carers report feeling part of a community with other parents?</li> <li>Do parents/carers use the programme activities outside sessions and have positive family literacy experiences?</li> <li>Do school staff describe increased awareness of family needs and confidence in meeting them?</li> <li>Do schools report increased communication with parents/carers?</li> <li>Are there any differences in how the programme was perceived to operate and impact, compared with the theory of change?</li> </ul>	<p>Delivery partner interviews</p> <p>Parent/carer interviews and survey</p> <p>Parent/carer interviews and survey</p> <p>Parent/carer interviews</p> <p>Parent/carer interviews and survey</p> <p>School interviews</p> <p>School interviews</p> <p>All interviews</p>

<b>Readiness for trial</b>  What if any further work is required for Our Skills to be ready for trial?	<b>Consistency in delivery</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent is Our Skills delivered consistently between delivery partners?</li> </ul>	Observation, delivery record and delivery partner interviews
	<b>Programme materials</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Description of any necessary changes or additional to programme materials, resources and implementation strategies</li> </ul>	Review of all study findings
	<b>Fidelity criteria</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proposed features of programme for structural and dynamic fidelity criteria</li> </ul>	Observation, interviews, programme developer focus groups, survey

## Methods

### Overview

The evaluation will involve:

- Programme data provided by Learning Unlimited:
  - Number of schools approached
  - Number of schools agreeing to participate
  - Number of schools returning Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)
  - Number of schools dropping out after returning MoU
  - Summary of reasons reported by schools to delivery partners for non-participation or subsequent drop-out
  - For each participating school, number of families whose contact details were passed to LU
  - For each participating school, number of families who enrol
  - For each course, a register will be completed showing name of school/s and session by session attendance by parent/carer using unique identifier
- A survey of parents/carers:  
This will be administered by tutors to all parents/carers starting the course at three waves (Session 1, Session 10 and three-month follow-up)
- Observation of sessions:  
Observations of tutor training sessions and programme delivery will be undertaken. Observation of programme delivery will be kept to a minimum to reduce the burden on families and delivery partners or impact on programme delivery and experience. The purpose will be to understand the nature and consistency of delivery.
- Tutor delivery checklist:  
Selected tutors will be asked to complete a simple checklist to record any adaptations made to session content and delivery
- Qualitative interviews and focus groups:  
These will involve the following groups:
  - The programme developers
  - Delivery partners: tutors and supervisors/managers
  - Parents/carers: those who complete the programme (attending at least 8 sessions), participate but in fewer sessions, and choose not to participate
  - School staff: those involved in the decision to participate, the identification of and approach to parents/carers, and as participants in programme sessions
  - LA staff: involved in the identification of eligible children or who could potentially support this

### Sample selection and recruitment

An information sheet for parents/carers will be included in pre-course materials, outlining the evaluation and that participation is voluntary. It will also provide a point for parents to opt out of being contacted for interviews or observation sessions if their course and school is selected for those. All tutors will be given a briefing sheet about the research and will be briefed in the Our Skills training about the evaluation.

Further information and consents will be provided for each research activity. An information sheet and consent form will be sent to selected school and LA representatives. Informed consent will be obtained and recorded before each research activity.

### **Parent/carer survey**

All participating parents/carers will be invited to take part in the survey. They will have had the opportunity to consider whether or not they choose to take part when they received the information sheet with the pre-course materials (see above).

Parent/carers will complete the Wave 1 survey in Session 1, early in the session but after initial introductory material. The positioning of the survey near the start of the session reduces the risk of their Wave 1 survey responses reflect any immediate change in outcomes due to the first session. The tutor will explain the nature and purpose of the Wave 1 survey in the early stages of Session 1, including the fact that it is voluntary. The first page of the survey will provide this information and the survey will be activated by clicking a consent button. Alternative activity will be offered to parents who do not consent. A link to the survey will be sent by email and/or text by delivery partners to parents who do not attend Session 1. If two parents/carers in the same home attend Session 1, tutors will help them to complete the survey on different gadgets if possible, and send a link to the survey for completion after the session if necessary.

The same approach will be used for Wave 2, which will be administered in Session 10. A link to the survey will be emailed/texted by delivery partners to parents who attended at least one session but do not attend Session 10.

Wave 3 will involve all parents/carers who attended at least one session and will be administered by email and/or text by the LU internal evaluation team.

A £10 voucher will be offered as an incentive for Wave 3.

### **Observation:**

Eight tutors will be randomly selected, and one session of course delivery observed. Tutors will be contacted by Learning Unlimited and consent to share contact details with the evaluation team sought. Course participants will be informed ahead of a session that a member of the evaluation team would like to observe. They will be told again at the start of the session that a member of the evaluation team is observing and verbal consent to this sought. If any participants do not consent, the session will not be observed.

### **Tutor delivery checklist:**

Ten different tutors will be randomly selected and asked to complete a simple checklist after every session, documenting components delivered and any adaptations made to programme content or delivery.

### **Qualitative interviews and focus groups**

#### Programme developers:

A focus group will be undertaken with the programme developers and key stakeholders involved in adaptation, at the beginning and at the end of the programme delivery period.

#### Tutors and supervisors:

The evaluation will involve:

- An interview with each of the 10 tutors completing the adaptations checklist
- Six interviews with supervisors/managers

### Parents/carers:

The evaluation will involve interviews with:

- 10 parents/carers who chose not to participate in Our Skills
- 10 parents/carers who attended 1-5 sessions
- 20 parents who completed Our Skills (attending at least 5 sessions)

The first group of parents will be selected and approached by schools, and the second and third groups by tutors, to meet purposive sampling criteria. They will forward an information and consent sheet for parents/carers with a link to an electronic form for parents to provide contact details if they would like to take part in an interview. Those consenting will be contacted by the evaluation team, brief demographic information collected to monitor sample composition, and a telephone interview arranged. Consent will be checked at the beginning of the interview. An incentive of £20 will be offered.

### Schools

The evaluation will involve interviews with one member of staff in each of ten schools, supplemented by short interviews with further staff members if necessary to cover all the research questions (see further below). Schools will be selected purposively to ensure diversity in region, urban/rural location, size, Ofsted rating, and number of children taking part.

### LA representatives

Ten virtual school heads or other LA representatives will be interviewed. Local authorities will be selected for diversity in region and number of schools taking part.

## **Data Collection**

### **Programme data**

See above. A proforma will be provided for completion by tutors and Learning Unlimited. Participants are regarded as having 'completed' Our Skills if they attend a minimum of three sessions, not including Session 10. This is the definition applied by Learning Unlimited on the basis of their judgement about the amount of 'content' to which a parent/carer needs to be exposed for Our Skills to prompt the intended changes in attitudes and behaviours.

### **Parent/carer survey**

The survey will be designed to take no more than 15 minutes to complete at each Wave. Waves 1 and 2 will be administered online during course sessions (wherever possible) to maximise response rates. Wave 3 will be administered by email or text.

The survey will cover:

- Home literacy practices and environment
- Attitudes and confidence in relation to support child's learning
- Enjoyment in home literacy practices
- At Wave 1: demographics on parents or carers and their children
- At Wave 2: the extent of participation in Our Skills and views about the programme

## **Observation**

Eight tutors will be selected for observation. Two tutors will be observed delivering Session 3, two delivering Session 4, two delivering Session 6 and two delivering Session 7. These are the sessions viewed by Learning Unlimited as most emblematic of the Our Skills approach and content. Observations will be recorded on a semi-structured checklist. There are not yet established fidelity criteria for Our Skills. The semi-structured checklist will therefore be used to record whether the intended session content as set out in the toolkit has been delivered, and any deviation (change in order, missed content, substituted resources etc). The checklist will also, where possible, include items relating to instructions in the toolkit or tutor training relating to style of delivery. However these will be as limited as validated measures will not be available.

## **Tutor delivery checklist**

Tutors will complete a checklist after each session to record whether instructions for session content and delivery have been followed, and any adaptations made.

## **Qualitative interviews and focus groups**

Topic guides for qualitative interviews and focus groups will be developed by the evaluation team. Fieldwork will be undertaken by telephone or virtual platform, depending on participants' preferences. Interview duration will vary, from around 15-25 minutes with parents/carers who did not take part in Our Skills to around 45 minutes with participating parents/carers and professionals. Interviews with delivery partners may take up to 60 minutes, and focus groups around 90 minutes.

The issues to be explored in interviews are:

Programme developers:

- Start of programme: Adaptation process and adaptations made
- End of programme: learning from programme delivery

Delivery partners:

- Experiences of delivery, parent/carer participation and perceived impacts
- Perceived appropriateness of course content and approaches to parents/carers
- Any adaptations made, how and why

Parents/carers

- Reasons for participating (or not)
- Experiences of the course: whether and what they and their child enjoyed, experience of participating online, appropriateness of course content and fit with their values and culture
- Whether they undertook course activities with children outside sessions
- Any perceived impacts (positive and negative) and how these arose, particularly in relation to
  - attitudes to and understanding of how to support children's literacy
  - literacy related interactions with children
  - understanding of how schools teach literacy
  - relationship with school

School staff:

- Reasons for participating
- Approaches used to identify and contact eligible parents/carers and encourage participation
- Experience of participating in sessions
- Views about the programme content and approaches

- Any perceived impacts on children or for school

LA staff:

- Approaches used to identify and contact eligible parents/carers and encourage participation
- Views about the programme content and approaches
- Any perceived impacts on children and parents/carers

In summary, pilot data will be captured through:

Data Collection Method	Sample Size	Collection Timeline
Parent survey	All participating parents	Wave 1: Feb/March 2021 Wave 2: May 2021 Wave 3: August 2021
Observation	1 session of each of 8 courses	Feb-May 2021
Tutor delivery checklist	10 tutors	Feb-May 2021
Programme developer focus groups	2 focus groups, each with 3-6 participants	Feb-March 2021 and June 2021
Delivery partner interviews	10 interviews with tutors 6 interviews with managers	June 2021
Parent/carer interviews	10 non-participants 20 participants, 10 part-participants	March 2021 June 2021
School staff	10, supplemented if necessary	June 2021
LA staff	10 interviews	June 2021

## Analysis

The data analysis will follow the main questions outlined in the previous section.

Programme data will be analysed descriptively with simple counts in Excel. Information about the identification of eligible children will be compared with the numbers taking up the programme.

The survey data will be used to measure changes in outcomes over time, from the start to the end of the course, and then again after three months to test how far any early changes are maintained after the end of the course. Depending on sample sizes, exploratory analyses may be undertaken to look at for whom change has happened the most, including parent/carers of Reception and Year 1 pupils and parents with different levels of confidence or home learning engagement at the start of the course. Preliminary findings will be discussed with the Advisory group.



Interview and focus groups will be recorded, transcribed verbatim, and pseudonymised before analysis. Qualitative data will be analysed following thematic analysis principles. Key themes in the data will be identified both inductively (themes stemming from the research questions) and deductively (themes emerging from the data). Data will be coded by researchers. The thematic coding will be analysed using principles from the framework method for the research questions. The framework method is a matrix-based approach that enables deep data interrogation and comparative analysis to answer specific questions, which is considered particularly appropriate for questions around implementation (Gale et al., 2013). Data will be coded and managed using Dedoose software. Data will be interpreted to describe the range of responses in relation to each research question and sub-topic, provide potential explanations or hypotheses, examine associations between themes and responses, and explore differences between study populations and sub-groups (e.g. care status of child, parent/carer age or qualification, child school year). Data will be triangulated with the parent/carer survey and programme data where relevant, and compared with the draft logic model, to identify consistencies and variation.

The following steps will be taken to ensure rigour in analysis and reporting of qualitative data:

- Analysis and interpretation will be carried out by several evaluation team members, and variation in interpretation highlighted and discussed
- Confidence that findings are an accurate reflection of data will be ensured through presentation of examples using quotes and detail, triangulation between different participants and forms of data, and reporting maximum variation
- The degree to which findings are transferrable will be assessed through description of contextual factors and gathering a range of perspectives
- Transparency and replicability in data collection and analysis
- Findings will be compared with findings from the evaluation of Family Skills and other family literacy programmes
- The report will clearly set the context of delivery as being within the Covid-19 pandemic and how this impacted on delivery

Preliminary findings will be shared with the Advisory Group in order to discuss implications.

## Ethics

Ethical approval was gained from the What Works Children's Social Care Research Ethics Committee for the RCT evaluation as originally designed; the revised protocol will be shared with the REC. The section below details components for consent for participation in different activities, and a summary of ethical considerations.

### **Consent by parents and carers for parent/carer survey and interviews**

Parent/carers will be sent an information sheet with information about the pre- and post-course survey, observation and interviews, as part of the enrolment process. This will include contact information for the evaluation team. Consent to take part in the survey will be obtained as part of the online survey. Consent for observation will be taken at the start of observed sessions. In the wave 2 survey at the end of the course, participants will be asked if they wish to take part in an interview, and to provide contact details on an electronic form if so. Information on each data collection activity will be provided and the consent of

participants will be sought prior to each research activities (e.g., online survey, interview). It will be made clear that they do not have to take part in the evaluation activities and that they can skip any questions and withdraw from the study at any time. Participants will be asked to provide a unique code to link surveys across time points. Data will be kept separately from any contact information, including that of delivery partners and tutors used to contact parents and carers.

### **Implementation and process evaluation interviews**

Those invited to take part in interviews will be sent an information sheet setting out the purpose of the study and contact details of the research team .

Written informed consent forms will be sent to participants prior to the interviews to be signed and returned before the interviews. If a consent form has not been returned, the researcher conducting the interview will confirm that the participant has read the information sheet and consent form, and will obtain verbal consent for the interview over the phone. The researcher will record this consent.

Participants will be told that they can withdraw their participation at any time up until the submission of the report provided their data can be distinguished in any analysis and writing undertaken. Interviews will be tracked via a unique identifier number, with codes kept separately from data.

<b>Ethical Consideration</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
Potential for parent/carer distress	Careful drafting of survey and qualitative instruments to avoid undermining confidence or self-esteem in relation to home literacy practices and environment
Undue burden on schools while subject to intense Covid-19 pressures	Minimal requirements of schools, no teacher assessments
Consent, including perceived or actual coercion of parents to participate in evaluation	Clear information sheets, explicit that participation in the evaluation is voluntary, voluntary consent checked at start of survey and qualitative interviews
Right to withdraw consent	Explained in information sheets and repeated in survey and qualitative interviews
Disclosure of (risk of) harm to participant or child	Clear explanation of the circumstances under which evaluation team would need to disclose (risk of harm)
Confidentiality	All data pseudonymised. No names (of individual or organisations) used in the report, nor detailed case

	information that lead to actual or perceived identification
Data security	Personal data held securely in accordance with GDPR. Secure transmission of personal data. Research team reminded of data incident reporting procedures. Data security reviewed regularly in team meetings
Protecting researchers from harm	Data collection will be remote and topic coverage is unlikely to be sensitive or difficult for researchers

### Data Handling

CEI will act as data controller for the study. All data will be handled in accordance with GDPR regulations. Information sheets will include a link to a Data Privacy Notice on CEI's website.

The lawful basis for processing information about participating schools and attendance register data is GDPR Article 6(1)(f) legitimate interests: 'processing is necessary for the purposes of the legitimate interests pursued by the controller or by a third party except where such interest are overridden by the interests or fundamental rights and freedoms of the data subject which require protection of the personal data'.

The lawful basis for processing observation, interview, focus group and survey data is consent.

Data will be pseudonymised and held confidentially in encrypted files or locked rooms. Egress or other secure platform will be used to securely transfer data. Egress meets FIPS 140-2 standard and the UK Government CPA Foundation Grade as a certified email encryption product suitable for sharing OFFICIAL and OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE information. Data will only be used for the purpose of the evaluation and will only be accessed by members of the research team. Data will be deleted within 24 months of publication of the final report.

No information about individual children will be made available to anyone outside of the research teams at CEI and BPSR. Pupils, teacher and school names will not be used in the final report. Qualitative data will be used in the report without identifying participants, including removal of contextual information where necessary if this could indirectly identify a participant.

A Memorandum of Understanding is in place between schools, Learning Unlimited and CEI, and a Data Sharing Agreement is in place between CEI and Learning Unlimited. A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) has been completed and signed off by CEI's Data Protection Officer and a senior staff member not connected with the study.

### Personnel

- Jane Lewis – Director, Centre for Evidence and Implementation: Co-Principal Investigator

- Eleanor Ott – Senior Advisor, Centre for Evidence and Implementation: Co-Principal Investigator and project manager
- Caroline Bryson – Bryson Purdon Social Research: survey design, administration, analysis and reporting
- Susan Purdon – Bryson Purdon Social Research: evaluation design and statistical analyses
- Rebecca Dean – Research Assistant, Centre for Evidence and Implementation: supporting survey administration, analysis, sampling and recruitment, qualitative fieldwork, analysis and reporting
- Georgina Mann – Research Assistant, Centre for Evidence and Implementation: supporting survey administration, analysis, sampling and recruitment, qualitative fieldwork, analysis and reporting
- Bianca Albers – Associate Director, Centre for Evidence and Implementation: supporting design and analyses of the implementation evaluation

### Registration

The pilot evaluation protocol has been pre-registered on OSF (<https://osf.io/vfj2d/>).

### Risks

This section outlines the risks to the anticipated risks that may arise and steps that will be taken to mitigate against these.

Risk	Mitigation
<p>Low participation by schools or parents/carers in Our Skills</p> <p>Likelihood: medium Impact: medium</p>	<p>Delivery partners have worked intensively with schools and supported their recruitment of parents/carers. The study will explore reasons for low participation.</p>
<p>Literacy levels or technology difficulties make participation difficult for parents/carers</p> <p>Likelihood: medium Impact: low</p>	<p>Schools and delivery partners will have access to equipment and funding to provide hardware if necessary. Tutors will endeavour to make materials accessible to parents/carers</p>
<p>Survey disrupts delivery of Our Skills sessions</p> <p>Likelihood: low Impact: medium</p>	<p>The survey will be designed to be short and interesting. Integration in sessions will be discussed with Learning Unlimited. Tutors will explain the value of understanding parents' experiences. Alternative activities will be available to those not participating.</p>
<p>Low engagement by families and professionals in the evaluation</p> <p>Likelihood: low Impact: medium</p>	<p>The study is designed to collect the minimum data necessary from small samples. Interviews will be undertaken remotely and timing flexed to participant convenience. It is expected that parents/carers and professionals will largely be invested in the programme and in supporting</p>

	children's learning. Triangulation between data sources and types will allow some compensation for gaps.
Disruption or changes to implementation due to unexpected impacts of Covid-19 or other cause  Likelihood: medium Impact: medium	Timing of fieldwork will be flexed as necessary (e.g. if there is an unexpected break in programme delivery), and scoped to the delivery that takes place.
Findings not applicable to future delivery in non-Covid-19 circumstances  Likelihood: low/medium Impact: low/medium	The basis of the evaluation is that there is value in exploring online delivery of the programme. Efforts will be made to distinguish features of programme delivery and implementation that might vary in non-Covid-19 circumstances.

### Timeline

Phase	Timing	Lead
Project scoping and set-up	Oct 2020-Feb 2021	JL, EO
Delivery begins. Observation of sessions begins. Wave 1 of parent/carer survey	End Feb/early March 2021	JL, EO, CB
Interviews with non-participating parents	March 2021	EO
Wave 2 of parent/carer survey	Wave 2: May 2021 Wave 3: August 2021	EO
Interviews with other parents; interviews and focus groups with professionals	June 2021	EO
Analysis	July-October 2021	JL, EO
Wave 3 of parent/carer survey	August 2021	EO
Final analysis and reporting	August 2021 – February 2022 publication	JL, EO, CB



## References

- All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked after Children and Care Leavers. (2012). *Education Matters in Care: A report by the independent cross-party inquiry into the educational attainment of looked after children in England*.
- Andrew, A., Cattan, S., Costa Dias, M., Farquharson, C., Kraftman, L., Krutikova, S., ... Sevilla, A. (2020). Inequalities in Children's Experiences of Home Learning during the COVID-19 Lockdown in England\*. *Fiscal Studies*, 41(3), 653–683.
- Bayrakdar, S., & Guveli, A. (2020). *Inequalities in home learning and schools' provision of distance teaching during school closure of COVID-19 lockdown in the UK Non-Technical Summary*. Retrieved from [www.iser.essex.ac.uk](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk)
- Berridge, D., Luke, N., Sebba, J., Strand, S., Cartwright, M., Staples, E., ... O'higgins, A. (2020). *Children in Need and Children in Care: Educational Attainment and Progress*. (April). Retrieved from [www.nuffieldfoundation.org](http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org)
- Cara, O. (2018). *Family Skills Internal Report*.
- Drew, H., & Banerjee, R. (2019). Supporting the education and well-being of children who are looked-after: what is the role of the virtual school? *European Journal of Psychology of Education*.
- Evans, R., Brown, R., Rees, G., & Smith, P. (2016). Systematic review of educational interventions for looked-after children and young people: Recommendations for intervention development and evaluation. *British Educational Research Journal*.
- Gale, N., Health, G., Cameron, E., Rashid, S. and Redwood, S. (2013) Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi-disciplinary health research. *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 2013 13:117
- Husain, F., Wishart, R., Marshall, L., Frankenberg, S., Bussard, L., Chidley, S., ... Morris, S. (2018). *Family Skills: Evaluation report and executive summary*. (July), 84. Retrieved from <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk>
- Kelly, R. (2017). *The importance of education on the life chances of children in care*. London: Sir John Cass's Foundation.
- Melhuish, E. C., Phan, M. B., Sylva, K., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2008). Effects of the home learning environment and preschool center experience upon literacy and numeracy development in early primary school. *Journal of Social Issues*, 64(1), 95–114.
- Sanders, M., Sholl, P., Leroy, A., Mitchell, C., Reid, L., & Gibbons, D. (2020). *What Works In Education For Children Who Have Had Social Workers? Summary Report*. Retrieved from [https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WWCSC\\_what\\_works\\_education\\_children\\_SWs\\_Feb20.pdf](https://whatworks-csc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WWCSC_what_works_education_children_SWs_Feb20.pdf)
- Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., Mayo, A., Sammons, P., Melhuish, E., & Sylva, K. (2013). The learning life course of at "risk" children aged 3-16: Perceptions of students and parents about "succeeding against the odds". *Scottish Educational Review*, 45(2), 5–17. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bri&AN=91994924&authtype=hib&site=ehost-live>
- Sutcliffe, A. G., Gardiner, J., & Melhuish, E. (2017). Educational progress of looked-after children in England: A study using group trajectory analysis. *Pediatrics*, 140(3).

## Appendices

Appendix 1: Logic Model (PDF).