

The Wizard - Digital Solutions Case Study

Summary

In 2016 Northumberland became an early implementer for 30 hour free childcare. We were set a specific challenge of providing working, rural families with additional childcare. To deliver our objectives, service areas have joined forces and worked in partnership with parents and childcare providers to develop an informative and transparent pilot. We have met the challenge and greatly improved systems and communication by working collaboratively with colleagues to deliver better outcomes for children and families.

We have created a cost effective, secure cloud based application that enables paperless communication for parents and providers for all early education entitlements.

How we are delivering better outcomes

Nationally all 3 and 4 year olds are entitled to 15 hours of free childcare per week and the Government is committed to doubling this to provide 30 hours for eligible working families. Northumberland is extremely proud and excited to be awarded Early Implementer Status and be part of a 30 hour childcare pilot designed to allow the Department of Education (DfE) to test the delivery of the additional 15 hours in preparation for full roll out September 2017.

[For more Information](#)

Alongside the pilot we have been supporting the DfE/HMRC trial of the Childcare Service (*the joint Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours' free childcare service - through which parents can apply;(re)confirm their eligibility; get a childcare account; make payments to childcare providers and receive their 30 hours' free childcare eligibility code* by developing a streamlined business process to produce an end-to-end service with the local authority, parents and childcare providers to establish eligibility.

This is a national statutory duty, many local authorities have concerns over the growth in this area of work because of the extra administrative burden and the cost of leading software suppliers which puts pressure on already limited resources. Northumberland recognised this dilemma early and has produced a cost effective bespoke solution that can be adapted and shared nationally, The Wizard.

Why did we develop The Wizard?

Northumberland is committed to promptly pass porting as much early years funding to childcare providers as possible and therefore reducing centrally retained budget. We aspire to ensure local childcare providers are appropriately funded and remain sustainable to ensure a flexible, high quality, sufficient childcare market that supports the needs of working families and improves outcomes for children.

The Wizard was initially developed to ensure a reduction in the administrative burden on both the LA and childcare providers, resulting in parents being easily able to access the childcare free entitlement they require in order to maintain employment or get back into work. Supporting the LA's priorities to:

- Grow our local economy
- Improve our places and our environment
- Enable families and communities to be strong
- Help people to be healthy and independent

In order to fulfil our ambitions and pilot objectives we took a less traditional innovative approach by linking with other service areas to develop an up to date, digital solutions system which was needed to secure efficient implementation of this new statutory duty and respond to parents application swiftly.

Northumberland

Northumberland is an exceptional place – somewhere that retains a strong identity stemming from the unique combination of its landscape, location and heritage. Life in

the county is authentic – it is unspoilt, rugged and genuine. From this, there is a shared sense of unity and belonging, an affinity among residents not only with each other but also with the communities where they live. This “sense” of the county is perhaps best captured in the messages that underpin the Northumberland brand.

The greatest asset of Northumberland is its children and young people and we are committed to supporting them in reaching their aspirations. Our aim must be to make the county an even better place for them to grow up; a place where they can realise their potential; a place they are proud of, a place where families want to raise their children, and a place where children and young people are able to enjoy both through learning and further opportunities to pursue their own interests. Sufficient, sustainable high quality early years provision is key to delivering better outcomes for children within the early years across the County.

Northumberland County Council, like many other councils is facing the most challenging budget yet with the next few years being a period of transition and modernisation. This coupled with our ambition to passport as much funding to providers as possible pose significant pressures. It is more important than ever to integrate teams and develop new tools that fundamentally tackle systems, processes and attitudes in order to do things differently and collaboratively across services.

The Wizard, will dramatically reduce the back office work needed to administer the funded entitlement and improve customer journey and services whilst providing excellent value for money and income for the council.

Wizard

The Wizard has been developed as a bespoke in house solution to a statutory duty. It has been developed to be future proof through imaginative use of council resources including LEAN events, consultation and the shared expertise of the early years team, information services, childcare providers (including schools and private voluntary and independent childcare providers) and parents. The Wizard ensures all stakeholders achieve better outcomes through improved customer journey and

swifter service delivery. It could not have been developed to this high level without service area leads supporting teams to think outside the box and model a can do attitude. It is this leadership that has enabled these better outcomes.

The Wizard is divided into modules which will grow in response to future developments. The Primary Module, already developed and in use, is linked to checking eligibility for families applying for 30 hours childcare, this is new work for all LA's. Previously the LA would have produced a paper application form with parents filling it in and posting it back, this long drawn out process is neither fit for purpose or cost effective.

As a pilot Local Authority, Northumberland have been working closely with the DfE Eligibility Checking System (ECS) change team to support the development of a system that will reduce the administrative burden of checking eligibility for 30 hour free childcare. As a result we are at the forefront of system development and delivery. We are the first organisation to have successfully tested and completed the accreditation process with the ECS change team. We have in place a solution to the DfE requirements.

The Wizard 30 Hour Eligibility Module integrates directly with ECS Web Services providing real time responses to providers and administrators on parents and carers eligibility to 30hrs funding. This has been used with a subset of providers within Northumberland to ensure the solution meets all stakeholder requirements. Our digital system manages the administrative functions for 30 Hours with ease, delivering smarter and more efficient results.

Due to the ease of use of the Headcount Module of The Wizard, twice as many providers have been able to submitted their estimated headcount figures, on time, than we have previously received. To elaborate, this solution has eradicated approximately 1.5 weeks of administration time and doubled the amount of providers (132) accessing initial payments, which were processed within a day. We now have

a comprehensive register of early years education providers with an interface to our financial systems.

This means we were able to make prompt early payments to childcare providers to support their cash flow, financially support our early years providers to remain viable and focus on delivering of high quality childcare provision. At the same time, providing them with new information via improved estimated figures submission to enable them to financially forecast.

The Wizard, although still in the early stages of development, is already generating significant interest across the public sector, with other Local Authorities wishing to bid for DfE funding to procure, The Wizard as their solution because:

- The Wizard has been developed by an Early Implementer Local Authority working with HMRC, DfE and the ESC team making it entirely fit for purpose.
- It has been specifically tailored and has already been trialled by parents and providers to ensure it meets the exact needs of all stakeholders.
- Using a Local Authority developed system will keep the funding in the public sector for further early years support and development.
- The Wizard is a secure cloud based solution.
- It is responsive in its design, making it available on any electronic device form
- The Wizard is extremely cost effective when compared to other private sector providers who may have recently contacted you.
- Authorities have little or no capacity to develop their own in house solution given the tight timescales.

Additional modules regarding census; headcount, 2 year old entitlement and pupil premium eligibility checks, funding calculations, payments and sufficiency data. These modules will be brought to the market shortly creating an agile early years system that meets all the needs for delivering and claiming early years funding.

Login portal

The Wizard

Early Years Portal

<input type="text"/>	Username
<input type="password"/>	Password
<input type="button" value="Continue"/>	Forgotten Password?

Eligibility Check

 **Northumberland** Eligibility Check

BETA This is a new service – your [feedback](#) will help us to improve it.

Check Eligibility

Child First Name	<input type="text"/>
Child Surname	<input type="text"/>
Child Date of Birth	<input type="text" value="dd-mm-yyyy"/>
Parent's National Insurance Number	<input type="text"/>
National Asylum Support Service Number	<input type="text"/>
DERN	<input type="text"/>

Has you received consent from the parent/guardian to carry out this check?

Yes No

Provider Statements

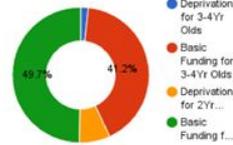
Your Autumn statement 2016-17

DFE
High Street
Longhirst
Morpeth
Northumberland
DFE 000

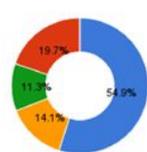
DFE Demo

This is your termly statement for 2 Year old and 3-4 Year old funding within your setting for Autumn 2016-17. It shows you how much income you have obtained for children which are entitled within your setting.

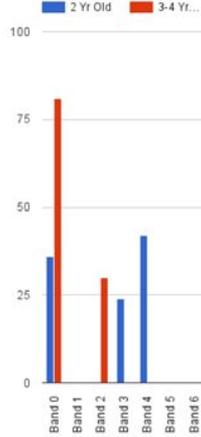
Funding Breakdown



Deprivation Bands



Deprivation



Two Year Old

8	Number of kids
102	Total weekly hrs
102	Funded weekly hrs
£5,813.39	You claimed
£852.01	Deprivation
£6,635.40	Total
£3,718.00	Interim paid
£2,947.40	Final payment

Three-Four Year Old

8	Number of kids
111	Total weekly hrs
111	Funded weekly hrs
£4,825.17	You claimed
£211.14	Deprivation
£5,036.31	Total
£3,521.00	Interim paid
£1,515.31	Final payment

£4,462.71



Statement Ref EY100001

Date: 15/01/2017

Issued By

Northumberland Early Years
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 2EF

Freephone: 0800 000 0000
Tel: 01670 623592
Email: fis@northumberland.gov.uk

You Claimed

£10,638.56

We have calculated this from the information supplied in your Autumn Headcount

Interim Payment

£7,239.00

We calculated 75% of your total from your estimated figures

Deprivation Payment

£1,063.15

Deprivation is calculated and cross-referenced against the LSOA (Lower Super Output Area) and (IDACi) Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index. This payment is only for the first 15 hours on a child's entitlement, this payment may also be split where children are receiving attending multiple providers.

Your final payment

£4,462.71

This is your settlement for the Autumn Term subtracting any interim payments

To download this sheet for your records, you can go to:
File - Download as PDF
Under Layout, select Portrait and Fit To Width

A large number of trial users have contacted us with the following compliments and all users have valued the improved service, especially the provider statement which provides them with a clear financial breakdown, allowing for better planning which improves their viability and sustainability.

- *“OK, so I followed the video and I must say I am very impressed I think I have actually submitted the funding form for the first time unaided!”*

Claire Robinson.

- *“I wanted to say how good the new sheets are for claiming money for nursery”.*

Andy Hudson - Headteacher Mickley

Conclusion

Northumberland early years service was set and have met the challenge of being an early implementer for 30 hours childcare. Working with colleagues in other service areas we have broken down traditional silo working and integrated resources, intelligence and decision making. We have provided stakeholders with smarter more efficient systems and supported them in this transition, ensuring effective use of funding. The Wizard serves as a resource for all, hosted and managed by the Local Authority with DfE, early years providers, parents and other LA's benefitting from its work. Investments from multiple sources, including DfE funding (digital accelerator both core and extended) and income from other LA's, development of The Wizard will continue to ensure it reaches its full potential. It has been created as a state of the art solution that is responsive in design to deliver any new initiatives and challenges that are set for the local authority.

The Wizard has been recognised by the DfE as a model of innovative practice and is promoted by Childcareworks, who hold the national support contract for 30 hours, as a case study of excellent practice by a team that have not been hindered by previous methods of working.

In conclusion over 470 families have not only been able to access additional childcare support, with the average saving of £2,131.80 per household, they have done so immediately on application ensuring young children ultimately benefit.