Foundation Stage Capacity Building Review 2017-19

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Between 2017 and 2019 CCEA Foundation Stage Officer in conjunction with a group of Primary Principals created Foundation Stage Capacity Building Workshops in line with recent documents distributed by DE and the ETI and CCEA online courses.

Throughout this period, a range of Foundation Stage face-to-face workshops were held to present this training resource to teachers across Northern Ireland. These workshops were facilitated as part of a part of a wider cross-sectional study, beginning in the Belfast and South-Eastern regions in 2017, then subsequently the North-Eastern and Southern region in 2018, concluding with the Western region in 2019.

In total, 638 teachers attended and took part in the workshops.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

At the beginning of the workshop, attendees completed a starting point questionnaire (see Appendix 1 for an example of this) to gauge their initial awareness and usage of various documents, support materials and resources.

Following the presentation, which had opportunities for professional engagement and group discussion, attendees were split into groups in order to take part in semi-structured focus group discussions (see Appendix 2). These discussions focused on the capacity building materials presented, the online resource, and the benefits of and barriers to clustering. These discussions were facilitated by CCEA Research Officers who recorded the teachers’ feedback.

1.3 RESULTS

The findings from the starting point questionnaire and workshops are detailed under the headings below. The total number of teachers who took part in the research was 613 for the starting point questionnaire and 446 for the focus group discussions (96.1% and 69.9% of total attendance respectively).

1.3.1 Starting Point Questionnaire

The starting point questionnaire indicated that, under half of all teachers (N=285, 47.5%) expressed a familiarity with the ETI document, ‘Effective Practice and Self-Evaluation Questions for Primary’ (2017), and the ‘Chief Inspector’s Reports 2014-18’ (N=266, 44.9%). Conversely, just under three-quarters of respondents (N=427, 72%) were unaware of the ‘Learning Leaders’ document published by DE in 2016.

Please see Section 3.3 of this report for an explanation of this discrepancy.
In terms of comparison between the three phases of the Foundation Stage Capacity Building Programme, marked improvements in awareness of the aforementioned documents can be seen throughout the lifetime of the programme. During the first phase (Belfast and South-Eastern) an average of 28.7% of respondents reported being aware of at least one of the documents; this increased to 34.1% and then to 41.3% in the second (North-Eastern and Southern) and third phase (Western) of the programme respectively.

Around half of those who responded to the starting point questionnaire (N=303, 49.4%) stated that they were unaware of the existing CCEA Foundation Stage Online Course. For those who indicated that they were aware (N=266, 43.4%), approximately 40% (N=105, 39.5%) indicated that they had used the materials presented in the online course.

Around two-thirds of respondents (N=404, 65.9%) indicated that they do not use the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework tables (included in the Effective Practice and Self-Evaluation Questions for Primary (ETI 2017) to reflect on their own teaching practice. This was found to be considerably higher in the Western region (N=116, 82.3%). A large number of teachers who stated that they do not use the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework tables for reflection (N=273, 67.6%) also indicated that they do not use any document for reflection.

1.3.2 Workshop Findings

Capacity Building Materials

Attendees across all events (N=446, 100%) agreed that the DE and ETI documents would be useful to disseminate to colleagues. Around two-thirds of attendees (N=283, 63.5%) noted that they would require time to study these and evaluate how they could be implemented into classroom practice.

In addition to this, the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework questions have been well received with over 90% of attendees (N=410, 91.9%) agreeing that they will be useful. Many of these teachers (N=104, 23.3%) believed that the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework questions would be useful guidance for teachers and for the inspection process.

It was also felt that these questions are extremely important for newly qualified teachers as a means of providing guidance.

There was a consensus amongst almost all attendees (N=441, 98.1%) that the CCEA online materials are useful. One particular resource which attendees liked (N=219, 49.1%) was the CCEA online videos of classroom practice. These were considered useful as they illustrate effective practice in a format which is more accessible, tangible and preferable to reading through textbooks or guidance documents.

Overall, almost all respondents (N=445, 99.8%) agreed there was opportunity to engage in professional dialogue, and all agreed that this had been useful, with a large number of attendees noting that the session was beneficial for attendees to share best practice.
Clustering

Approximately half of all respondents indicated that they cluster/work together outside with other schools, whilst a similar proportion noted that they did not cluster outside of their own school. A large number of those who clustered outside of their school are involved in clusters through Shared Education.

Focus group discussions revealed that, though less than half of respondents do not cluster outside of their centres, a large number (approximately two-thirds) clustered within their school, at either Key Stage or whole school level.

The vast majority of attendees (N=427, 95.7%) noted that they were keen to get involved in clustering as a result of attending the Foundation Stage events. Attendees discussed how they felt enthused about cluster group meetings. Additionally, around 80% of respondents (N=348, 78%) indicated that they would use the CCEA materials presented as part of any future clusters.

When discussing the obstacles faced by cluster grouping, the main issues raised were: a lack of available time (N=391, 87.7%); the costs of travel/hosting/organisation (N=119, 26.7%); and a reluctance/unwillingness to share resources or best practice (N=112, 25.1%).

1.4 CONCLUSIONS

This report suggests that teachers, overall, were satisfied with the CCEA online resource presented by CCEA Foundation Stage Officer, with almost all respondents concluding that the online materials presented would be useful for their practice and that they would share these with colleagues.

However, qualitative comments raised the question of time as an issue for Foundation Stage teachers, particularly in terms of the time required to understand and fully engage with the DE and ETI documents.

Just under half of teachers in attendance were already involved in cluster groups with outside schools. A sizeable proportion of those who are not involved stated that they are now more likely to get involved in clustering as a result of the sessions. Time and financial constraints were consistently mentioned as obstacles to active clustering and the potential preparation of new cluster groups.
2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 BACKGROUND

Between 2017 and 2019 CCEA Foundation Stage Officer in conjunction with a group of Primary Principals created Foundation Stage Capacity Building Workshops in line with recent documents distributed by DE and the ETI and CCEA online courses.

Throughout this period, a range of Foundation Stage Capacity Building Workshops were held to present this training resource to teachers across Northern Ireland. These were facilitated as part of a wider cross-sectional study, beginning in the Belfast and South-Eastern regions in 2017, then the North-Eastern and Southern region in 2018 and concluding with the Western region in 2019. These were held in the following locations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Attendees (N)</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belfast and South-Eastern</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>Jan/Feb. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-Eastern and Southern</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>Jan-Apr. 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>Jan. 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Attendance Sheets

Overall, 638 teachers attended 20 events across the three years of the project (an average of 32 attendees per event), 613 (96.1%) of which completed an initial starting point questionnaire to gauge their knowledge and understanding of the DE and ETI documents and existing online materials. At the end of the events 446 respondents (69.9%) provided feedback on the capacity building documents presented, the online resource and clustering via focus group discussions.

This report is a summary of the information gathered through the starting point questionnaire, the focus groups and the follow-up questionnaire.

2.2 REPORT STRUCTURE

This report details the findings obtained from the workshops. The structure of the remainder of this report is as follows:

- Section 3: Methodology;
- Section 4: Results; and
- Section 5: Conclusions.

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2 For a detailed explanation of the response rate, please refer to Section 3.3 of this report.
3.0 METHODOLOGY

The following section includes a summary of the methodology used to obtain feedback from Foundation Stage teachers. During the Workshops, CCEA Foundation Stage Officer and Principals delivered a presentation which had opportunities for professional engagement and group discussion. The pertinent information from recent DE and ETI publications have been integrated into the CCEA online teacher professional learning courses.

3.1 STARTING POINT QUESTIONNAIRE

At the beginning of each workshop, attendees completed a starting point questionnaire (see Appendix 1 for an example of one of these) to gauge attendees’ initial awareness and usage of various documents, supports and resources.

The questionnaire captured school information, use of Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework tables, as well as attendees’ awareness of other DE and ETI documents (‘Chief Inspector’s Report 2016-18’ (2018) and ‘Learning Leaders’ (DE: 2016)) and existing CCEA online courses.

As stated, 613 respondents (96.1% of total attendance) provided feedback through the starting point questionnaire; information obtained from this will be included in Section 4 of this report.

3.2 FOCUS GROUP & FOLLOW UP QUESTIONNAIRE

Following the presentation, attendees were split into groups and took part in semi-structured focus group discussions (see Appendix 2). The discussions focused on the capacity building materials presented, the online resource and the benefits of and barriers to clustering. These discussions were facilitated by CCEA Research Officers who recorded feedback for future analysis.

As stated, 446 respondents (69.9%) provided feedback on the capacity building documents, online resource and clustering via focus group discussions and/or a follow up questionnaire.

3.3 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS / CAVEATS

Due to staffing shortages within the Research & Statistics (R&S) Unit at the time of the project in 2018, the original method of utilising focus groups to collect all data from the workshop participants had to be cancelled.

For the North-Eastern and Southern regions, the R&S Unit developed a feedback questionnaire to collect information in place of the focus groups. This document included a wide range of qualitative questions that followed the planned focus group discussion guide. However, it should be noted that this was a compromised method of enquiry that unfortunately included a number of research limitations.
Focus groups offer a number of research advantages that unfortunately were lost as a result of having to amend the methodology. The main advantages of focus groups is that they allow for more detailed information, clarification on specific points and opportunity to explore relevant issues and themes that may not be covered through a standardised questionnaire. Actions were taken to attempt to obtain this feedback, however certain themes and opinions may have been missed due to the limitations of the differing methods used in the project.

While completion of the starting point questionnaire was relatively high at 96.1% (N=613), a much lower percentage of attendees 69.9% (N=446) provided feedback to the follow up questionnaire because North-Eastern and Southern teachers completed it independently in groups of two or three and were not part of a focus group.

### 3.4 INTERPRETATION OF TABLES AND RESULTS

The value ‘N’ in the report is the number of actual responses to the items presented, described, or illustrated. In some instances, were respondents are asked to give multiple responses to an item, ‘N’ may be greater than the total respondent figure.
4.0 RESULTS

4.1 STARTING POINT QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS

At the beginning of each Coordinator Capacity event, teachers were presented with a starting point questionnaire. This questionnaire captured school information, as well as gauging attendees’ familiarity with and use of ETI and DE documents and CCEA online courses. In total, 638 teachers attended the events, with 96.1% (N=613) completing the starting point questionnaire.

Table 2 – Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Stage Coordinator</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1 Teacher</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2 Teacher</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composite Year 1/2 Teacher</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>613</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Starting Point Questionnaire Feedback

Figure 1 – Other Respondents

Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Starting Point Questionnaire Feedback

The largest single grouping of respondents indicated that they were Year 1 Teachers (N=114, 18.6%). The majority of those who stated ‘Other’ (N=234, 38.2%) clarified that they were
either composite teachers with varying year group responsibilities or did not provide a response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Controlled</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintained</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish-Medium</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>613</td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Starting Point Questionnaire Feedback*

The largest proportion of questionnaire respondents were from a Controlled School (N=270, 44%) followed by Maintained (N=232, 37.8%). A range of school sizes were represented in the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Size</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small School (&lt; than 105 pupils)</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium School (105-219 pupils)</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large School (220 pupils+)</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>613</td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Starting Point Questionnaire Feedback*
Table 5 – Awareness of Documentation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The following documents are going to be outlined today, are you familiar with any of the below?</th>
<th>Yes N (%)</th>
<th>No N (%)</th>
<th>Unsure N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective Practice and Self-Evaluation Questions for Primary (ETI 2017)</td>
<td>285 (47.5%)</td>
<td>246 (41%)</td>
<td>69 (11.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief Inspector’s Reports 2014-183</td>
<td>266 (44.2%)</td>
<td>263 (43.7%)</td>
<td>73 (12.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Leaders (DE: March 2016)</td>
<td>77 (13.0%)</td>
<td>427 (72.0%)</td>
<td>89 (15.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Starting Point Questionnaire

Feedback

Prior to the workshops, a moderate proportion of attendees stated that they were familiar with both the ETI document and Chief Inspector’s Reports.

Under half of all teachers (N=285, 47.5%) expressed a familiarity with the ETI document, ‘Effective Practice and Self-Evaluation Questions for Primary’ (2017), and the ‘Chief Inspector’s Reports 2014-18’ (N=266, 44.9%).

Conversely, just under three-quarters of respondents (N=427, 72%) were unaware of the ‘Learning Leaders’ document published by DE in 2016.

In terms of comparison between the three phases of the Foundation Stage Capacity Building Programme, marked improvements in awareness of the aforementioned documents can be seen throughout the lifetime of the programme. During the first phase (Belfast and South-Eastern) an average of 28.7% of respondents reported being aware of at least one of the documents; this increased to 34.1% and then to 41.3% in the second (North-Eastern and Southern) and third phase (Western) of the programme respectively.

This increase could potentially be explained by the programme becoming more established over time, and educational professionals becoming aware of it and subsequently sharing the documents with other colleagues.

3 Please Note: For the first and second phase of the programme, respondents were asked to rate their awareness of the Chief Inspector’s Report 2014-16 (November 2016), whilst the third phase of the programme asked respondents to rate their awareness of the Chief Inspector’s Report 2016-18 (November 2018).
### Table 6 – Awareness of Existing CCEA Foundation Stage Online Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are you aware of CCEA’s existing Foundation Stage online course?</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>49.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>613</td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Starting Point Questionnaire Feedback*

Around half of those who responded to the starting point questionnaire (N=303, 49.4%) stated that they were unaware of the existing CCEA Foundation Stage Online Course. For those who indicated that they were aware (N=266, 43.4%), approximately 40% (N=105, 39.5%) they had used the materials presented in the online course.

There was no notable difference found between the levels of awareness across the regions in relation to the existing CCEA Foundation Stage Online Course with awareness ranging between 40% and 49%. However, usage in the North-Eastern and Southern regions (N=48, 15%) was found to be considerably lower than the average found across the regions.

### Table 7 – Use of Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you reflect on your own teaching practice using Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework tables?</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>65.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>613</td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Starting Point Questionnaire Feedback*

Around two-thirds of respondents (N=404, 65.9%) indicated that they do not use the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework tables (included in the Effective Practice and Self-Evaluation Questions for Primary (ETI 2017) to reflect on their own teaching practice. This was found to be considerably higher in the Western region (N=116, 82.3%).
Table 8 – Documents Used for Reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If no, do you use any other document to reflect on your own teaching practice?</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Starting Point Questionnaire Feedback

A large number of teachers who stated that they do not use the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework tables for reflection (N=273, 67.6%) indicated that they do not use any document to reflect on their own teaching, whilst the remainder either used other documents (N=99, 24.5%), or did not answer the question (N=32, 7.9%).

Qualitative comments allowed respondents an opportunity to further explain how they reflect on their teaching. Respondents indicated that they either used school specific (internal) documents, CCEA documents\(^4\) or self-evaluation (without documents) to reflect on their practice.

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\(^4\) Please Note: No elaboration was provided as to what CCEA documents were utilised to reflect on teaching practice.
4.2 WORKSHOP FINDINGS

At the end of each Foundation Stage event attendees were given the opportunity to provide feedback through participating in semi-structured focus group discussions or by completing a follow up questionnaire that was based on the focus groups themselves. The findings from each of these events have been thematically analysed and are presented below.

4.2.1 Overview of Documentation

**Q1 From what you have heard today, what are the implications of the DE and ETI documents for you in your role?**

**Time Constraints**

Attendees from all events (N=446, 100%) agreed that the DE and ETI documents would be useful to them in their role. However, around two-thirds of attendees (N=283, 63.5%) noted that they would require time to study these and evaluate how they could be implemented into classroom practice. Teachers stated that they lack time during the school day to properly evaluate the usefulness of these documents. It was felt that doing so might distract from the priorities of teaching (e.g., lesson planning and marking pupils’ work).

Attendees suggested that the only time that they could review these documents would be outside of school hours, which is not appropriate and goes against union advice on industrial action. Due to this, a number of teachers emphasised the importance of senior management providing Foundation Stage teachers with the time during school hours to review and implement these documents into their classroom practice. However, concerns were raised as to whether this would be possible. Additionally, a small number of respondents (N=16, 3.6%) suggested that there was an overwhelming amount of teaching and guidance documents to review.

In spite of this, over one-third of attendees (N=159, 35.8%), felt that the documents would be useful to disseminate to their colleagues and school principal to promote Foundation Stage and best practice.

**Lack of Awareness**

Around one-fifth of attendees (N=79, 17.7%) described being introduced to the documents through the session they attended and that previously they had little or no previous awareness of said documents. There was a general consensus that with this new awareness comes the responsibility of disseminating these documents to colleagues, a number of attendees (N=23, 5.2%) described being enthusiastic about going back to school and sharing information with their colleagues.
It was recommended by several respondents (N=63, 14.1%) that it would have been beneficial to have the documents before or during the meeting, however the materials were available online from 2016 onward.

27 respondents (6.1%) discussed how Senior Management Teams (SMTs) are not effective in passing documents or sharing information to relevant members of staff. Suggestions were made that links to documents should be emailed directly to Foundation Stage teachers or be highlighted by C2K on school intranets.

**Use of Documents**

Around a quarter of respondents (N=89, 20%) agreed that the DE and ETI documents would be useful when preparing for an inspection, as they would help provide information relating to what will be expected. However, a small number of respondents (N=9, 2%) warned against using only these documents when preparing for an inspection as it may limit their teaching.

It was also suggested by 11% of respondents (N=49) that these documents can be used as an aid for teachers to improve their self-reflection, with 12 respondents (2.7%) agreeing that it was a priority for them.

From a management perspective, 14% of respondents (N=62) believed that the DE and ETI documents can be used as a referral for guidance and planning. It was recommended that School Development Plans (SDP) should incorporate these documents as they would help to ensure that pupils’ needs in Foundation Stage are appropriately considered.

Q2 Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework questions have been used for reflection in each of the CCEA online courses. Do you think this is useful for you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>91.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Questionnaire Feedback

**Support**

Overall the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework questions have been well received with over 90% of attendees (N=410, 91.9%) agreeing that they will be useful for them. Over one-quarter of all respondents (N=125, 28%) felt that the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework documents promoted understanding on how to become a more reflective
teacher and would therefore help facilitate staff development. Many of these teachers (N=90, 20.2%) felt that they would be a useful base for self-evaluation, when it comes to current practice and lesson planning, or for drafting their School Development Plan, as they encourage reflection in areas which might otherwise be overlooked.

The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework questions were also considered useful in terms of clearly setting out what best practice looks like in the classroom. In relation to this, teachers (N=64, 14.3%) agreed that the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework questions were a good resource to use to “[…] take stock” of their classroom practice and to provide reassurance. It was noted that teaching can be isolating particularly for those small schools where there is maybe only one Foundation Stage teacher and, as such, it was considered beneficial to have these questions to provide that level of reassurance that what is being carried out is best practice.

Around one-quarter of all respondents (N=104, 23.3%) believed that the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework questions would be useful in preparing for inspections as they highlight ETI’s requirements. It was also felt that these questions are extremely important for newly qualified teachers as a means of providing guidance.

In terms of planning, approximately 10% of attendees (N=54, 12.1%) discussed how self-evaluative questions give meetings and discussions with colleagues a structure and sense of purpose, and will help management plan teaching.

A number of respondents (N=47, 10.5%) also indicated that they will share the learning from the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework questions with colleagues either individually, at meetings or introduce them into their local cluster groups (N=27, 6.1%).

**Concern**

In spite of the positive response, a number of attendees (N=71, 15.9%) were unsure of the value of the questions for use outside planning and preparation. These respondents felt that they self-reflect naturally on a daily basis. It was discussed that teachers are aware if something is not working in their classroom and are constantly evaluating their teaching practice. These teachers suggested that the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework questions should not be promoted as a tool for daily use as they would become laborious and thus negatively impact on teaching time and creativity.

The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework questions were also felt to be overwhelming by a small number of attendees (N=26, 5.8%) in the Western region who suggested that the questions appeared to be too subjective. These respondents admitted to being previously unfamiliar with the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework questions, and stated that they would need time to review them. It was recommended that attendees should have been directed to the document prior to the event or, alternatively, provided with printed copies on the day, however the materials were available online from 2016 onward.
Q3: Overview of Materials.

**Figure 2 – Was the overview of the online materials useful?**

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</tr>
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<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Questionnaire Feedback*

As illustrated in Figure 2, almost all respondents in question (N=441, 98.1%) agreed that the overview of online materials was useful.

Just under one-quarter of attendees (N=101, 22.7%) specifically mentioned that the overview had been useful at signposting teachers to relevant available CCEA online resources. A number of focus group attendees (N=37, 8.3%) stated that this part of the Foundation Stage event was particularly useful as they were previously unaware of any of the online materials. Attendees also commented that they had heard some useful ideas during this part of the event.

One particular resource which attendees liked (N=219, 49.1%) was the CCEA online videos of classroom practice. These videos were considered useful as they illustrate effective practice in a format which is more accessible and quicker to access than having to read textbooks or guidance documents. Teachers from the Belfast and South-Eastern (N=89, 19.9%) regions also discussed the logistical difficulties to visit other Foundation Stage classrooms. For these respondents the videos provide an invaluable insight, particularly for teachers from smaller schools as they show classroom layouts as well as teaching practice.

Respondents praised the CCEA videos as they took place in a real classroom and present a realistic depiction of what teaching in that setting is actually like. In addition to this, respondents liked that the videos were set in Northern Ireland specific classrooms which made them easier to relate to and obtain ideas from. This was compared favourably to previous videos which were said to be contrived and unrealistic.
Around 10% of attendees (N=41, 9.2%) stated that they were satisfied the CCEA online materials are up-to-date and in line with ETI guidance.

**b. Would you use them in school?**

Three-hundred and forty respondents (N=340, 76.2%) explicitly stated that they would use the CCEA online materials presented at the Foundation Stage event in their schools.

Regarding their use, a number of attendees (N=40, 9%) felt the content of these online resources provide guidance for structuring planning meetings and the School Development Plan, and can be used as a tool for lesson planning and to help enhance professional development.

Furthermore, respondents commented on the high quality of the resources presented and feel they will benefit teachers. It was agreed that these materials would be useful to feedback to colleagues (N=30, 6.7%).

However, it should be noted that just under half of all respondents (N=212, 47.5%) were concerned that, whilst the overview of the CCEA online materials was useful, they would not get the time to access and evaluate these materials within their busy classroom. Concerns were raised that reviewing the materials might encroach on time dedicated to teaching, lesson planning and marking.

**c. Would you share these materials with colleagues?**

As with the previous question, the majority of respondents (N=358, 80.3%) stated that they would share these materials with colleagues.

Attendees stated the resources outlined at the event would be useful to disseminate to their principal and other colleagues to ensure that Foundation Stage is given the recognition that it deserves. Attendees commented that Foundation Stage is seen as the least important stage in comparison to the other Key Stages, but that these resources will help to highlight the value of Foundation Stage and play-based learning.

A large number of attendees (N=135, 30.3%) indicated that they would share the information at staff meetings which would provide an opportunity to plan together. Others also believed that the materials could be used to structure cluster groups to promote beneficial discussions.
Q4a How useful did you find the session?

Figure 5 –

Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Questionnaire Feedback

A large number of focus group attendees noted that the session was beneficial for attendees to share best practice. In addition to this, almost 60% mentioned that meeting face-to-face is the only way they can receive this type of information (N=266, 59.6%). Around one in ten respondents (N=41, 9.2%) agreed that the session was useful as it provided attendees with the reassurance that their teaching practice is effective.

In addition to this, over one-quarter of respondents (N=126, 28.3%) elaborated that the session provided a good overview of resources available, with some respondents commenting that the session was informative and empowering in this regard.

Furthermore, over one-third of attendees (N=166, 37.2%) stated that they liked the Foundation Stage focus and stated that these are very rare. A number of these respondents (N=85, 19.1%) noted that the importance of Foundation Stage is sometimes overlooked by colleagues from other Key Stages. As such, it was felt that these events were useful for highlighted the importance of Foundation Stage and the importance of their role within school overall, whilst providing a unique opportunity for networking and engaging with colleagues outside of their own school.

On a more general note, praise was given to those who facilitated the session itself (N=29, 6.5%), whilst others strongly recommended that this type of training (N=51, 11.4%) should be arranged more regularly.
Q4b Was there an opportunity to engage in professional dialogue?

### Table 9 –

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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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</table>

*Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Questionnaire Feedback*

Almost all respondents (N=445, 99.8%) agreed there was opportunity to engage in professional dialogue, and all agreed that this had been useful. Attendees found the opportunity to talk with colleagues from Foundation Stage useful for sharing ideas and concerns. It was argued that Foundation Stage should be afforded more opportunities to meet up with colleagues.

### 4.2.2 Clustering

The CCEA resources have been designed for both internal school use and in wider cluster groups. This section of the research workshop gave attendees an opportunity to share their experiences of clustering and assess whether the resources would be useful in this setting.

Q5a Do you currently cluster/work together within or outside your own school?

Approximately half of all respondents indicated that they cluster/work together outside with other schools, a similar proportion noted that they did not cluster outside of their own school. A large number of those who clustered outside of their school are involved in clusters through Shared Education.

Around one-fifth of all respondents (N=31, 22%) identified the loss of the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) as having a negative impact on external clustering, as CASS previously coordinated and provided an agenda for cluster group meetings.

Focus group discussions revealed that, though less than half of respondents do not cluster outside of their centres, a large number (approximately two-thirds) clustered within their school, at either Key Stage or whole school level.

A number of respondents provided additional comments (N=63, 14.1%) stating they work as a Foundation Stage team and have regular meetings involving planning, evaluation and sharing good practice. Others meet within their respective Key Stages or as a whole school.
Furthermore, teachers who identified themselves as being from schools in isolated areas described how crucial groups on Social Media websites are for keeping in touch with colleagues when clustering is not possible. This was found to be a particular issue to those from the Western region.

**Q6 From what you have seen and heard today, would you be more likely to cluster/work together?**

![Figure 8](image)

*Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Questionnaire Feedback*

The vast majority of attendees (N=427, 95.7%) noted that they were keen to get involved in clustering as a result of attending the Foundation Stage events. Attendees discussed how they felt enthused about cluster group meetings.

**Q7 If you are in a cluster with other schools, do you think you will use the CCEA materials presented today?**

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<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
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<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
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</table>

*Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Questionnaire Feedback*
Around 80% of respondents (N=348, 78%) indicated that they would use the CCEA materials presented as part of any future clusters. It was felt that the materials provided will be useful to disseminate with school colleagues to provide an initial structure and guide for cluster meetings. A small number (N=5, 1.1%) felt that this use depended on the focus of the cluster group, whilst other teachers revealed that they would use the online materials (N=6, 1.4%).

**Q8 Do you face any obstacles/issues etc., when clustering/working together?**

![Figure 11 –](chart.png)

*Source: Foundation Stage Coordinator Capacity Building Questionnaire Feedback*

Most Foundation Stage teachers (N=108, 76.6%) reported that they face a number of obstacles which affects both the set up and effectiveness of cluster groups. The main obstacles arising from the various regions are discussed below:

**Time** – It was highlighted that for clustering to be valued it would need to take place during school hours and, as such, this makes engagement difficult. The majority of respondents (N=391, 87.7%) believed that finding time to attend and prepare for clusters was the biggest obstacle they would encounter, particularly due to the daily demands and requirements of the classroom. This is by far the most significant issue that faces teachers.

**Cost** – Just over one-quarter of all participants (N=119, 26.7%) felt that the financial cost of clustering is a deterrent. This was considered to be a particular issue for rural schools where teachers need to travel potentially long distances to attend clusters, requiring reimbursement. Additionally, a central venue along with sub-cover may need to be booked to help facilitate attendance. Respondents stated that the identified costs makes engagement in clustering unfeasible, particularly as school budgets are currently squeezed.
Unwillingness to Share Resources / Best Practice – A quarter of focus group participants (N=112, 25.1%) felt that some teachers will not attend clusters as they are not willing to share ideas and resources because they are competing with other schools for numbers. It was also mentioned that some teachers have attended cluster groups in the past solely to receive information without contributing to the cluster.

Principals’ Priorities – 23.3% of attendees across all events (N=104) believed that having a supportive principal who understands the benefits of clustering makes it much easier for teachers to attend and spend time preparing for clusters. Some attendees highlighted that it is crucial to have the support of the Senior Leadership Team of their school.

Location & Logistics – Ninety-five respondents (21.3%) stated that as the transport, location and distance between schools can act as an obstacle to teachers attending clusters due to the travel time involved. It was suggested that either rotating the location of the cluster or selecting a centralised location could help to counteract this (again associated costs were considered an issue). One small group (N=10, 7.1%) argued that it was essential for teachers to make more contacts with local neighbouring schools.

Cluster Leadership – One-fifth of respondents (N=91, 20.4%) felt that in order for a cluster group to be successful it must have a strong leader to direct, organise and guide meetings.

Industrial Action – Just under one-fifth of respondents (N=80, 18%) believed that the current union directive on industrial action prevents many teachers from taking part in clusters outside of school hours. It was also noted that individual unions have different policies on industrial action, which complicates the matter further. For instance, one union advises its members not to get involved in any ‘[…] new initiatives’, which clustering could be considered part of.

Additional Workload – Other attendees (N=73, 16.4%) discussed the difficulty in finding people willing to take the initiative to form a cluster. Teachers stated that people are unwilling to take the lead to develop an agenda and organise the logistics around a cluster due to the responsibility and workload this entails. One small group (N=9, 6.4%) felt it was unfair if the planning falls onto one teacher and suggested it would be fairer to have a rotating Chairperson to take control and organise specific clusters.

Competing Priorities – Approximately 15% of attendees (N=69, 15.5%) felt that competing priorities are often a serious obstacle to cluster groups. These were discussed in terms of Foundation Stage vs other Key Stages. Teachers felt that Foundation Stage was often outnumbered and those from other key Stages have little interest in Foundation Stage. Some individuals are very single minded in using a cluster for their own purposes to the detriment of other members.

Clear Agenda – Around one-tenth of all respondents (N=47, 10.5%) felt that a strict agenda should be set for clusters and only items on this discussed. Teachers were unhappy at the
prospect of attending a cluster without a clear focus, with some admitting they have attended such groups in the past. As such, it was recommended that to encourage teachers to attend cluster groups, they need to be well organised and have a clear purpose.

**Size of Cluster** – A number of participants (N=26, 5.8%) identified cluster size as a barrier to engagement. It was argued that if clusters become too large they can become ineffective and therefore off-putting due to the competing demands and various needs of different schools. It was argued that keeping the cluster at an appropriate size would ensure that the needs of all teachers are met.

**4.2.3 Additional Comments**

The majority of respondents who provided additional comments were very positive and remarked on how their course was very enjoyable, informative and well presented.

Again, participants highlighted time concerns with many stating that there may not be enough time to read and understand the documents to see what can be implemented.
5.0 CONCLUSIONS

This report suggests that teachers, overall, were satisfied with the CCEA online resources presented by CCEA Foundation Stage Officer, with almost all respondents agreeing that the online materials would be useful for their practice and that they would share these with colleagues. This compares favourably with the starting point questionnaire which found that less than half of respondents had used any online materials prior to the workshop.

However, qualitative comments raised the question of time as an issue for Foundation Stage teachers, particularly in terms of the time required to understand and fully engage with the DE and ETI documents the resource was based on.

Teachers also acknowledged the importance of the Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework questions as being a useful resource for lesson planning and preparation. This finding is of particular interest as a majority of respondents prior to the workshop indicated that they had never used Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework questions.

It was also felt that the sessions themselves were a valuable opportunity for interaction and networking.

Just under half of teachers in attendance noted that they are already involved in cluster groups with outside schools. A large number stated that they are more likely to get involved in clustering as a result of the sessions.

Teachers acknowledged that the materials presented would be useful for Foundation Stage meetings, staff meetings and their school development plans, and to feedback work done at Foundation Stage to the rest of the school. Teachers also believed that the materials could be used to structure cluster groups to promote beneficial discussions.

However, time and financial constraints were typical obstacles with regard to clustering and the potential preparation of cluster groups.
# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: Starting Point Questionnaire

![Logo](cea.png)

**Foundation Stage Co-Ordinator Capacity Building: Starting Point Questionnaire**

>This questionnaire aims to gauge your level of knowledge and inform how we can improve the communication of documents and guidelines. All responses will be treated with the strictest confidence.

*Please return this questionnaire to a CCEA officer.*

## School Information (used for research purposes only)

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<tr>
<td>☐ Year 1 Teacher</td>
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<td>☐ Year 2 Teacher</td>
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## School Size

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<tr>
<td>☐ Small School (&lt; than 105 pupils)</td>
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## Baseline Information

**Q1. Are you familiar with any of the following?**

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<th>Question</th>
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<td>☐</td>
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<td>b) Chief Inspector's Report 2016-18 (November 2018)</td>
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<td>c) Learning Leaders (DE: March 2016)</td>
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</table>
Q2. Are you aware of CCEA’s existing Foundation Stage online course?
- Yes
- No
- Unsure

b) If yes, have you ever used the materials presented in the online course?
- Yes
- No

Please comment:

Q3. Do you reflect on your own teaching practice using ISEF tables?
- Yes
- No

b) If no, do you use any other document to reflect on your own teaching practice?
- Yes
- No

Please comment:

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Prepared by Research & Statistics

SOH0016/1819
Appendix 2: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Foundation Stage Capacity Building: Questions

**Session**
1. From what you have heard today, what are the implications of the DE and ETI documents for you in your role?

2. ISEF questions have been used for reflection in each of the CCEA online courses. Do you think this is useful for you? How would you use them?

3. Was the overview of the online materials useful? Would you use them in school? Would you share these materials with your colleagues?

4. Did you find the session beneficial/useful? Was there an opportunity to engage in professional dialogue?

**Clustering / Working Together**
5. Do you currently cluster/work together?
   
   In your own school (e.g. as a FS team or as a FS rep on a Key Stage team)
   Outside with other schools

6. From what you have seen and heard today, would you be more likely to cluster/work together?

7. If you are in a cluster or work with other schools, do you think you will use the CCEA materials presented today?

8. Do you feel clustering/working together is worthwhile?

9. Do you face any obstacles/issues etc. when clustering/working together?
Acknowledgements

CCEA Research & Statistics Unit is grateful to those who have contributed to this evaluation. We would like to thank all involved in the evaluation for their feedback and support.

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