

# A modelling and feasibility study of a positive early childhood education programme for early years educators

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<b>Registration date</b> 18/11/2024	<b>Overall study status</b> Completed	<input type="checkbox"/> Statistical analysis plan <input type="checkbox"/> Results
<b>Last Edited</b> 18/02/2025	<b>Condition category</b> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual participant data <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Record updated in last year

## Plain English summary of protocol

### Background and study aims

There is growing evidence that early childhood education benefits children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Early years (EY) settings are influential in supporting successful development, especially for children from more deprived backgrounds. However, early years senior staff (nursery managers) and early childhood educators (EYEs) report a lack of training and support in this area. A range of approaches and techniques have been developed for early years staff to manage and diminish behaviour problems in young children while promoting social and emotional development. Yet, few studies focus on the implementation of evidence-based programs with fidelity within early years classrooms. The Positive Early Childhood Education (PECE) programme is designed to build early years workforce knowledge, confidence and skills and enhance self-efficacy in implementing strategies that promote children's development, social competence, and self-regulation. This study aims to establish the feasibility and acceptability of evaluating the PECE intervention before a large-scale study. Subsequent objectives include characterising intervention components and potential mechanisms driving change in educator and child outcomes; informing the development of a scientifically rigorous yet service provider-, children-, and parent-sensitive explanatory large-scale study; investigating the acceptability and feasibility of measuring potential PECE program impacts on children's early social and emotional development; and, exploring potential social, environmental, and demographic factors to enhance comprehension of trends in uptake, engagement, attrition, and outcomes.

### Who can participate?

EYEs and EY practitioners (EYPs)/managers from nursery settings and children aged 3-4 years old who attend nursery for a minimum of 12 hours per week

### What does the study involve?

The feasibility study will include an intervention group and a control group. The intervention group will complete the PECE programme and implement it during the school term. The control

group will not complete the programme as part of the trial but will be given access to the online educator training at the end of the academic year. The control group will take part in the assessments following the same timeline as the intervention group.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

The possible benefit for settings taking part in the study is that they will make an important contribution to developing the evidence base for early years education and improving child development. Settings in the intervention group will also receive free training and accreditation in Triple P – Positive Parenting Program PECE and the resources to support their early years educators. Although settings in the control group will not receive PECE training during the study, they will be offered free access to PECE online for up to 5 of their staff at the end of the trial. There are no anticipated significant risks or disadvantages in taking part. There may be some inconvenience in terms of the time needed for the staff to participate, e.g., completing training in the intervention group, completing data collection tools, and participating in data collection activities.

Where is the study run from?

The University of Sheffield

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

April 2022 to April 2025

Who is funding the study?

The Nuffield Foundation

Who is the main contact?

Dr Anna Weighall, [anna.weighall@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:anna.weighall@sheffield.ac.uk)

## Contact information

### Type(s)

Public, Scientific, Principal Investigator

### Contact name

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# Additional identifiers

## EudraCT/CTIS number

Nil known

## IRAS number

## ClinicalTrials.gov number

Nil known

## Secondary identifying numbers

171465, EDO/FR-000023236

# Study information

## Scientific Title

A cluster-randomised controlled feasibility trial of a Positive Early Childhood Education (PECE) CPD programme for educators to improve social and emotional outcomes for children in Early Years Settings.

## Acronym

PECE

## Study objectives

1. Establish the feasibility and acceptability of an evaluation of the positive early childhood education (PECE) intervention in advance of a large-scale cluster randomised controlled trial (cRCT). Subsequent aims are to:
2. Characterise intervention components and potential mechanisms by which they produce change in educator and child outcomes.
3. Inform the development of an appropriately powered explanatory phase II cRCT that retains scientific rigour while being sensitive to the needs of the service provider, children, and parents.
4. Explore the acceptability and feasibility of measuring potential PECE programme impacts on children's early social and emotional development.
5. Explore potential social, environmental, and demographic factors to support understanding of the trends in uptake, engagement, attrition, and outcomes.

## Ethics approval required

Ethics approval required

## Ethics approval(s)

Approved 29/11/2022, School of Education University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee (UREC) (The School of Education, The Wave, Faculty of Social Sciences, 2 Whitham Road, Sheffield, S10 2AH, United Kingdom; +44 (0)1142228177; edu-ethics@sheffield.ac.uk), ref: 047115

## Study design

Multicentre interventional single-blinded cluster randomized controlled trial

## Primary study design

Interventional

## **Secondary study design**

Cluster randomised trial

## **Study setting(s)**

Childcare/pre-school

## **Study type(s)**

Other, Efficacy

## **Participant information sheet**

Not available in web format, please use the contact details to request a participant information sheet

## **Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied**

Exploring the acceptability and feasibility of measuring potential positive early childhood education (PECE) programme impacts on children's early social and emotional development.

## **Interventions**

The positive early childhood education (PECE) programme is for nursery teachers and managers, rather than parents. Both early years educators (EYEs) and early years practitioners (EYPs) complete online training. EYPs including nursery managers, and group leaders who can support EYEs, complete online training, where they learn the content of the online programme and the consultation skills necessary to facilitate practice sessions with Early Years Educators using a self-regulatory approach to become a PECE Coach.

EYEs including nursery teachers, nursery teaching assistants, and nursery staff working in the classroom, complete four 1-hour online modules (PECE Online), including video modelling, interactive activities, and key takeaway messages to help them acquire new knowledge and skills, self-evaluate their performance, and set themselves goals for change. This is followed by two to four practice sessions with a PECE Coach.

The feasibility study will include an intervention group and a control group (no treatment). The intervention group will complete the PECE programme and implement it during the school term. The control group will not complete the programme as part of the trial but will be given access to the online educator training at the end of the academic year. The control group will take part in the assessments following the same timeline as the intervention group. So that randomisation can be undertaken independently of those directly involved in the trial, it will be conducted by one of the research consultants from Seneca College, Canada. The randomisation will be conducted using an automated online system. No identifying information about settings will be shared. Codes assigned to each setting, which will be used for randomisation, will be shared.

**Blinding:** After randomisation, the research team cannot be blinded to the condition. However, trained research assistants will conduct observations in settings and will be blinded to the condition as far as possible.

## **Intervention Type**

Behavioural

## **Primary outcome measure**

The primary feasibility outcome is recruitment to the trial, based on the final number of settings enrolled at baseline.

The following will be measured using administrative data recorded by the trial team at baseline

1. Number of settings approached to take part in the feasibility study
2. Number of settings which consent to take part in the feasibility study
3. Number of early years educators who sign up to take part in the feasibility study
4. Number of early years educators who start and finish the online training
5. Number of parents who consent for their child to take part in the feasibility study
6. Number of coaches who consent to become a PECE coach practitioner to support staff through the programme

### **Secondary outcome measures**

To explore feasibility and process, the following secondary outcome measures will be measured using administrative data collected via the PECE online system and administrative data recorded by the trial team throughout the trial:

#### **Intervention Feasibility:**

1. Number of early years educators who received the online training
2. Length of time taken for early years educators to complete the online training
3. Number and timing of setting and nursery staff withdrawals from the intervention and reason for withdrawal

#### **Trial Feasibility:**

1. Number and timing of setting and nursery staff withdrawals from the intervention and feasibility study, and reason for withdrawal
2. Missing data on intervention outcome measures at baseline, 12-16 weeks and 24 weeks follow-up

#### **Intervention Outcome Measures**

To explore the feasibility of collecting potential intervention impacts on nursery staff and children the following secondary outcome measures will be assessed at baseline, 12-16 weeks and 24 weeks follow-up.

1. Child personal, social and emotional development measured using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ-T)
2. Child personal, social and emotional development using the Preschool and Kindergarten Behaviour Scales-2 (PKBS-2 Typical Social 3-6 Teacher)
3. Child behaviour measured using the Child and Adolescent Disruptive Behaviour Inventory (CADBI)
4. Child behaviour measured using the Child and Adolescent Disruptive Behaviour Inventory Observer
5. Child emotional well-being and involvement measured using the Leuven Scale
6. Early years staff professional practice and self-efficacy measured with a bespoke online questionnaire

### **Overall study start date**

01/04/2022

### **Completion date**

30/04/2025

# Eligibility

## Key inclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria for settings:

1. A minimum of 4 Early Years Educators working with children aged 3-4 years
2. A minimum of children, at least 10, aged 3-4 years

Inclusion criteria for Early Years Educators:

Early Years Educators who have not participated in the PECE Programme before

Inclusion criteria for Coaches:

Coaches who have not participated in the PECE Programme before

Inclusion criteria for children:

1. Children aged 3-4 years old, attending the trial setting
2. Children who are taught by participating educators regularly
3. Children who attend nursery for a minimum of 12 hours per week
4. Children whose parents have provided consent

## Participant type(s)

Employee, Learner/student, Other

## Age group

Child

## Lower age limit

3 Years

## Upper age limit

4 Years

## Sex

Both

## Target number of participants

Target number of settings is 10-20. Target number of Early Years Educators is 40-80 (4 from each Setting); each of them reporting on 2 children. Target number of children is 80-120

## Total final enrolment

119

## Key exclusion criteria

Exclusion criteria for settings:

1. Having less than 4 Early Years Educators working with children aged 3-4 years
2. Having less than 10 children, aged 3-4 years

Exclusion criteria for Early Years Educators:

Early Years Educators who have participated in the PECE Programme before

**Inclusion criteria for Coaches:**

Coaches who have participated in the PECE Programme before

**Exclusion criteria for children:**

1. Children who are not aged 3-4 years, attending the trial setting
2. Children who are not taught by participating educators regularly
3. Children who do not attend nursery for a minimum of 12 hours per week
4. Children whose parents have not provided consent

**Date of first enrolment**

05/09/2023

**Date of final enrolment**

20/10/2023

## **Locations**

**Countries of recruitment**

England

United Kingdom

**Study participating centre**

**The University of Sheffield**

Western Bank

Sheffield

United Kingdom

S10 2TN

## **Sponsor information**

**Organisation**

Nuffield Foundation

**Sponsor details**

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London

England

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info@nuffieldfoundation.org

**Sponsor type**

Charity

**Website**

<https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/>

**ROR**

<https://ror.org/0281jqk77>

## **Funder(s)**

**Funder type**

Charity

**Funder Name**

Nuffield Foundation

**Alternative Name(s)****Funding Body Type**

Private sector organisation

**Funding Body Subtype**

Trusts, charities, foundations (both public and private)

**Location**

United Kingdom

## **Results and Publications**

**Publication and dissemination plan**

A protocol for this study is being submitted for publication in the coming months. It will be uploaded to ISRCTN if published. An academic publication in a peer-reviewed journal will be planned. Findings will also be shared at relevant conferences where possible.

**Intention to publish date**

01/01/2026

**Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan**

After anonymisation, aggregated outcome data will be shared via the University of Sheffield Data Repository and potentially other research teams.

**IPD sharing plan summary**

Stored in non-publicly available repository