

Delivering the new extended free entitlement (EFE) in partnership: marketing the partnership offer

Clarify what is being marketed

The partnership should discuss and agree what is being marketed, who is going to do the marketing and how. This is a new offer and parents will need information about eligibility and how to apply for their entitlement (see [FAQs](#) for more information), as well as about the partnership offer. However, there will be other sources of information about the offer in general and there is no need to duplicate this, a partnership should probably adopt a signposting approach while making sure that staff are able to deal with any queries that arise. The partnership should, therefore, focus its efforts on marketing the partnership offer.

The new EFE for three and four year olds of working parents

Currently 94% of three year olds and 99% of four year olds nationally are using some or all of the current free early education entitlement (the universal offer), although there is some variation locally, with lower uptake in more deprived areas.

The Department of Education (DfE) estimates that up to 42% of those children (390,000) whose parents take up the current universal offer will be eligible for the extension to new entitlement.

The evidence from demand surveys carried out by the DfE and in the course of the 30 Hours Mixed Model Partnership project (the project) is that there will be a high take up from eligible parents currently using the universal offer. Many parents will convert from paying for extra hours to take up of free hours. In addition, the experience of the project indicates that ineligible parents see the new entitlement as an opportunity to extend their working hours. A partnership established to deliver the new EFE, therefore, needs to consider a wider target audience than parents currently entitled to 30 hours.

Sources of information about the offer will include the local authority and external organisations such as the Family and Childcare Trust:

<http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/>

Marketing the partnership offer

The partnership should take time to agree a marketing strategy, including a clear message about the partnership offer.

1. Towards a marketing strategy

The purpose of a marketing strategy should be to identify and then communicate the benefits of the partnership offer to your target market i.e. your potential customers. Without a strategy, efforts to attract customers are likely to be haphazard and inefficient and could undermine sustainability.

A strategy helps to sharpen focus and identify different 'segments' of the 'market' e.g.

- universal offer use only
- top-up patchwork
- full time extended hours

or

- eligible parents currently using individual partner's services
- eligible parents not using partner services
- ineligible parents who may become eligible.

In broad terms, a marketing strategy has a number of functions and can be used to:

- generate general awareness of the partnership and its activities
- collect information about demand and parental preferences
- advertise the partnership offer.

In the lexicon of marketing, a successful strategy depends on understanding:

- who your customers are
- what are their needs
- how you can persuade those customers to 'buy' from you rather than anyone else

2. Key elements of a successful marketing strategy

2.1 Segments

Identifying the segments as discussed above enables you to target your marketing and avoids making assumptions about who potential customers are.

Wider market research (e.g. parental demand surveys) will help you understand where, when and how to reach different parents and increase understanding of how the whole market works e.g. where do different segments of parents find out about nursery provision?; are their expectations of provision similar?

Your marketing strategy document should:

- analyse the different needs of different groups of parents
- apply this to partnership objectives for the offer
- use the information to target activities proportionately to your aims and resources.

2.2 Understanding strengths and weaknesses

The strategy should start with an understanding of the partnership's strengths and weaknesses, as this will affect your marketing messages and ensure you are not promising what you can't deliver. Marketing advice suggests that it's a good idea to conduct some research with your existing parents at this point, as it will help to build a more accurate picture.

An honest and rigorous SWOT analysis, looking at your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, is a recommended place to begin developing the strategy.

Strengths could include:

- quality provision with registered teachers
- school readiness
- single point of contact for extended and stretched offer.

Weaknesses could include:

- lack of an established reputation for the partnership as a whole
- inefficient accounting systems/unfamiliar with payment systems and ethos
- insufficient demand knowledge, including from existing parents.

Opportunities could include:

- increased demand for nursery places
- wider diversity of family background
- potential for financial security
- using the internet and social media to reach new markets.

Threats could include:

- transition to longer hours and fine-tuning extended provision
- competition with other offers
- lack of parental understanding of new offer
- reduction in expenditure within public sector.

3.3 Towards a strategy

With the combination of partnership aims, market segments and business analysis, you can then create a marketing strategy that makes the most of your strengths and matches them to the needs of those you wish to target. A good strategy will:

- look to the short, medium and long term, recognising that marketing needs will change with different patterns of use and take-up
- build in mechanisms to update feedback, parent preferences and market changes
- be reviewed regularly to change things that aren't working or focus activities on different segments as and when needed.

A key element often overlooked is that of monitoring and evaluating how effective the strategy has been. This control element not only helps you see how the strategy is performing in practice, it can also help inform your future marketing strategy. A simple device is to ask each new parent or parental enquiry how they heard about the nursery.

3.4 A marketing plan

A marketing plan explains how to put your strategy into action. It will set marketing budgets and deadlines (which will depend on the recruitment calendar for the partnership), but it will also tell you how you're going to talk to your target parents - whether that's through advertising, networking or word-of-mouth.

A marketing plan (which might simply be set out in a table) includes the aims, actions, dates, costs and resources for marketing activity over a given period (say a year), together with any agreed partnership targets. As with any plan, progress should be regularly measured and reviewed to see what's working and what isn't; and to reflect changing priorities for marketing activity.

3.5 Marketing activities

This section contains a range of options to consider. It is not exhaustive but is designed to stimulate thinking.

Internet

- As more parents rely on internet searches to investigate childcare options individual partner websites should be kept up-to-date and include pricing schedules and the agreed description of the partnership offer as well as a comment/feedback facility and a way of applying online if possible
- The local Family Information Service should include details of the partnership offer and a link to websites – check the information is relevant and that the links work.

Social media

- Produce a strong image to use in marketing – something bright and informative without being wordy that will work as a jpeg so you can use it in all your marketing
- Twitter – use Twitter accounts and set up a new handle for the partnership. Tweet often using a jpeg image if possible and include a link to how to apply
- Facebook – post on the partners' Facebook pages. Consider setting up a partnership page. Use images to make the post stand out. Include a link to how to apply and to where to find out more general information about the 30 hours offer.

School/nursery-based activities

- Prominent signage – boards and banners
- Leaflets home for existing parents
- Branding – on t-shirts, bags, pens etc. The partnership should keep a lookout for sponsorship, e.g. from local businesses, including places where parents work.

Through word-of-mouth

- Current or past parents are generally held to be the most powerful/effective means to share information and promote the nursery
- Parent Champions or other more structured groups working with partners (including parent governors and parent advisory groups)
- Through regular processes of feedback and consultation with parents.

Where the parents and carers go

- Coffee shops, restaurants, supermarkets, local shops
- Gym, health/fitness centres swimming pools etc.
- Doctors surgeries, dentists, health centres.

Pre-school activities

- Libraries, swimming pools/leisure centres
- Children's centres, drop-ins
- Anywhere with a crèche.

Local businesses

- Asking local businesses to put leaflets in their shops or on their notice boards
- Piggy-backing on leaflet drops in the area.

Local media

- Small ads in local papers (including free papers and publications aimed specifically at parents) could be worthwhile, although will usually cost
- Events at partner settings might be of interest to local media sources (including radio) and it may be worth developing relationships with them.