



centre for research on
families and relationships

Evaluating the impact of Bookbug Bags and Sessions in Scotland

Final report by the Centre for Research
on Families and Relationships



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Contents

Executive Summary and Recommendations	i
1 Introduction and context	1
2 Existing evidence on book sharing programmes	3
3 Background and policy context	20
4 Family reading and singing practices	35
5 Views and experiences of gifting and receiving Bookbug Bags	48
6 Views and experiences of Bookbug Sessions	74
7 The contribution of Bookbug to workforce development, practice and strategy	102
8 Conclusions and recommendations	116
References	125
Appendix A: Outcomes chain for the Bookbug Programme with Risks and assumptions	133

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Bookbug is Scottish Book Trust's Early Years Programme, delivered in partnership with local authority library and education services, NHS boards (including health visitors and health promotion staff) and third sector partners. Bookbug encourages parents and carers to share books with their children from as early an age as possible, to inspire a love of books and reading in every child. The programme, in its current form, gifts bags containing books and resources to every baby, toddler, three and five-year-old in Scotland. It also includes Bookbug Sessions, held in libraries and community settings, which provide opportunities for parents, carers and children to meet, cuddle, read, talk and sing together. Enhanced support to access the benefits of Bookbug is provided through a comprehensive Outreach Programme.

In May 2015, the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships was commissioned to conduct a two-year evaluation of the programme's activities. The aim of the study was to examine how, and to what extent, Bookbug impacts on the lives of families in Scotland, and on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of early years professionals.

Under each thematic heading, this summary appraises the evidence; provides key findings; and suggests how evidence may frame future service developments. We then summarise our recommendations.

1. Family singing and reading practices

"I think it's the fact that we sit and snuggle with the torch and we read, and she loves the fact that it's the three of us together 'cos that's 'our family time', she calls it, before bed" (parent)

Our data show that many Scottish families are engaged in regular singing and reading practices, with qualitative data highlighting the great rewards that parents find in how their children respond to books. Parents frequently referred to reading with their babies and young children as 'special time' together, for relaxation, closeness and attention. These findings are supported by a solid body of evidence showing that home literacy activities in the early years lead to positive outcomes in the areas of emergent literacy, language and cognitive development.

Barriers to reading and singing at home were also discussed by parents, including time pressures, and for a minority of parents, negativity surrounding books and experiences or perceptions of libraries, and negative emotions prompted by their children's responses to reading. Our overview of the literature suggests an effect of wider relationship dynamics on the quality of book sharing, suggesting that some parent-child pairs may need additional support to scaffold pleasurable and effective interactions. The importance of reading *quality* as well as frequency is consistently asserted in the literature, relating to factors such as responsiveness, sharing of control over the book, and talking around the book.

Key findings:

- Reading frequency was found to correspond with children’s age, with: 50% of the Baby sample; 80% of the Toddler sample; and 90% of the Explorer sample reading at least once a day.
- Well over 80% of families with babies or toddlers reported singing at least once a day, and singing was found to be a more common practice than reading from birth. In contrast with reading, singing declines in frequency with age, so 71% of the Explorer sample sang daily compared with 84% of babies.
- Closer examination of the 18% of parents who said they did not read with their babies at the point of gifting revealed that younger parents, parents living in deprived areas and families with English as an additional language were overrepresented. 29% of those in the most deprived decile reported not reading with their baby at the point of gifting, compared with 18% in the most affluent.
- 53% of recipients of an Explorer Bag with a parent aged 30 or younger was a library member prior to gifting, compared to 73% and 72% respectively, with parents aged 31 to 40 or 41 and over.

Using the evidence to shape development: the Bookbug programme, in gifting, sessions and outreach, needs to operate in a way which is sensitive to issues of quality in book sharing, such that parent-child pairs who are struggling are helped, gently, to find moments of fun and enjoyment in their experiences together.

Using the evidence to shape development: evaluation data suggest the need to extend the reach of the programme, in particular to younger parents and those living in deprived areas. More research into the diverse needs of families with English as an additional language is required.

2. The impact of Bookbug Bags

“A lot of the things I may not have thought of doing...I would never have thought about getting wee books, because I would have thought “well she can’t read”, so I would say it’s a great benefit to myself and to her.” (parent)

“It’s maybe just taking just a wee bit more detail to his books that he’s looking at, speaking about them more and he makes up songs now about his stories and things now, so it does help.” (parent)

The quality of Bookbug Bags, particularly of the books included, was recognised by parents and practitioners alike. Parent and practitioner testimonies confirmed the appeal of the books to young children, and children’s delight in receiving them. Previous evaluation has linked book gifting to later improvements in reading by, for example, influencing parental attitudes and increasing book ownership and library membership. For some first-time parents, the Baby Bag introduced the idea that babies can enjoy books from birth, as well as informing them about appropriate literature for babies.

Comparing the contents of the bags, parents said that they valued the books most and the calendar and height chart least. This was reflected in figures describing use: 83%

(Baby), 92% (Toddler) and 88% (Explorer) of parents had read the books with their child; 28% had put up the calendar (Baby Bag only); and 29% had put up the height chart (Toddler Bag only). Additional items were used less frequently. However, the height chart, calendar and finger puppets were reported as being used more often by families in the most deprived parts of Scotland.

The Bookbug messages were seen by practitioners as complementary to their existing understandings and practices, and Bookbug could act as a positive starting place for work with families. However, lack of capacity and resources placed increasing pressure on staff, and their ability to prioritise Bookbug activities (whether gifting, sessions or outreach).

Where practitioners were able to dedicate time to show and model the resources in the bags, the impact on parents was notable. Furthermore, experiences of gifting were framed by wider experiences of service provision and in particular, the relationships that families felt able to form with their health visitors.

Irregular gifting was most frequently cited in relation to nursery provision. Transmission of the Bookbug messages around gifting of the Explorer Bag may be limited by levels of parental engagement in nursery provision.

Key findings:

- 80% of practitioners responding felt that gifting took place at recommended ages 'all' or 'a great deal' of the time. However, parents and carers reported wide variation in when they and their children received the Baby Bag. Case studies intimate that this might be linked to health visitor perception of the family's needs and also personal opinion of when gifting should take place.
- Professional and parent perceptions of the messages communicated during gifting diverged, with families reporting fewer messages (although the samples were unrelated). Overall, just over a third of families reported receiving the bag with no other message. A shift in practice was observed following the age of the child, so: one fifth of Baby Bag recipients; one third of Toddler Bag recipients; and almost half of Explorer Bag recipients were simply given the bag.
- Only 36% of practitioners surveyed said that they made use of Scottish Book Trust's gifting advice, with 56% being unaware of the advice.
- Having sufficient resources to support consistent gifting practices in nurseries was emphasised. However, resources for outreach activities, such as visiting nurseries, was often limited.

Using the evidence to shape development: there is a need for consistent gifting, particularly the Baby Bag where gifting practice is the most variable. The importance of showing and modelling the bag was shown to be critical to maximising impact.

Using the evidence to shape development: there should be recognition of that families from different circumstances access, use and learn from Bookbug Bags in different ways. Future bag content development should be cognisant of this, while at the same time

not making assumptions about a families' needs (for example, assumptions based on age or location of home).

Using the evidence to shape development: there is a need for improved messaging around the gifting of the Explorer Bag by nurseries in particular. Nurseries need support in enhancing levels of parental engagement, which in turn, will improve the transmission of Bookbug between nursery and home.

3. The impact of Bookbug Sessions

"I came because he didn't have many words. I've been coming for a year now and I can see the difference in his language, he is mouthing out the words of the songs and he is using words he has never used before." (parent)

"When we go home and sing the songs in the car she knows them and knows all the actions." (parent)

Parents' accounts indicate that they link Bookbug Sessions with many developmental benefits for their children: knowledge of songs and rhymes; improved speech and language; and understanding of social cooperation. Some described a positive loop where they were encouraged to sing and rhyme more because of their child's positive responses. Some introduced more creativity into their play and some felt the benefits in terms of social networks/integration and friendship. The benefits of gifting were felt to be maximised when families attended Bookbug Sessions, pointing to the importance of creating linkages between the two.

Younger parents and parents living in deprived areas faced barriers engaging in mainstream Bookbug Sessions. Lack of confidence, existing family reading practices, parental literacy and poor parent-child attachment were all considered as factors in this. This points to the importance of targeted and outreach provision – but also to making sure that the 'first visit counts', that all library staff are engaged in ensuring that new visitors are fully welcomed. The inclusion of fathers in sessions and in receiving Bookbug messages was also felt to be key.

This evaluation contributes to understandings of the benefits of song and rhyme sessions outside of the home, an area served less well by existing literature.

Key findings:

- The importance of session leaders' practice was highlighted by parents, underlining the continued importance of staff commitment, motivation, training and support.
- The parent and carer survey revealed high levels of awareness of Bookbug Sessions, with variation according to age, social deprivation and English as an additional language. Friends/word of mouth and health visitors were the main sources of information about Bookbug Sessions, with health visitors apparently particularly important for recipients of the Baby Bag living in the most deprived areas.
- Professionals felt that Bookbug was highly beneficial to staff and families alike, with the benefits to staff including factors such as improved understanding of the evidence for book sharing and changed public perceptions of libraries.

- Many practitioners expressed concerns about the inclusion in Bookbug Sessions of younger parents, parents living in deprived areas and parents perceived to be less engaged with literacy.
- Some parents expressed concerns about the scheduling and capacity of sessions in their area, including inappropriate timing, insufficient regularity, waiting lists and lack of weekend provision.
- Issues of access, insufficient supply, lack of staff training and pressure on resources was especially pertinent in rural areas.

Using the evidence to shape development: Extending the reach of sessions might involve mapping of local need, more flexible/weekend and evening provision to address the needs of fathers and working parents, and continued relationships with third sector organisations to provide sessions in public or semi-public spaces, targeted at particular groups of families. Practitioners in libraries should be mindful of the factors impacting on library use, and develop responses to ensure ‘every visit counts’. Marketing material could be used to confirm the relevance of Bookbug to groups currently at risk of exclusion.

Using the evidence to shape development: Work with partners to explore the possibility alternative opportunities for participation in Bookbug, such as community or public spaces, virtual Bookbug Sessions or mobile Bookbug Sessions (via van or playbus services). This would have particular benefit to areas of unexplained low demand, or rural areas where access and supply is an issue.

Using the evidence to shape development: Links between sessions and bags could be improved by, for example, ensuring that book sharing is included within every Bookbug Session and making mention of the bags, as well as by encouraging book borrowing after sessions.

4. How Bookbug contributes to workforce development

“Yes, the Bookbug messages are consistent with other messages that health visitors would be delivering anyway, on speech and language development, brain development, bonding, attachment. I feel that Bookbug is a really good tool for delivering those messages.” (health visitor)

This evaluation reveals that Bookbug training and resources are highly valued, with Bookbug broadly complementing what practitioners are trying to achieve in their work overall. This reflects a recurrent theme in our overview of the literature; that book sharing programmes contribute within a wider framework of support for family literacy.

Areas for development may include further opportunities for practice-sharing, improving take-up of training by session leaders and improved links made in gifting to sessions and library services.

Key findings:

- Overall, professionals valued Bookbug training and found it to be useful, particularly in refreshing their knowledge of the programme and in raising confidence in their delivery.
- Some session leaders had not received recent training which may affect session quality.
- Although practitioners agreed that more must be done to engage with families facing barriers to accessing services, almost three quarters of respondents believed that the Bookbug programme allowed them to reach families that they otherwise would not.
- There were many positive and well received examples of collaborative and innovative practice aimed at involving families in book sharing generally and the Bookbug programme. While some such initiatives were more strategic, others relied on individual practitioners making connections with others in different roles and working together to meet the needs of a particular group of families.
- All sectors expressed high levels of commitment to the Bookbug programme, and considered it as making important contributions to impact on early years development. There were, however, ongoing concerns around spending cuts, and the associated impact on resources and capacity.

Using the evidence to shape development: It may be useful to provide specific support to nurseries about how to use the Bookbug programme to engage with parents.

Using the evidence to shape development: Connectivity could also be improved by making the links between gifting, sessions and library services more explicit. New initiatives should give priority to projects that build connections between sectors.

Using the evidence to shape development: Continue well established positive relationships with local areas to ensure Scottish Book Trust have evidence on the extent of cuts locally, and how this might be restricting impact.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, the evaluation has found that the Bookbug programme is **high quality, understandable, transferable into different local settings**, and **highly respected** by those involved. **Families and professionals value the Bookbug programme** and regard it as **having positive impacts**.

The message and approach being delivered is clearly evidence based and is being delivered in a clear, concise way, complementary to national and local policy objectives. The brand and mascot work are praised for being well respected, recognised and valued.

Bookbug is making an important contribution to positive engagement with families facing barriers to accessing services, with the majority of professionals stating that that the Bookbug programme allowed them to reach families that they otherwise would not.

Main challenges include ensuring quality and consistency across the programme, widening the benefits and coping with sectoral complexities and pressures on

resources. The greatest issue is not therefore a question of whether the Bookbug programme can support Scotland's families to read, talk, sing and cuddle more, but rather, that the context of diminishing resources impacts on delivery.

Key recommendations are:

5.1. Strategic commitment and collaboration

- **Advocacy work in local authorities and cultural trusts:** Scottish Book Trust should use its advocacy approach to highlight the critical role of the Bookbug co-ordinator, and the need for local authorities and cultural trusts to ensure adequate priority is given to the role. Evidence from the evaluation could be used to highlight the impact that cuts to the Bookbug programme might have on local authorities' ability to deliver national outcomes.
- **Space for sharing practice:** Scottish Book Trust should continue to support opportunities for shared practice, both regionally and locally. Front-line practitioners benefit from being supported to create opportunities to meet and discuss Bookbug with others working locally. Shared practice opportunities should be cross-sectoral and multi-organisational.

5.2. Consistency and quality

- **Awareness and use of gifting advice:** New ways of delivering gifting advice should be considered. This should emphasise both the importance of the timing of gifting and the quality of gifting practices.
- Build on high quality training programme:
 - Training for session leaders should emphasise: Sharing a story at each session; reference to Bookbug Bags at every session; Bookbug t-shirts worn by those leading sessions; provision to ensure 'latecomers' are welcomed, and that those attending first time are acknowledged and encouraged to come back; and attendees encouraged to stay after the sessions to enjoy the library, and borrow books.
 - Training for gifters should emphasise: the quality of the gifting experience; and the opportunities for parental engagement in the process of gifting Explorer bags. Good practice examples should be shared.
- **Training in early years professional education:** This is a challenge given the breadth of professional disciplines, and diversity of 'routes' into professional training (especially within the nursery sector). We recommend a mapping exercise to identify the professional routes into employment for each sector, and across Scotland. The results should be used to target training resources on priority areas.
- **Gifting to babies:** Continue research into the most appropriate and timing for gifting the Baby Bag, and explore opportunities and challenges of working with families prenatally via the new Baby Box initiative.

5.3. Widening benefits

- **Support nursery providers to integrate Bookbug into nursery setting:**
 - The Explorer Bag represents an important opportunity to reinforce the Bookbug message.
 - Scottish Book Trust should promote the benefits that Bookbug can offer to nursery practitioners (for example, as complementary to their existing practice and aims: as integrative to the inspection process by offering an opportunity to demonstrate parental engagement).
 - Given the challenges expressed by nurseries, it may be useful to provide specific support to nurseries about how to use the Bookbug programme to engage with parents in the form of a good practice guide including examples of innovative practice from across Scotland.
- **Tackle negative perceptions of libraries:** There is evidence that a small minority of families do not attend libraries due to negative (and often unfounded) perceptions of their local library space.
- **First visits count:** support local libraries to make every visit library positive and welcoming. Libraries may need support to consider how they ensure that they never leave people feeling vulnerable and/or excluded on this initial visit.
- **Practice inclusivity at sessions:** Whilst the majority of session leaders already do this, some parents are more likely to feel uncomfortable or unwelcome at sessions. This issue should be emphasised at training to ensure that Session Leaders are aware of who might feel vulnerable and provide additional support.

5.4. Making the link between gifting, sessions and home

- **Promote the Bookbug as a programme:** Scottish Book Trust advocacy and communication locally should promote Bookbug as a programme and as a potential ‘community of interest’. While training should remain focused, it is important that all those trained recognise their part in the wider community, and their responsibility in promoting the programme (i.e. gifters should have information on sessions and encourage families to attend).
- **Improve local marketing:** Families can only attend Bookbug Sessions if they know about them:
 - Gifters should always have current information about the location of local classes.
 - Social media is an important source of information about Bookbug for parents. Scottish Book Trust should support Bookbug Co-ordinators to develop effective and up-to-date social media strategies.
 - Encourage local areas to include more young parents and fathers in their marketing materials, and ensure this is reflected in Scottish Book Trust materials.
 - Encourage Bookbug Co-ordinators to advertise Bookbug Sessions beyond standard locations. This could include play park display boards, shopping centres and dentist surgeries.
- **Information resource for specialist workers:** It may be useful to produce an Information resource for those currently ‘outside’ the mainstream Bookbug community (e.g. in the

third sector) with ideas about how they could engage with the Bookbug programme. This could include examples of innovative practice by, for example, foster parents, prison workers, speech and language therapists, those working with fathers, gypsy traveller communities, those working with migrant families.

5.5. Information and monitoring

- **Improving communication flow:** Scottish Book Trust should support local areas to ensure clarity about what contact and support practitioners can expect to have from the co-ordinator. Data from the mapping exercise can be used to support this process. Other simple ideas include having a sticker on each box of Bookbug Bags with the name and contact details of the Bookbug Co-ordinator.
- **Local mapping of Bookbug:** Scottish Book Trust should consider ways of further supporting local authorities to map the Bookbug Programme locally. Such a mapping exercise would support Scottish Book Trust in identifying priority areas within the context of limited resources. This could focus on area characteristics such as levels of deprivation and / or urban versus rural locales. An initial mapping exercise could include:
 - a review of Bookbug Programme – who, what, where, how;
 - a review of logistics and current gifting practices;
 - demographics of those attending Bookbug Sessions (age, gender, additional support needs, English as an additional language, postcode and distance travelled);
 - location and timing of other similar early years activities; and
 - Bookbug’s strategic contribution in local areas.
- **Evidence non-attendance:** Scottish Book Trust should provide advice to local co-ordinators on how to consult with families not currently attending Bookbug Sessions, to understand better why some families do not attend, and identify any potential barriers.

5.6. Resources and capacity

- **Advocacy work in local authorities and cultural trusts:** The mapping exercise outlined above should be used to target advocacy at chief executives, chairs and boards of trusts and elected members within local authorities, emphasising the clear and positive evidence from this research.
- **Additional funding opportunities:** Many of the recommendations have the potential to put extra pressure on practitioners who are already struggling with a lack of capacity. We recommend that Scottish Book Trust support local authorities to look for alternative funding sources to support their Bookbug activities.
- **Develop a culture of shared practice:** We encourage Scottish Book Trust to give consideration to whether shared practice activities (national, regional and local) are as effective as possible. Co-ordinators have ongoing training needs and it may be useful to think about whether shared practice meetings could be more focused to include topics identified by this evaluation and by Scottish Book Trust and Bookbug Co-ordinators on an ongoing basis.
- **Disseminate evidence locally:** We recommend that Scottish Book Trust carefully considers to how best to disseminate these research findings to decision makers, Bookbug Co-

ordinators, local practitioners and parents. In particular, when presenting this evaluation to strategic decision-makers, it should be made clear that there is a strong evidence base for the success of the programme. We see a possibility to position Bookbug as an established, flexible and transferable model that offers demonstrable benefits in the current difficult financial context.

Areas for further research may include: use of volunteer Session Leaders to deliver Bookbug; use of community spaces other than libraries to deliver sessions; and transmission of the Bookbug message pre-birth.

6. About the research and methods used

This evaluation uses contribution analysis, which, a) recognises the varied contexts of Bookbug (social, economic, political, local), b) seeks to identify the unique contribution of Bookbug to practitioners and families and, c) recognises each stage of project work. According to this methodology, an outcomes chain was created at the outset, forming a narrative to describe programme aims and the steps taken to achieve these, including consideration of risks and assumptions. The outcomes chain combined with data from surveys, interviews and observation, have enabled the research to provide a strong narrative about the contribution and impact of the Bookbug programme.

Data collection included the following:

- National online survey of professionals (n=627)
- Scottish Book Trust's national survey of parents and carers, available for a one-year period (n=4387)
- 46 in-depth telephone interviews targeting families in deprived areas, bilingual households, fathers and families with children with additional support needs.
- Six local based case studies selected to show geographic range, communities with varied socio-economic features and communities that are urban, semi-urban and rural (55 professional interviews, 141 parent and carer interviews, 18 observations)
- Contribution analysis workshop, analysis workshop and six interviews with Scottish Book Trust staff.

We also provided an overview of relevant literature related to: the impact of home literacy activities in the early years; comparable book gifting programmes; family reading practices; and quality in book sharing including the socio-emotional context.

Note that the Bookbug P1 Family Bag does not form part of this current evaluation and the Outreach Programme, providing enhanced support to families, has been evaluated separately.

1 Introduction and context

Introduction

1.1 The Centre for Research on Families and Relationships was commissioned by Scottish Book Trust to evaluate Bookbug, their flagship Early Years Programme. The aim of the evaluation was to examine how, and to what extent, the programme is impacting on the lives of families in Scotland, and on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of early years professionals. The evaluation took place over a two-year period, beginning in May 2015. In this report we provide the findings of the research, including practical and realistic recommendations for how the programme might be developed in the future.

The Bookbug Programme: an overview

1.2 Bookbug is Scottish Book Trust's Early Years Programme, delivered in partnership with local authority library and education services, NHS boards (including health visitors and health promotion staff) and third sector partners. Bookbug encourages parents and carers to share books with their children from as early an age as possible, to inspire a love of books and reading in every child. By providing the foundations for a lifelong love of reading, the programme works towards the following outcomes:

- Families are reading, talking, singing and cuddling more with their babies and children.
- More practitioners are confident and able to communicate the key Bookbug messages.
- Decision makers integrate the Bookbug approach into Early Years practice.
- More children and families use libraries.

1.3 The programme, in its current form, gifts bags containing books and resources to every baby, toddler, three and five-year-old in Scotland. It also includes Bookbug Sessions, held across the country in libraries and community settings, which provide opportunities for parents, carers and children to meet, cuddle, read, talk and sing together. The Bookbug P1 Family Bag (not included in this current evaluation) is gifted to every P1 child in Scotland during Book Week Scotland in partnership with Education Scotland and the Scottish Government as part of 'Read, Write, Count' (the national literacy and numeracy campaign).

1.4 In acknowledgement that certain groups need enhanced support to access the benefits of Bookbug, the Outreach Programme (formerly known as Assertive Outreach) began in 2012. Based on targeted universalism, this approach includes Bookbug for the Home which trains professionals to introduce the principles of Bookbug Sessions into the homes of families who face barriers accessing Bookbug. This programme, which has trained 3,686 early years professionals to date, was part of a separate evaluation in 2013, 2015 and 2016.

1.5 Scottish Book Trust has a dedicated Early Years team who co-ordinates the programme. This involves developing and co-ordinating the distribution of

Bookbug Bags; delivering training to support gifting, sessions and outreach activities; co-ordinating Bookbug Outreach Steering Groups; and delivering one-off events (including Bookbug Week and the Annual Conference). At a strategic level, the Early Years Team undertakes national fundraising, advocacy work, and champions models of good practice in local Bookbug programmes nationally.

- 1.6 At the heart of the programme is universalism: this means that bags and sessions are always free, and available to everyone, regardless of age, ability and health, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. Examples of accessibility and inclusion include the delivery of sessions in Gaelic in ten local authorities, dedicated titles for children with additional support needs and translated information about Bookbug.

Evaluation aims and approach

Evaluation aims

- 1.7 The purpose of this evaluation was to examine how, and to what extent, the programme is impacting on parents and children in Scotland, and on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of Early Years professionals. The evaluation has explored several more specific questions:

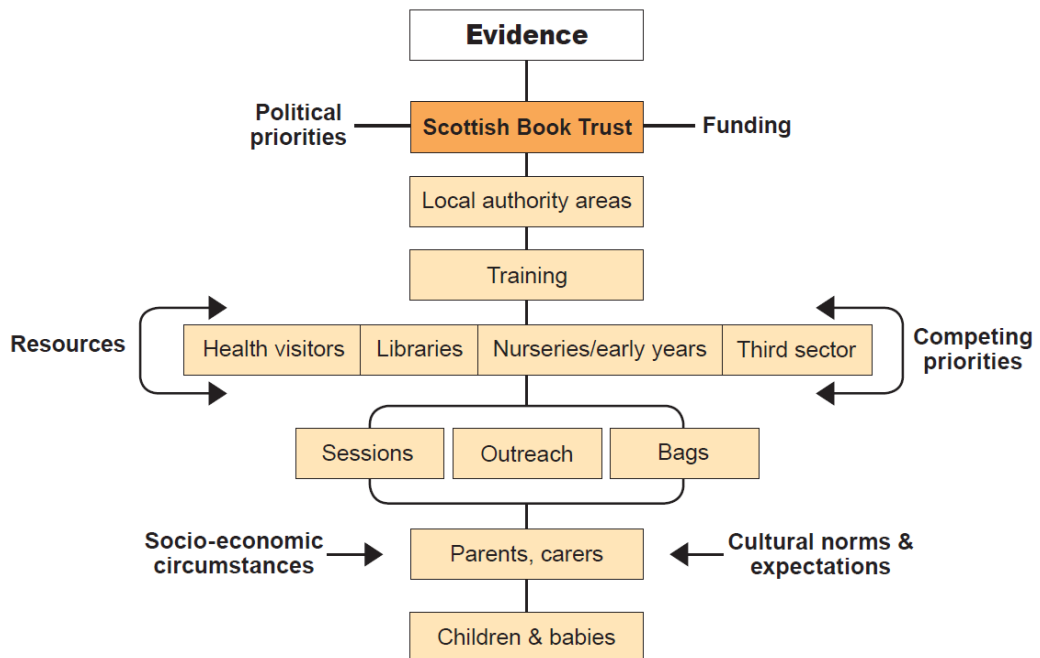
- Are certain groups less able to gain the benefits of the Bookbug programme and if so, why?
- What is the nature of the link between the Bookbug Bags and Bookbug Sessions? Why is such a link important?
- Is there a link between the way Bookbug Bags are gifted and the impact they have on a family?
- Do the bags inform professionals and families' knowledge of Bookbug and Scottish Book Trust and the wider range of services available?

Our evaluation approach

- 1.8 Rather than seeking to understand Bookbug in a vacuum, our evaluation methodology uses 'Contribution Analysis' (see Mayne, 2008). Central to this approach is the explicit recognition that the Bookbug programme is embedded in a complex policy context, and operates in diverse local contexts. By focusing on contribution, rather than impact per se, our approach accepts the impossibility of attributing social impact to specific interventions, and instead seeks to identify the unique contribution that the Bookbug programme brings to families and professionals. Contribution analysis also helps to highlight all stages of project work, rather than focusing purely on the end result.
- 1.9 As with other programmes, Bookbug is operating in a complex social, economic and cultural context. As Figure 1.1 shows, the context is complex with many agencies and actors. The programme not only has to operate within (and potentially influence) an existing national, political and policy context, but it also has to navigate the diverse conditions within each local authority, and the distinctive sectoral identities within these. Families' attitudes to book sharing,

songs and rhymes, in turn, are influenced by their own cultural, social and economic conditions and resultant cultural norms.

Figure 1.1: The context of Bookbug programme delivery



1.10 The starting point of contribution analysis is to develop a ‘theory of change’ underpinning a service or policy – in other words how people think a project will lead to successful outcomes - by discussing what the project sets out to achieve, and the steps that will lead to these outcomes. In particular, a theory of change is used to examine and interrogate the risks and assumptions implicit in the service design. In the approach CRFR takes to Contribution Analysis all partners/stakeholders are involved in discussion about the programme and how it works. As well as encouraging investment and ownership in the project aims and processes, together with the evaluation, this helps to reflect multiple viewpoints that exist in a complex context and ensure that these are included in any model.

1.11 In this evaluation, a contribution analysis workshop was held at the beginning of the evaluation process with staff and other key stakeholders. Together, we developed an outcomes chain for Bookbug which identified different success criteria for the service at different outcome levels and interrogated the risks and assumptions inherent in the approach. The framework was expressed visually, in the form of an outcomes chain showing how each stage of the project linked to the next (see Figure 1.2 which expresses the outcomes chain in three parts, as described in 1.12 below). This framework was then used to inform all aspects of the data collection, including developing interview schedules for interviews and focus groups.

1.12 For the purposes of this report three outcomes chains have been created. 1) gives an overview of the Bookbug programme; 2) focusses on support for parents and

3) on support for professionals. The full version of the outcomes chain with risks and assumptions can be found in Appendix A.

- 1.13 Data collected in the evaluation was analysed to assess whether or not it provided evidence to support the outcomes chain and the outcomes chain was adapted to reflect any new information about the impact of Bookbug. Overall the outcomes chain combined with data from surveys, interviews and observation, have enabled the research to provide a strong narrative about the contribution and impact of the Bookbug programme.

Figure 1.2: Outcomes chain overview - Bookbug's contribution to children's outcomes (part one of three)

Bookbug's contribution to children's outcomes: overview					
What the Bookbug programme does	Who with	How they react	What they learn and gain	What they do differently	Final outcomes
Fund delivery of bags, Bookbug sessions and outreach work.	All staff working in early years settings.	Families enjoy getting bags and feel they can engage with the programme.	Parents and children learn new ways of sharing books, rhymes and fun times together.	Families across Scotland from all backgrounds are sharing books with children from a young age.	Parents and carers will be confident in engaging with their children's social and emotional wellbeing and learning.
Hold regular events: Bookbug Week, Bookbug Picture Book Prize, Bookbug's Library Challenge.	Every baby, toddler, three and five year-old in Scotland., and their parents/carers.	Practitioners feel Bookbug helps them deliver their work and is high quality and useful.	Professionals understand the role of Bookbug in the early years landscape and are committed to delivery.	Professionals are consistently supporting the Bookbug programme and messages to parents.	Children will develop early literacy capacity for life.
Hold Bookbug annual conference, practice-sharing events; regional meetings for Bookbug coordinators.	Funders and national stakeholders.				No child in Scotland will grow up without books.
Deliver a wide programme of training for professionals.					Cultural change in Scotland, making it a place where songs, stories and rhyme are part of everyday life.
					Overall literacy in Scotland improves and inequalities in attainment reduce.

Figure 1.2: Outcomes chain overview - Bookbug's contribution to children's outcomes: supporting parents (part two of three)

Bookbug's contribution to children's outcomes: supporting parents					
What the Bookbug programme does	Who with	How they react	What they learn and gain	What they do differently	Final outcomes
Fund delivery of bags, Bookbug sessions and outreach work.	Every baby, toddler, three and five year-old in Scotland., and their parents/carers.	All families in Scotland receive their Bookbug Bags and understand why.	Parents understand importance of reading and singing in child development, and be confident and willing to try new things.	Children share their Bookbug Bags with their parents.	Parents and carers will be confident in engaging with their children's social and emotional wellbeing and learning.
Hold regular events: Bookbug Week, Bookbug Picture Book Prize, Bookbug's Library Challenge.	Outreach activities engage fathers, parents from ethnic minorities or with ESL, parents of children with disabilities.	This is for me, my baby/child likes it, this is a quality product, I can do this and this is fun.	Parents have the knowledge and capacity to build conversations from books and share stories in a variety of ways.	Children and parents are motivated to engage with books and music.	Children will develop early literacy capacity for life.
Hold Bookbug annual conference, practice-sharing events; regional meetings for Bookbug coordinators.		Parent feel valued and supported, and in turn are motivated to spend quality time with children sharing books, songs and rhymes.	Families see reading and singing are fun, but also be aware that they can be used as a basis for other learning.	More children become library members and families enjoy visiting the libraries.	No child in Scotland will grow up without books.
Deliver a wide programme of training for professionals.			Parents will know songs and rhymes (and actions) for specific age groups.	Children enjoy sharing books, stories and rhymes with their parents.	Cultural change in Scotland, making it a place where songs, stories and rhyme are part of everyday life.
				Books, stories and rhymes are shared in a variety of ways, and are part of everyday family practices.	Overall literacy in Scotland will improve, and inequalities in attainment reduce.

Figure 1.2: Outcomes chain overview - Bookbug’s contribution: supporting early years professionals (part three of three)

Bookbug’s contribution: supporting early years professionals					
What the Bookbug programme does	Who with	How they react	What they learn and gain	What they do differently	Final outcomes
Fund delivery of bags, Bookbug sessions and outreach work.	All staff working in early years.	They see clear links between their role and aims of Bookbug.	A strong evidence-based knowledge about the role of book-sharing in child development and feel confident about engaging with families, and passing this message to them.	All practitioners share the key gifting messages consistently and books and songs are used in their everyday practice.	Parents and carers will be confident in engaging with their children’s social and emotional wellbeing and learning.
Deliver a wide programme of training for professionals.	Midwives; health visitors, social workers; librarians, teachers, early years practitioners;	They feel that Bookbug is easy to incorporate into their role.	Awareness that stories can be used as a basis for games and other learning.	Reading, singing and rhymes are modelled in a variety of ways, and reading for enjoyment is promoted.	Children will develop early literacy capacity for life.
Hold regular events: Bookbug Week, Bookbug Picture Book Prize, Bookbug’s Library Challenge.	Local authorities; third sector staff and volunteers; speech and language therapists; nursery staff.	Bookbug is a tool for attachment, bonding, relationship building, family support and literacy.	Knowledge and confidence to run quality Bookbug Sessions.	A Bookbug community develops and creates a focus for improving partnership working and sharing practice.	No child in Scotland will grow up without books.
Hold Bookbug annual conference, practice-sharing events; regional meetings for Bookbug coordinators.	Funders and national stakeholders.	Bookbug is a high quality, evidence based and trustworthy programme.	Awareness of the whole Bookbug programme, the links between, and how it can support their role.	Work in partnership with parents and develop positive relationships.	Cultural change in Scotland, making it a place where songs, stories and rhyme are part of everyday life.
		Feel involved in the programme, and that SBT understand their work and role.			Overall literacy in Scotland will improve, and inequalities in attainment reduce.

Data collection methods

- 1.14 The evaluation framework was designed to capture both quantitative data at a national level, and experiential qualitative data. This combination allows us to gain insight into the programme as a whole, and the rich, detailed experiences and perspectives of families and practitioners in local contexts.
- 1.15 To do this, we conducted a national online survey of professionals involved in delivering the Bookbug programme. The survey was distributed by Scottish Book Trust to key partners and promoted widely on social media. In total we received 627 responses from a range of different sectors, organisations and areas. In the analysis these have been broken down, as far as possible, by sector. Notably, 76% of those responding to the survey were female and four per cent were male. A fifth were not identifiable by gender.
- 1.16 Library staff and health professionals were typically straightforward to identify by job title. The category 'nursery' includes those whose role was defined as nursery nurse, nursery assistant, nursery manager or similar. This includes both local authority and private provision. The 'other' category largely consists of family support services and specialist practitioners working in the Third Sector, and the local authority (such as Speech and Language therapists, or Play Practitioners). The more complex category was that of 'early years' – there we have included anyone who had a job title including the term early years, and did not obviously work in a nursery. Most worked in a local authority setting (as early years practitioners / educators / workers / development officer / outreach workers). Typically, these were professionals who were working alongside (rather than in) nurseries.
- 1.17 A national survey of parents and carers was also issued. This was developed by Scottish Book Trust, and at the start of the evaluation was already being distributed in Bookbug Bags. The additional option of completing the survey online was added by the evaluation team. The survey was available for a period of 12 months, and in this time a total of 4,387 surveys were returned (1,549 related to the Baby Bag, 1,233 to the Toddler Bag and 1,605 to the Explorer Bag).
- 1.18 Due to the means of distribution, neither of the national surveys were representative. In both, respondents are likely to be those parents and or professionals who have strong opinions about the Bookbug programme and/or are particularly motivated to complete such a survey. To address this issue, we conducted in-depth telephone interviews and locality based case studies. These qualitative forms of inquiry allowed the evaluation team to target particular groups of families and professionals who we believed were under-represented in the national survey.
- 1.19 To supplement the Parent and Carer survey, we conducted 46 in-depth telephone interviews (parents who completed the survey were asked if they would be willing to take part in a follow-up telephone interview). Interviewees were selected by weighting specifically for those in the most deprived areas of Scotland (based on

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) ranking of their postcode). We also specifically targeted fathers, families with children who have additional support needs and bilingual households.

- 1.20 Finally, six area-based case studies were undertaken. Each involved extended time on-site in the local area (in libraries, nurseries and in third sector settings) with the aim of understanding how local circumstances shape and affect the extent to which Bookbug is impacting on families and professionals. Case study areas were chosen, as detailed in Appendix A, to represent a geographical spread across Scotland, communities with a range of socio-economic factors and communities that are urban, semi-urban and rural. Across the six case study areas, we interviewed 55 professionals and 141 parents & carers. We also observed or took part in 12 Bookbug Sessions and eight parent and toddler and family groups.
- 1.21 Staff within Scottish Book Trust were also involved in the research. In addition to the contribution analysis workshop, a selection of staff from the Early Years Team (six in total) were interviewed about how the programme operates and their own roles and responsibilities. An analysis workshop – held within Scottish Book Trust - enabled staff members to work ‘hands on’ with the data collected, and be part of the analysis process.

Overview of the report

- 1.22 The report begins by providing a short overview of the existing evidence in support of book sharing. In chapter two it moves on to look specifically at the Bookbug programme, exploring its place in national policy and legislation, and its expected aims and objectives, as articulated by staff.
- 1.23 In chapters three to six we begin to look specifically at the evaluation evidence. We examine families’ singing and reading practices in the home, then move on to discuss how Bookbug Bags and Sessions are experienced. In the final data chapter we report on the programme as a whole, looking at the linkage between bags, sessions and the training programme. We finish by providing a number of recommendations for developing and improving the programme to ensure its future sustainability. Here we provide a revised ‘theory of change’ which can be utilised by Scottish Book Trust to support future evaluation.

2 Existing evidence on book sharing programmes

Key points

- There is a solid body of evidence showing that home literacy activities in the early years lead to positive outcomes in the areas of emergent literacy, language and cognitive development.
- Connecting book gifting and book sharing programmes with positive outcomes, with home literacy activity as the mediating factor, is slightly more difficult due to the range and quality of available information. Book gifting has been linked to later improvements in reading, by for example influencing parental attitudes and increasing book ownership and library membership.
- Book sharing can benefit children irrespective of their parents' level of education and socio-economic status, however, family reading practices vary according to socioeconomic and sociodemographic factors.
- It appears that fathers in Scotland read less frequently with their young children than do mothers, however the majority do read. Evidence is less well-developed in relation to fathers' book sharing, with conflicting reports of differences in style between mothers and fathers. Fathers' book sharing has been connected with positive outcomes for the child.
- For families with English as an additional language, dual language texts may facilitate parental involvement in children's literacy learning, however a theme in this chapter is the importance of recognising diverse and culturally relevant literacies.
- The power or special nature of book sharing may reside in: the socioemotional context in which it takes place (that those participating know each other well); the talk that happens around the text; the making of connections (intertextuality); as well as learning about narrative, visual image, sounds and language.
- Much of the research in this field seeks to connect book sharing to learning outcomes, rather than for example pleasure in reading together or the quality of parent-child interaction or attachment. Some work has established an effect of wider relationship dynamics on the quality of book sharing practice, suggesting that some pairings may need additional help to scaffold pleasurable and effective interactions. This emphasises the *quality* of book sharing in addition to occurrence and frequency.
- Quality in book sharing has been related to: cooperation and positive interaction; the reading experience involving both 'instructional and socioemotional' qualities; variety of types of talk (including non-immediate talk); and responsiveness to the child. Dialogic reading, which encourages adults to prompt children with questions,

engage them in discussions and provide feedback while reading to them, has been shown to promote children's language development.

- We found more limited evidence on the benefits of book sharing for children with additional support needs, however training in dialogic reading may be useful to the parents and professionals supporting them.
- Most of the available evidence is orientated towards the book sharing and book gifting elements of the Bookbug programme, with less information related to song and rhyme sessions outside the home; an area where this current evaluation can contribute.
- A recurrent theme in the literature relates to the position of book sharing programmes within a wider framework of support for family literacy. The contribution of the book sharing initiative to that wider framework is therefore of significance.

Introduction

- 2.1 In this chapter we provide a brief review of past, related evaluations, systemic reviews and research. The aim was to determine the quality and quantity of evidence currently available on the benefits of book sharing and related practices, and in particular, identify where evidence is strong, and where it is weak. Finally, and critical to understanding Bookbug's impact, we have sought to understand what evidence exists on other factors influencing impact (positively or negatively), and the contribution they may be making to outcomes.

The impact of book sharing at home

- 2.2 The Bookbug programme is based on findings from a range of studies that a significant amount of literacy learning takes place before (and around) formal schooling, and that the home environment can powerfully influence a child's experiences of more formal learning. Overall, we have found that these principles are underpinned by a strong and well-established body of research on the long term benefits of shared reading during children's earliest years (Bus et al, 2005; Hindman et al, 2014; Spratt & Phillip, 2007; What Works Clearinghouse, 2006). Moreover, this evidence shows consistency across different research paradigms and focus (Sheffield Hallam, 2014). EU READ (see www.euread.com), a consortium of European reading promotion organisations, shows the extent to which the importance of reading promotion, and book sharing specifically, is now recognised across different cultural, social and economic contexts.
- 2.3 Studies have shown that what happens in these early years, especially in the home learning environment, can have a significant impact on literacy, language development, cognitive development and a child's desire to learn (see Bradshaw, King, Knudsen, Law and Sharp, 2016; Bryant and Bradley, 1985; Buckingham et al, 2014; Heath et al, 2014; Kuhl, 2011; Neuman and Dickinson, 2001; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2014; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart, 2004; Wade and Moore, 2000; Whitehurst and Lonigan, 1998). Other studies refer specifically to parental support as a crucial factor in literacy success (Hannon, 1995; MacLeod, 1995; Tett and Crowther, 1998). Several studies have established that these early advantages can significantly affect later educational outcomes (see Feinstein, 2003), although the effects may weaken as children become conventional readers (Bus, van IJzendoorn and Pellegrini, 1995).
- 2.4 The value of book sharing is attributed to the dedicated interaction it prompts between children and parents; the use of more complex language in books compared to everyday conversations; and the ability to reinforce new knowledge through repetition (see Sénéchal, 2008). Evidence of the benefits of book sharing at home is far reaching. Key studies have shown that:
- Being read with and exposed to books can affect children's early literacy development (e.g. Whitehurst, 1998; Wade and Moore, 2000). Reading to pre-schoolers is related to language growth, emergent literacy and reading achievement. Book reading is a 'main condition for developing the knowledge necessary for eventual success in reading acquisition' (Bus et al, 1995:16).

- Parental involvement in reading activities can influence language comprehension and expressive language skills (Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich and Welsh, 2004).
- Reading with children, along with songs, rhymes and games with letters and numbers are associated with higher intellectual and behavioural scores (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford and Taggart 2004).
- Children who were regularly exposed to reading and visiting libraries had higher cognitive ability than those with less experience. Likewise, frequent home learning activities such as reading and singing from an early age were associated with better cognitive ability (vocabulary and problem-solving) at age three, even after taking account of sociodemographic factors (results from the Second Birth Cohort of the Growing Up in Scotland study, see for example Bradshaw, King, Knudsen, Law and Sharp, 2016).
- Children who are read to more frequently enter school with larger vocabularies and more advanced comprehension skills (Mol and Bus, 2011).
- Competent early readers share: a positive attitude to books and enjoyment of narrative; the drive to extend the narrative in to their own imaginary worlds (through re-enactment and imaginary play); the ability to connect the narrative with their own life experiences; good phonological awareness; involved parents and literacy-rich home environments (Collins and Svensson, 2008).

2.5 Findings have highlighted the impact of home learning activities on children growing up in areas of high socioeconomic disadvantage (Flouri and Buchanan, 2004). The Millennium Cohort Study, for example, found that differences in the home learning environment (which included reading, sharing learning, visits to the library, songs and rhymes) had a significant role in narrowing the cognitive gap between rich and poor (Dearden, Sibieta and Sylva, 2010). Other studies have concluded that early exposure to reading may be more significant than socio-economic status and parental education in accounting for individual differences in literacy attainment (Bailey et al, 2002; Melhuish, 2010; Sylva et al, 2004). Parental involvement in home learning activities is certainly not a panacea for the effects of poverty and disadvantage (this, as Hartas (2010) emphasises, would be a gross oversimplification). Tett and Crowther have argued (1998) that dominant forms of literacy can privilege middle-class, school-based literacies, and marginalise those of working class communities. Though this work is now dated, it points to the importance of programmes which work *with* the families, as opposed to imposing or dictating particular literacy practices:

“A family literacy programme that helps parents to be true partners in their own and their children’s learning will be one which sees the role of the home and the school in learning as reciprocal. Paying attention to literacies that are culturally productive, through supporting the real life context of the family, is therefore more likely to result in positive outcomes for all” (Tett and Crowther, 1998; p457)

2.6 As the value of book sharing with young children has become more widely accepted, evaluation of those programmes seeking to promote it may rest at establishing connections between programme and home literacy practices, rather than tracing these through to later literacy attainment (as this can be assumed) (Sheffield Hallam, 2014).

The qualities of book sharing

- 2.7 All of the above raises the question; why is book sharing at home such a special and valuable experience? Researchers have frequently acknowledged the importance of the talk surrounding the book sharing experience and its different aspects, both instructional and affective (Sheffield Hallam, 2004). This has led some to analyse in detail the quality of the interaction during book sharing, including helping the child to understand and interpret the text and making explicit the child's connections between the text and other texts, or their own personal experiences (see for example Torr, 2007). Here, book sharing is cast as lively, meaning-making practice drawing text-to-text, life-to-text and text-to-life connections (intertextuality).
- 2.8 The book sharing experience can extend into children's imaginary play and relationships (Collins and Svensson, 2008). Children's contributions may sometimes appear idiosyncratic (see Elster, 1995), and skilful support is required to clarify how the contribution is relevant to reading of the text, to make the reading experience most beneficial and rewarding for the child (Torr, 1997). Arizpe's work on children's interpretation of visual texts echoes similar themes, of appropriate adult support and children's competence in engaging with texts. She highlights how children not yet confident in reading are capable of analysing visual text (in this case a visually complex picture book), including interpretation of visual imagery, understanding point of view, colour imagery, switches in style, and inter- and intra-textual references (Arizpe, 2001; Styles and Arizpe, 2001). Literacy is an active practice, integrating the child's wider knowledge and experience, and visual literacy may contribute to later, critical reading skills. Finally, the personal context of book sharing at home may in part explain its special role:

"What appears to be particularly significant about book sharing in the home, as distinct from book sharing in the classroom or pre-school, is that it takes place between an adult and a child who know each other well, share the same cultural context and therefore share understandings, interests and experiences." (Sheffield Hallam, 2014; p17)

The relationship surrounding the child's experience of book sharing

- 2.9 The socioemotional context of book sharing is a relatively neglected research area. Pahl, Lewis and Ritchie (2010) highlight the affective aspect of book sharing, referring to touch and physical closeness for example, as well as the wide range of experiences that come from books. Sylva et al (2004) echo this, arguing that child-adult interaction is most effective when it is cooperative, promotes shared thinking and has both an instructional and socioemotional quality. Bus, van IJzendoorn and Pellegrini (1995) emphasise the personal location of book sharing and that the interaction must be positive to be pleasurable.
- 2.10 In what the authors believe to be the first American study of its kind, Bus, Belsky, IJzendoorn and Crnic (1997) explored the relationship between child-parent attachment and quality of book sharing experience, continuing their earlier work in the Netherlands. Attachment was assessed using the well-established, Strange

Situation procedure where children are separated from their parent in the presence of a stranger. 'Secure' children come to the parent following separation and are easily reassured, 'insecure-avoidant' children avoid the parent and 'insecure-resistant' children will seek proximity but avoid contact. The authors hypothesise that at an early age, children will be more motivated by the book related to their parent, than the book as an object in itself, therefore the success of book sharing in a parent-child pair will follow the dynamics of their relationship. Less securely attached pairs will probably read less frequently:

"When the quality of bookreading is less satisfying to parent and child, frequency of reading is likely to be affected." (p83)

- 2.11 Child-mother attachment was found to have a significant effect on the quality of the book sharing experience. This was not found for fathers, possibly because the fathers on average read less frequently with their children, and the pattern of interaction was less well set. In this study the fathers just tended to read the text in a literal way (contrasting with the findings of more recent work by Duursma (2016)). In secure attachments, mothers typically used a range of techniques to draw their child through the book, for example, motivating, pointing, questioning, labelling, commenting, giving feedback on the child's responses and shadowing the child's interests. However, in insecure-avoidant pairs, mothers tended to just read the text, with their children becoming unresponsive and distracted. In insecure-resistant pairs, the mothers showed a tendency towards overstimulation and control, while the children showed negative responses.
- 2.12 Similarly, Fletcher and Finch (2014) found that toddlers were more likely to respond when mothers used "positive feedback, positive motivating strategies and questions rather than labelling and reading text". Other work also points to the importance of 'quality', rather than frequency of reading. Sonnenschein & Munsterman's (2002) study of 30 families in the U.S. found the affective quality of the reading interaction was the most powerful predictor of children's motivations for reading: quality in this study was rated according to reading expression, contact with child, reader involvement and sensitivity to the child's engagement. Meanwhile, Hindman et al (2013), noted that parents engage in a variety of 'types' of talk during reading, but concluded a wider variety of meaning-related remarks (i.e. discussing the words and concepts in the book) was linked to more advanced language skills among preschoolers. Buckingham et al (2013) point to the influence of socio-economic status on early literacy, stating that children from disadvantaged families are less likely to have high 'quality' early literacy experiences.
- 2.13 A further study with similar themes explored interaction during reading between parents and high-risk (prenatally exposed to cocaine) children, selected because they were at the extremes of a larger group in expressive language scores (Cross, Fletcher and Neumeister, 2011). Parents in the high-scoring group shared control of the book and conversation and were described as 'in tune' with the child's needs and abilities, using techniques such as expanding on words and pictures, offering an answer to their own questions (where the child could not yet answer)

and shadowing the child's interests. Parents in the lowest performing group showed insensitivity to their child's developmental needs and sometimes engaged in power struggles with their children over control of the book. The authors draw attention to the way in which most parents adapt their reading behaviours as their child develops from simple gestures (for example labelling) to more complex interactions (questioning, de-contextualised language). Parents in the lowest performing group were seemingly unable to follow this elevation. As in the case of Bus et al this study shows how the socioemotional climate during reading influences language development. The authors suggest that the skills of parents in the more successful pairs could be taught to others. Such skills included supporting parents to have greater responsiveness to their child's needs during reading, supporting a child's autonomy and being willing to assent to children's requests.

- 2.14 The key finding here - that quality book sharing depends on the socioemotional context – is that to be effective book sharing programmes must support parent-child pairs who are caught in negative patterns of behaviour.
- 2.15 The rich case studies offered by the evaluation of Bookbug for the Home (Blake Stevenson, 2016), give some insight in to what an intensive process of scaffolding or modelling positive interaction might look like.

Interactive book sharing

- 2.16 Linked to this is the evidence about dialogic and active reading practices. Reese et al (2003) have argued that it is the style of reading that impacts children's early language and literacy development. Dialogic reading, which encourages adults to prompt children with questions, engage them in discussions and provide feedback while reading to them, has been shown to promote children's language development (Huennekens and Xu, 2016; Whitehurst, 1994). During dialogic reading adults use specific techniques while sharing a book with a child. In Whitehurst's study children whose parents were trained in dialogic reading had better expressive language skills, used longer utterances, had higher frequency of phrases and lower frequency of single words than children whose parents were not using this approach. Notably, these differences remained nine months after the training (Whitehurst, 1994). In a meta-analysis on dialogic bookreading by Mol et al (2008) interactive reading – that is reading that emphasises active as opposed to non-interactive participation by the child - was found to have a positive impact on younger children's (ages two to three) vocabulary. Positive effects of dialogic reading have been found in the development of the oral vocabulary skills of children at risk (Morgan & Meier, 2008).
- 2.17 Duursma (2016) emphasizes the importance of such 'decontextualised' or non-immediate talk and active engagement during bookreading. Not only is it beneficial to children's early language and literacy development (Reese et al., 2003; What Works Clearinghouse, 2015) but it can help children understand their social worlds, by offering them the opportunity to make connections to their own experiences, engage in explanations and explore meanings (De Temple and Snow,

2003). Similarly, Hindman et al (2012) in a study of Head Start Teachers (a programme in the US for low-income families) found that book sharing can have significant benefits to the vocabulary development of young children in poverty, especially true where book readings included both contextualised and decontextualised talk.

Home learning activities and the socioeconomic and sociodemographic factors influencing these

- 2.18 Children's early experiences are usually located in the home, meaning that the home environment has the most influence on language development, vocabulary size and growth (see for example Hart and Risley, 2003). Most parents in the West are aware of the importance of verbal interaction with their children (see for example Bus, 2001; Hart and Risley, 2003; Senechal, 2000). However, inequalities in home learning activities have been repeatedly observed, relative to socio-economic group and parents' education. In an influential study of home language activity, Hart and Risley (1995) observed 42 American families with one and two-year-old children over an extended timeframe. When they compared the children by socio-economic group, they found a relationship with vocabulary size and rate of vocabulary growth which was reflected in follow up at nine to 10 years. This was explained in reference to huge differences in the number and quality of words that the children heard in their early years, dubbed the '30 million word gap'. Later studies, and criticisms of Hart and Risley's work have emphasised the correlation between quantity and quality, suggesting that parents who "talk more with their children also tend to use more of the rich vocabulary, complex ideas, and back-and-forth conversation known to promote language growth" (Fernald & Weisleder, 2015 p 2).
- 2.19 Inequalities in frequency of home learning activities, such as playing, reading and telling stories, have also been described in the UK (see for example Brocklebank, Bedford and Griffiths, 2014). This work has also shown the complex intersection of differences relating to ethnicity, family structure, educational qualifications, parents working hours and number of children. Reports from the Growing Up in Scotland survey document variations in language development at age three and five between children of families in advantaged and disadvantaged circumstances. There are solid connections between early home learning activities and language development, such that home learning activities may form a protective factor (of language development) for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Bradshaw, 2011; Bradshaw, Lewis and Hughes, 2014). Differences of language ability in young children also relate to gender, maternal age, family composition, early development and birth weight (Bromley, 2009).
- 2.20 Probably the best overview of the frequency of home literacy activities in Scotland comes from the Growing Up in Scotland survey, a longitudinal research programme tracking two cohorts of Scottish children, 10 months old in 2004/05 (birth cohort 1) and 2010/11 (birth cohort 2) respectively (see Bradshaw et al, 2016). It shows that parents read or looked at books most days with 66 per cent of 10-month-old babies in birth cohort 1, and 69 per cent in birth cohort 2. Parents

were slightly less likely to sing with their babies every day or most days in birth cohort 2 (90 per cent in birth cohort 1 and 88 per cent in birth cohort 2). Overall the frequency of learning activities undertaken with three-year-olds across the two cohorts remained constant. In both cohorts, 90 per cent of three-year-olds were reading or looking at books most days, although this includes reading or looking at books by themselves, or with nursery staff. Of children who had looked at books in the last week, 93 per cent had done so with their mother (both cohorts) and two thirds with their father (67 per cent in birth cohort 1 and 66 in birth cohort 2).

Evidence of the impact of Bookbug and comparable book gifting programmes

- 2.21 The research that is available on existing book gifting programmes confirms that this approach has the potential to make a contribution. A review of the contribution of book gifting programmes to literacy attainment (Sheffield Hallam, 2014) concluded that there was evidence that book gifting is linked to later improvements in reading by: impacting on parental attitudes to sharing books; encouraging children's enthusiasm for reading; increasing book ownership; increasing frequency of reading; and encouraging library membership. This work examines the case for book gifting related to the principles that reading for pleasure, early book sharing and book ownership contribute to literacy attainment. Similarly, Wade and Moore's (1993) key study focused on 300 families with babies at approximately nine months. In this study book gifting resulted in: positive attitudes to books; increases in book ownership and library membership; greater frequency of home learning activities; and changed attitudes to sharing books with babies. Hardma and Jones (1999) evaluation of the Kirklees 'Babies into Books' project (which provided free baby book bags) found significant increases in the number of books owned by the baby, the frequency of baby reaching for books, the frequency of shared reading between mother and baby. The results, they claim, confirm the value of very early intervention. More recent research by Hall (2001) on the 'Babies Need Books' initiative in North Tyneside found that participating families were reporting increased confidence and enjoyment, with shared books forming an important part of family life. Less positive results were found in terms of the scheme encouraging library use
- 2.22 The review by Sheffield Hallam (2014) indicates that there are insufficient studies of book gifting on an appropriate scale to conduct meta-analysis, arriving instead at more careful conclusions based on the available evidence. There is 'promising evidence that book gifting is linked to later improvements in reading' (p46). Programme effectiveness is linked to book gifting practice, strong partnerships, relevance to families, book selection and a diet of repeated book gifting. As messages on the importance of reading with young children become more absorbed within the population, the researchers observe that the impact of book gifting may be harder to evidence. The role of intervention may shift from changing behaviour to reassuring parents and reinforcing the messages. The review also underlines the connection between book gifting and wider service provision, such that the specific contribution of gifting may be hard to gauge; instead it forms one part in a functional ecosystem of family literacy support.

2.23 Using data from Growing Up in Scotland, Bradshaw et al (2016) compare the children's language development and home learning activities across the two cohorts, mindful that the introduction of Bookbug and Play Talk Read fall between the two time frames. Home learning activities included sharing books, singing songs and reciting nursery rhymes, as well as drawing and painting and playing with numbers, letters and shapes. Very slight, positive differences were found between cohorts in the vocabulary of three-year-olds and in children of 10 months being read to or looking at books most days. The overall frequency of home learning activities and the gap in home learning activities between families in advantaged and disadvantaged circumstances remained constant. However, it should be noted that Bookbug was not painted on to a blank canvas, but rather morphed from previous initiatives (see chapter three), meaning that families received similar services. Previous studies have made a connection between gifting and parental attitudes to book sharing (see for example Millard, 2000, Wade and Moore, 1993), however as researchers at Sheffield Hallam note (2014), there may be a ceiling effect here. The nature of the questions asked by Growing Up in Scotland and the emergent nature of the Bookbug initiative make it an imperfect source of evaluative data. However, it does show a positive association between recollection and use of the baby bag and frequent home learning activities with the child at 10 months, and with the child's expressive vocabulary at age three. The nature and direction of this relationship (influence, reinforcement or co-occurrence) could not be specified.

2.24 The intransigence of the gap in home learning activities between rich and poor in the six-year period between the two cohorts, leads to the conclusion that parents in the most disadvantaged groups have been least able to benefit from these universal programmes. Programmes targeting families in need of enhanced support, such as Bookbug for the Home, are discussed from 2.34.

"The fact that the behaviour of parents and children who are the most disadvantaged had changed so little suggests that while universal initiatives like the Bookbug Bags and the Play Talk Read website may be helpful for engaging some parents, targeted and perhaps more creative approaches are needed to reach the most vulnerable."
(Bradshaw et al 2016; p6)

2.25 While Bookstart emerged in the UK, similar programmes have been adopted in other European countries, Australia, Canada, Columbia, Jamaica, Korea, New Zealand and Thailand, creating culturally different research sites. Evaluations of Reach Out and Read, an American programme are probably of the largest scale, showing positive outcomes in language, literacy and home learning environment (see discussion by Sheffield Hallam, 2014). Sheffield Hallam also reviewed four gifting programmes in Germany, Switzerland and Italy, finding for example attitudinal change amongst parents, especially related to the role of the library service in Switzerland, as well as highlighting some difficulties in reaching migrant communities. A key study in the Netherlands tested the effects of Bookstart on language development in babies at 15 months, with home language activities as a mediating factor; with the expectation that advantages at this stage would have value in predicting later development (van den Berg and Bus, 2014). Overall

effects were small, but higher in a sub-sample of ‘temperamentally highly reactive’ children¹. These children could reach or even exceed the language development of less ‘reactive’ peers with increased parent-child interaction, suggesting that here Bookstart reinforces a message to more able parents.

*“...Bookstart could be particularly effective in an average sample, because average or highly educated parents do not need coaching in how to interact verbally with infants, but merely incentives to initiate interactions despite their child’s difficult behaviour.”
(p74)*

- 2.26 This focus on temperamental reactivity is interesting as it suggests the differential impact of book sharing and also the nuanced reasons why some parents struggle more to interact positively with their children.
- 2.27 Families may experience a range of barriers in receiving and feeling able to put into practice the Bookbug message, such as: their feelings of being marginalised; the cultural value that is attached to bookreading (see discussion at 1.4); pressures of life circumstances; and the need for more intensive guidance and support than a 'light touch' universal service is offering. A recent report by Health Scotland draws attention to the preference of some fathers, young mothers and parents with literacy issues for empathetic and personal support when receiving health advice and information, where a trusting relationship is key. An older study, by Kaderavek and Justice (2002) highlights the possibilities of reading intervention – but also the pitfalls. They argue that reading interventions must be meaningful and positive. As such, they must recognise the impact of social and cultural influences on children’s expectations of book reading: their past experiences, their familiarity with different genres, and their motivation and interest. The broader point is that the relationship, and the wider social and cultural context mediates how a gifting message is received, recalled and translated into behaviour.

Song and rhyme

- 2.28 Song and rhyme are widely used practices in childcare, and evidence suggests that they contribute to children’s development in a number of ways. There is a strong relationship between phonological awareness and learning to read (Stanovich, Cunningham and Cramer, 1984; Tunmer and Nesdale, 1985) and through repetition, nursery rhymes acquaint children with the component sounds of words. In the first study of this connection, MacLean, Bryant and Bradley (1987) detected a strong relationship between knowledge of nursery rhymes and development of children’s phonological skills. Further work on the same data linked advantages in knowledge of rhyme and alliteration at age three or four to

¹ Children with a ‘highly reactive temperament’ typically respond “negatively to verbal interactions as a result of their proneness to sadness, anger, and frustration. Because interactions are less rewarding and often frustrating, their parents may initiate verbal interactions less frequently than parents of temperamentally less reactive infants” (van den Berg and Bus, 2014)

children's reading ability two or three years later, independent of their general language ability (Bryant, MacLean and Bradley, 1990).

- 2.29 In relation to song, research has shown maternal singing to hold the attention of six-month-old infants more than maternal speech (Nakata and Trehub, 2004). Music may transmit affective information to the pre-verbal child. Mothers and fathers intuitively adjust their singing style in the presence of their infants, with higher pitch, slower tempo and more emotion (Trehub et al, 1997):

"The emotional expressiveness of the parent's sung messages may promote and sustain reciprocal emotional ties between parent and infant." (p505)

- 2.30 Song can stimulate or sooth a child and may therefore accompany a wide range of daily routines, although it is most often associated with bedtime. Through training, Bookbug conveys the message that song and rhyme can contribute to attachment, for example by using eye and skin-to-skin contact.

Evidence of the impact of song and rhyme sessions outside the home

- 2.31 The book sharing and book gifting aspects of the Bookbug programme are served far better by the evaluation literature, than Bookbug Sessions and comparable song and rhyme sessions outside the home. Key Bookstart evaluations for example focus on the outcomes of gifting rather than 'rhymetime'. Wade and Moore do however report (2003) on qualitative work with relevant professionals in one borough of Birmingham, an extension of their key Bookstart study. Here, the librarians talked about Cradle Club, a morning session where they modelled play and literacy activities for parents. Respondents referred to the popularity of the sessions, sustained attendance, opportunities for social interaction, and dividends related to interest in books and library membership.
- 2.32 Some parents attending Glasgow's 'bounce and rhyme' sessions reported gaining confidence in their singing and learning the words to more songs and rhymes, leading to doing more at home (Ipsos Mori, 2011). The sessions also gave parents and their children a valued social opportunity. Parents reported using the library more often, and the sessions underlined the more relaxed and informal nature of the contemporary library service. Families with English as an additional language felt that the sessions were particularly useful for learning English.
- 2.33 Craigmillar Books for Babies provides song and rhyme sessions for children under the age of four in four socially deprived areas of Edinburgh. Recent evaluation highlights benefits relating to social networks, parent-reported positive change in the children's speech, language and listening, and parent perception of parent-child bond (Clark, 2015).

"The development of social networks was particularly noteworthy given the engagement of parents/carers suffering social isolation or low self-esteem who are signposted by local professionals and supported by the Project's Family Support at Home Programme as well as significant numbers of parents/carers who had moved to Craigmillar from overseas." (Clark, 2015: 16)

Parents also commented positively on the library setting, its location and the link to other services available in the library.

Where universal programmes lack leverage

- 2.34 Recognition of the needs of some families for enhanced support has led to the development of targeted programmes, such as Bookbug for the Home. A number of these have been positively evaluated, most of which are necessarily small-scale.
- 2.35 Bookstart Corner is located in children's centres in England and targets socially and economically disadvantaged families with children aged 20 to 30 months. The intervention involves four sessions focusing on reading, song and rhyme with dedicated materials, usually in the family home. Recent evaluation (Demack and Stevens, 2013), using before and after surveys, suggests positive changes in four domains: books, stories and rhymes; parent-child interaction; parent confidence and enjoyment; and child interest. After the sessions, parents were more likely to use other services in the community, such as song and rhyme sessions and the library. 65 families completed both before and after surveys in geographic regions.
- 2.36 Early Words Together is a National Literacy Trust programme aiming to develop children's communication, language and learning, based in 120 children's centres in England. Evaluators note outcomes such as: improved understanding of spoken language, by girls in particular; increased reported enjoyment of books, songs and rhyme; increased parent confidence in sharing books and singing; and increased book sharing (Wood, Vardy and Tarczynski-Bowles, 2015). The report highlights the strong female orientation of the project, applying to participants, project volunteers and outcomes, as highlighted above.
- 2.37 Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Scotland seeks to gift one book per month to Looked After Children up to the age of five. Recent evaluation (KSO Research, 2015) findings show that the children look forward to receiving the books, the books are being used and that access to books has been improved for the target group. The intervention has been positively received but this evaluation focuses mostly on delivery processes. Other research on Dolly Parton's Imagination Library found evidence from both the UK and US that a 'book in the hand' impacted directly on how much reading takes place in families, with evidence showing not only increases in everyday reading practices, but also literacy scores (Dolly's Imagination Library, 2012; see also Ridzi, Sylvia & Singh, 2014). Further research on Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, including the impact of the programme, is underway.
- 2.38 Bookbug for the Home itself has been positively evaluated (Blake Stevenson, 2016). The case studies are of particular interest, showing how through intensive, sensitive, careful work, skilled practitioners can help families in highly challenging circumstances to move forward through the media of books, rhymes and songs. The report notes the continued evolution of the programme to meet the needs of particular groups, such as adoptive and foster carers and families affected by imprisonment. Of note, is the flow of families from enhanced to universal

provision and to other support services. This hints at a regular theme in the literature, namely interconnectedness between the book sharing intervention and wider early years and family literacy services, and with the community (Hines and Brooks, 2005; Blake Stevenson, 2016). Cuts to community and family support services and libraries therefore threaten effectiveness.

Fathers

- 2.39 Most of what we know about parental involvement and children's educational attainment is based on mother-child interactions (see Clark, 2009 for discussion), however the feminised nature of the field is not always acknowledged. Studies have shown the value of paternal involvement related to children's language and cognitive skills (for example, Connor, Knight and Cross, 1997; Easterbrooks and Goldberg, 1984, Gleason, 1975). However, fathers' book sharing is less well-explored.
- 2.40 There is a trend of fathers (and indeed mothers) spending increasingly more time with their children. Changes in working patterns, gender roles and family structures create a shifting and more fluid role for fathers. The Growing Up in Scotland survey shows an increase from cohort one to two of fathers undertaking some home learning activities with their children (singing, drawing and painting and playing with letters, words, numbers and shapes). In the most recent cohort, 93 per cent of three-year-olds read with their mother and 66 per cent with their father; this has remained fairly constant in the five years between birth cohorts.
- 2.41 Past research has shown the importance of fathers' reading habits to their children's reading ability, level of interest and reading choices (Lloyd, 1999). It has also been suggested that fathers' use of language may be more complex and challenging than that used by mothers with their children, thus forming a bridge to the adult world (Gleason, 1975; Lamb and Tamis-LeMonda, 2004), however the converse, that it is mothers who use more complex language, has also been found in general interaction settings rather than book sharing specifically (Davidson and Snow, 1996). In another study, researchers found parity between low-income mothers and fathers in volume and complexity of speech when playing with their toddlers, but more use of 'wh-' questions by fathers, challenging and prompting verbal responses from their children (Rowe, Coker and Pan, 2014). In a recent study by Duursma (2016), low-income fathers employed more non-immediate talk (talk that goes beyond the text and illustrations, including providing definitions and explanations, and making connections) and engagement strategies when reading to their two and three-year-old children than mothers, suggesting that by doing so fathers may be contributing positively to their children's language development. Children mirrored their parents' styles. The specific contribution of fathers' non-immediate talk to language development was not assessed in this small-scale study. Overall the evidence is mixed, but there are indications of subtle differences in style between mothers and fathers, meaning that some fathers may accommodate their young children a little less and challenge them a little more.

- 2.42 Fathers' bookreading has been connected to their children's cognitive development at 36 months, and in the case of fathers with at least a high school education, their children's language outcomes (Duursma, Pan and Raikes, 2008). Interestingly, the same study showed that frequency of fathers' book sharing was best predicted by fathers' education, language spoken at home, child's gender (with two-year-old girls being read to more than two-year-old boys) and enrollment in an early intervention programme (Early Head Start). Work in US, rural, low-income communities showed the influence of fathers' vocabulary use during a picture book session on their children's language skills at 15 and 33 months (Pancsofar and Vernon-Feagans, 2010).
- 2.43 Figures included above suggest that fathers may be an appropriate target group for intervention given the greater part they now play in their children's daily lives, along with lower levels of book sharing in general than mothers.

Additional support needs

- 2.44 We found more limited evidence on the impact of book sharing on children with additional support needs; much that was available was fairly dated, and focused on speech, language and communication needs. The most significant study was for the Book Trust (2016), which examined how Book Trust's additional needs resources were used, and more generally how children with additional needs experience books and reading. The qualitative study concluded that "the benefits of reading for pleasure among children with additional needs ... were significant and often profound". As for every child, such benefits included comfort, closeness and well-being, as well as a stimulus for movement, communication, language development, new learning about themselves and their lives. Book Trust resources were clearly seen to contribute to delivering these positive outcomes. They also noted issues with access. Access can be highly personal, and unique – thus, it was important for resources to be flexible enough to encourage and support individual needs. Such personalisation was not just about the resources, but the combination of a good resource and responsive adult.
- 2.45 In a study by Catts et al (2002) on the reading outcomes of children with speech, language and communication needs, children's pre-school literacy experiences were good predictors of subsequent reading outcomes. Dale et al (1996) found that parents of children with language delays increased their use of 'wh-' questions, open-ended questions, imitation, and expansions after receiving training in dialogic reading. It was concluded that book sharing training offers potential for facilitating language development of children with language delays. In a later study, Crain-Thorson & Dale (1999) looked at the impact of dialogic reading on children enrolled in early childhood special education services. They found that parents and staff trained in the approach changed their book sharing style consistent with the instruction received, and that children with whom this technique was used spoke more, made longer utterances, produced more different words, and participated more in shared book reading. Stephenson (2009) emphasises the role of shared picture book reading in supporting children with

severe intellectual disabilities, by allowing the use of graphic symbols and pictures to develop their capacity for communication.

- 2.46 Other work, focusing specifically on young children with autism spectrum disorder has shown the importance of music in supporting reciprocal social interactions with family and peers (Thompson and McFerran, 2015). Mucchetti (2013) looked at adapted book sharing techniques as a means of working with minimally verbal children with autism. It found that visual supports, tactile objects, and specific teaching strategies all offer ways for meaningful participation in literacy activities.
- 2.47 Dolezal-Sams et al (2009) looks specifically at the features of family life, and the organisation of the home environment as a framework for reading practices. In the homes of families who had children with disabilities, the added time, effort, and expense related to a child's disability can place pressure on family life. The authors emphasis that families, in order to gain the benefits of literacy activities, may need support and resources to allow reading routines to develop. They also highlight that reading from books should not be prioritised, but instead be seen alongside other activities, such as telling stories which are easier to fit into daily schedules.

Dual language reading

- 2.48 There is a strong body of evidence on the positive role that dual language books can have on emergent literacy, motivation, and family involvement in children's schooling. From research in a kindergarten setting, Naqvi et al (2012) concluded that dual language texts can provide a "comfort zone" to minority language children, allowing them to participate in literacy activities and appreciate the context of the story; provide an opportunity for children to be a part of one large grouping, rather than natural language-based groupings and allow majority language children to come into contact with other languages.
- 2.49 Ma (2008) has explored the role of dual language texts in shared reading between parents and children. In bilingual families where parents are not literate in English, the research showed the ways that dual language storybooks can provide an opportunity for parents to participate more effectively in children's literacy learning, both in English and in the heritage language. Parents can provide 'scaffolding' to their child's learning, both enhancing understandings of the English text and heritage language. At the same time there was evidence that sharing dual language texts supported the development of the parents' literacy in English.
- 2.50 A Bookstart evaluation (Spratt et al, 2009) in Glasgow also investigated the impact of the Bookstart initiative on a sample of families with English as an additional language. Key findings were that parents appreciated the books as a gift, however, had diverse views on the usefulness of dual language texts. Some families prioritised books in their own language, or storytelling, as a means of preserving cultural and linguistic traditions. Others felt that dual language texts were helpful to parents with little knowledge of English. Parents also identified a need to be supported in the way

they used language with their children, suggesting that dual language bags should be accompanied by advice about language development in bilingual families.

Concluding thoughts

- 2.51 Overall, the evidence shows very strong messages about the value of book sharing (related to children's outcomes), quality and affective context. The importance of reading *quality* as well as frequency is consistently asserted, relating to factors such as responsiveness, sharing of control, non-immediate talk and dialogic reading practice. Chapter five of this report elaborates parents' experiences of gifting and book sharing with their children. Programme evaluations seem strongly skewed towards the gifting and book sharing side of the Bookbug programme, shedding less light upon the value of reading, rhyme and song sessions outside of the home. Chapter six shows the contribution of this evaluation, in this regard. The literature emphasises that book sharing programmes take place in socioeconomic and cultural contexts, and that they contribute to wider provision for family literacies. Chapter seven sets out from this understanding.

3 Background and policy context

Key Points

- Central to Bookbug's ethos or values are concepts of: a literary and literate society; connectivity (with other policies and services); universalism; Scottish identity; and a rounded understanding of the benefits of the programme, including attachment and love of books as well as literacy and attainment.
- The Bookbug programme shows impressive scale and reach. It is influential at the local level with a co-ordinator in each local authority and Bookbug Sessions and Bookbug Bag gifting taking place across the country. Over the last decade, programme outputs have risen sharply.
- A review of relevant, social policy shows a highly complementary fit between the Bookbug programme and the context for early years and child development support in Scotland. Both the Bookbug programme and the early years policy area have come to reflect current research evidence on children's brain development and the significance of attachment.
- Narratives in current policy thinking, such as the case for early intervention and closing the gap in attainment, correspond well with Bookbug's approach of providing free, universal services while reaching out to those in greater need with targeted support.
- Bookbug has a clear and extremely positive relationship with practice in various service areas and can readily be positioned by thinkers and practitioners within their own schema for service development and/or other areas of their practice.
- The impact of the programme may be negatively influenced by wider forces such as: cuts to services; the relationship between practitioners' responsibilities and the time available to them; and complexities in local distribution chains for Bookbug Bags.

Introduction

- 3.1 In this chapter we provide a descriptive overview of the Bookbug programme, its current operations, staff views on programme aims and objectives and programme outputs. The second part looks critically at Bookbug's connection to current policy and legislation.

Programme aims and delivery

- 3.2 Scottish Book Trust believes that books and reading have the power to change lives, stating that they “work with partners throughout the country to inspire, support and challenge the people of Scotland to fulfil their potential as readers and writers and celebrate reading in all its forms”.
- 3.3 The aim of the Bookbug, Scottish Book Trust's Early Years programme, is for all children in Scotland to enjoy the benefits of sharing books and rhymes with their parents. It aspires to give *all children* the opportunity to explore their emotions, ideas, issues and experiences through books, helping them to become more empathetic individuals and responsible citizens.
- 3.4 It was established, in its current form, in June 2010, following the rebranding of the Bookstart programme which had operated in Scotland since 2000. The change to Bookbug resulted in a new mascot character and the renaming of 'Bookstart Rhymetime' to 'Bookbug Sessions'.
- 3.5 The 2016 programme objectives are articulated as follows:
- To increase how often children are read to, talked to, sung to and cuddled
 - For parents to read to, talk to, sing to and cuddle their children more
 - To support practitioners to deliver the key Bookbug messages
 - To influence decision-makers to integrate Bookbug into early years practice

Staffing and strategic organisation

- 3.6 Core funding for the Bookbug programme comes from the Scottish Government's Children and Families Directorate, Education Scotland and Creative Scotland (Youth Music Initiative). Scottish Book Trust has a dedicated early years team that co-ordinates the distribution of the bags, as well as delivering training for professionals gifting the bags (such as health visitors, nursery staff and teachers) and those running Bookbug Sessions in community settings. The Head of the Early Years Programme oversees three teams: Operations, Development and Outreach. A network of trainers is employed on a consultancy basis to deliver the extensive training programme (see Table 3.3 for training outputs).
- 3.7 The programme is delivered locally by libraries, nurseries, health visiting services, schools, social work services, as well as early years practitioners working in the third sector and local authority settings. National partners include the Scottish Government, NHS Health Scotland, Education Scotland, Creative Scotland, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Gaelic Books Scotland, Dolly Parton Imagination Library, the Youth

Music Initiative, CALL Scotland and the Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC).

3.8 Scottish Book Trust has established partnership agreements with each Scottish local authority which set out their commitment to managing and delivering the Bookbug programme, as well as the support offered by Scottish Book Trust to make that delivery effective. At a local authority level, Scottish Book Trust support the following groups:

- **Bookbug Co-ordinator Regional Meetings** are held across five 'regions'. These meetings provide a forum to discuss the practicalities of running a local Bookbug programme. They include opportunities to share best practice and ask for advice or support from other Bookbug Co-ordinators or the Scottish Book Trust Early Years team.
- **Local Outreach Steering Groups (or equivalent local strategic groups)** operate at a local authority level to support the delivery of the Bookbug outreach programme and determine local training needs.
- **Shared practice events** (for all practitioners who use Bookbug e.g. lead Bookbug Sessions; are using Bookbug for the Home or gift the Bookbug bags) are designed to share practitioner learning and ideas, provide programme updates, give networking opportunities and include a practical element.

3.9 At national level Scottish Book Trust support the following groups:

- **National Bookbug Co-ordinator Steering Group** provides regular feedback about how the programme is delivered locally to Scottish Book Trust. The group meets 3 to 4 times a year and membership changes approximately every 18 months.
- **Libraries Early Years Strategy Group** provides a forum for discussion and consultation between Scottish Book Trust and Libraries about implementation of the Scottish Reading Strategy and about the strategic development of the Bookbug programme.

3.10 The Bookbug programme is co-ordinated locally in each authority by a named member of staff, the Bookbug Co-ordinator, employed by the local authority or cultural trust. In all but three local authorities this member of staff sits within library services. The co-ordinator is responsible for overseeing Bookbug Bag gifting to families and the co-ordination of Bookbug Sessions – usually as part of a wider remit. This involves managing bag deliveries and distribution, recording onwards distribution and stock monitoring, the local promotion of Bookbug and organising events (such as Bookbug Week), and encouraging colleagues and partners to take part in Scottish Book Trust training.

3.11 Scottish Book Trust recommends that local areas have some form of group to ensure that partners are updated on, and committed, to the programme. The structure and membership of such groups varies according to the needs of the local area. For example, several authorities include the Bookbug programme within existing strategic groups, typically early years. Others have formed an independent Bookbug group, or have adapted the Local Outreach Steering Group to incorporate wider programme updates and planning. As noted above, Scottish Book Trust is also supporting local authorities to establish, and sustain, Regional Meetings (north, west-south, west-north, east and central) which provide co-

ordinators with an opportunity to discuss emerging issues, and showcase good practice. Scottish Book Trust have also supported Local Shared Practice events, which bring together multiagency staff who have a shared interest in promoting Bookbug within their areas of work.

Logistics and local area co-ordination

- 3.12 The logistics of preparing the contents of the bags through to distributing them to local authorities is a lengthy process, and begins over a year in advance. Scottish Book Trust hold various meetings with publishers and publishers submit books for consideration. A shortlist of books is produced (in 2017 a total of 90 books) and shared with a Bookbug panel. The panel is composed to reflect a range of settings and geographies, so for example last year's panel included members from the University of Edinburgh, HMP Shotts, Scottish Government, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, NHS Health Scotland, Scottish Book Trust, West Lothian Council, Orkney Islands Council, Fife Cultural Trust, NSPCC, Douglas Nursery, NHS Tayside and Edinburgh Multicultural Family Base. Panel members are expected to share these books with colleagues and gather feedback from families. The books are then discussed, and a final selection made, at a full day meeting. Once agreed, bespoke versions of the books are printed for the Bags (including Scottish Book Trust's logo), and other non-printed items (such as crayons) are ordered by Scottish Book Trust. The average actual unit cost for Bookbug Bags is £3.07 each (compared to a guide retail value of £36.42).
- 3.13 Scottish Book Trust is responsible for distributing bags to each local authority. Normally deliveries are made on a quarterly basis, although some larger authorities have deliveries on a monthly basis. There is no standard distribution process, making this a logistical challenge. Eight NHS Boards, covering 13 local authority areas, distribute Bookbug Bags centrally. In other areas, Bookbug Bags are sent to the Bookbug Co-ordinator or central library service, who then oversee onward distribution to health centres, nurseries and early years settings and schools. Onwards distribution is complex: in some locations, Bookbug Bags can move to one or more locations after leaving the NHS distribution centre, resulting in delays in deliveries. Pressures on staffing and resources can also have a negative impact. For example, in one location the library can no longer fund onward distribution to health centres, therefore placing the onus on health visitors to collect bags themselves. While Scottish Book Trust does not have control over onward distribution, it aims to support local authorities in these processes, and help resolve gaps in the distribution chain.
- 3.14 The number of bags allocated to each local authority is calculated using the birth rate, with about six per cent added on. Leftover Bookbug Bags are also factored into calculations, and local authorities are asked to do a stock take at the end of each year. Local authorities, led by the Bookbug Co-ordinator, are responsible for providing quarterly Bookbug Bag monitoring statistics (this includes records of onward delivers to libraries, early years settings and health services). Data on the number of Bookbug Sessions delivered is also requested, including the number of Gaelic Bookbug Sessions, sessions in deprived areas (as classified by local co-

ordinator), and a breakdown of attendees by adult and child. Staff commented that co-ordinators are normally responsible for statistical monitoring but that posts are often stretched which makes data collection challenging. Local co-ordinators also noted that onward distribution, for example to nurseries and individual health visitors, is difficult to monitor. The core statistics collected by Scottish Book Trust focus on outputs (i.e. number of sessions delivered, number of bags gifted), not impact.

Programme outputs

- 3.15 The gifting of bags and delivery of sessions involve an impressive investment from professionals and organisations across all 32 local authorities in Scotland. Bags are primarily gifted by professionals working within Health Visiting Services, Libraries and Early Years settings, although others (such as the Third Sector) may have some involvement in gifting. Only one local authority in Scotland involves the registrar in gifting the initial Baby Bag. The majority of Bookbug Sessions are run by staff in local libraries, although many third sector organisations deliver Bookbug Sessions as part of the outreach programme (either as part of their existing family support groups or one-to-one family support). Bookbug Sessions are also increasingly taking place in community venues, typically nurseries and community groups, parent and toddler sessions and shopping centres.
- 3.16 Tables 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate the growth in the programme. In collaboration with its diverse partners, in 2016-17 the programme gifted approximately 180,000 bags across Scotland, and delivered 23670 Bookbug Sessions (attended by 318,277 adults and 369,024 children). It also supported the local delivery of Bookbug Week and Bookbug’s Library Challenge.

Table 3.1: Breakdown of Annual Programme Figures: Bookbug Bags distributed

Year	Baby	Toddler	Explorer	Total
2007/8	52,229	50,000	53,000	155,229
2008/9	57,800	54,880	57,755	170,435
2009/10	54,597	52,521	55,607	162,725
2010/11	62,330	59,860	62,730	184,920
2011/12	56,520	53,490	60,860	170,870
2012/13	66,260	63,730	68,010	198,000
2013/14	57,270	54,870	65,190	177,330
2014/15	58,500	56,660	65,520	180,680
2015/16	57,500	60,650	56,852	175,002
2016/17	58,015	59,630	60,400	178,045

Source: Scottish Book Trust

Table 3.2: Breakdown of Annual Programme Figures: Bookbug Sessions

Year	No. of Sessions	No. of attendances (adult and child)	No. of sessions in deprived areas	No. attendances in deprived areas	No. of Gaelic Sessions	No. of attendances at Gaelic Sessions
2007/8	1,187	15,128	-	-	-	-
2008/9	1,924	57,084	-	-	-	-
2009/10	8,504	215,571	-	-	-	-
2010/11	12,608	331,588	-	-	-	-
2011/12	14,385	399,671	4,894	140,727	-	-
2012/13	18,578	537,799	5,874	172,391	111	1,827
2013/14	19,884	551,706	5,467	167,321	188	3,139
2014/15	23,242	586,416	4,854	133,470	341	5,096
2015/16	22,634	643,672	7,332	203,262	462	5,723
2016/17	23,670	687,251	7,547	210,775	533	7,617
Cumulative total	146,616	2,694,963	35,968	1,027,946	1,635	23,402

Source: Scottish Book Trust

- 3.17 As noted earlier, a key development has been the introduction of the Outreach Programme in 2012 in all 32 local authorities. The recent evaluation of the Outreach programme found that over 14,000 vulnerable families had experienced the 'Bookbug for the Home' during the first four years of delivery, and that over 3,000 early years professionals had been trained².
- 3.18 Scottish Book Trust aims to continue the success of the Outreach Programme, giving particular attention to improving access to fathers and male carers, looked after children and their families, families affected by imprisonment, children with additional support needs and families with English as an additional language.
- 3.19 At a strategic level, the Early Years Team also undertakes national fundraising, advocacy work, and champions models of good practice in local Bookbug programmes nationally. Key recent activities have included acting as a key strategic partner in the Year of the Dad campaign; supporting Starcatchers Arts from the Start campaign; developing strong links between Read Write Count and the Bookbug Programme; and actively participating in the Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative. Funding has been granted to develop other strands of the programme e.g. YMI for developing musical elements of the programme, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library for Looked After Children in Scotland and most recently funding from Scottish Government's Digital participation team to develop a digital strand for Bookbug.

² More information about the evaluation of the outreach programme is available at: http://www.scottishbooktrust.com/files/bookbug_for_the_home_exec_summary_4_pages_3mb.pdf

Training

- 3.20 At the foundation of Bookbug is Scottish Book Trust's extensive training programme. This is offered – at no cost - to professionals across Scotland, with the aim of enabling them to gift Bookbug Bags effectively; run high quality public Bookbug Sessions; and confidently run targeted one-to-one Bookbug for the Home sessions with families where extra support is needed. Scottish Book Trust also provides 'Train the Trainer' training which enables locally delivered, peer training. This was initially run in 2013 and is being renewed to improve sustainability of the programme and to ensure skills are up-to-date. New, or recently developed training, includes the development of courses for practitioners who care for two-year-olds (community childminders and nurseries with looked after two-year-olds) and the roll-out of Bookbug training courses for students studying professional qualifications (child care, health visiting, midwifery, social care).
- 3.21 Ongoing development of the training programme has focused on introducing Bookbug to students, via the colleges and universities training midwives, health visitors and childcare professionals. Scottish Book Trust began piloting this work in 2015. Accessing this new workforce is critical for embedding Bookbug into working practices of the range of professionals groups who, when qualified, will have a role in delivering the Bookbug programme. However, there are challenges in delivering this element of the training. There are multiple study routes that individuals can follow to enter their chosen profession, and diversity in the ways that courses are taught (a childcare student, for example, could be completing courses at SVQ, HNC/D or PDA level, and each college has its own course, curriculum and modules). Moreover, since Scottish Book Trust is not gaining access at specific points in the curriculum, students may be at different stages of their learning. This, in turn, impacts on how they engage and the relevance they attach to Bookbug. Scottish Book Trust staff involved in training noted that engaging with trainee students can be challenging, and lack of confidence was a particular issue where Bookbug training was taking place early in their curriculum, or for younger students who were beginning their studies.
- 3.22 In the absence of a standard 'curriculum' which Bookbug can be part of, Scottish Book Trust currently arranges training directly with individual colleges, and adapts training to fit it into their curriculum at the appropriate stage. The training provided changes depending on the type of course, but generally involves a two-hour session provided as part of their regular teaching time. While staff felt this was working well, the sheer number of training providers and complexity of delivery means that more work is required to support a consistent, quality offering to early years students across Scotland. This is particularly important given new policies around the growth and skills of the early years workforce.
- 3.23 While there are challenges, Scottish Book Trust are successfully delivering a growing programme of training (see chapter seven for experiential evidence on training). In 2016/17, the Early Years Team delivered a total of 198 courses, attended by 3,543, across Scotland. As Table 3.3 shows, the volume of training

has grown significantly in the last several years, with both the number of training sessions and trainees increasing by over 3000%.

Table 3.3: Breakdown of Annual Programme Figures: Training delivered

Year	Number of training sessions	Number of trainees
2010/11	6	114
2011/12	17	245
2012/13	50	858
2013/14	159	2,235
2014/15	136	2,157
2015/16	146	2,106
2016/17	198	3,543

Source: Scottish Book Trust

Table 3.4: Breakdown of Annual Training Figures by type: 2016/17

Type of training	Number of training sessions	Number of trainees	% trainees by type
Bringing Picture Books to Life (formerly Story Time)	50	412	12%
Pirate	21	0	-
Pirate Plus	0	0	-
Explorer	0	469	13%
Bookbug Session Leader	33	567	16%
Health Visitor Awareness	39	0	-
Student Health Visitor	0	175	5%
Childcare Students	7	1,201	34%
Childminder	42	0	-
Music and Early Literacy	0	76	2%
Total	198	3,543	100%

Source: Scottish Book Trust

Note: Training for Pirate Bags was replaced with Explorer Bags during the year

The fit between Bookbug and national policy and legislation

- 3.24 In evaluating a programme it is important to understand the extent to which it supports or challenges wider national policy and legislation. Overall, a review of the key policy documents shows a complementary fit between the Bookbug programme and the context for early years and child development support in Scotland. In particular, we can see that the Bookbug programme and the early years policy area reflect current research evidence on children’s brain development and the significance of attachment. Narratives in current policy thinking – such as the case for early investment, nurturing attachment and closing the attainment gap – all correspond well to the contribution that Bookbug is seeking to make.

Overarching policy for children's services

- 3.25 Bookbug has a crucial role to play in supporting children's rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Specifically, Bookbug Bags and Bookbug Sessions have a role in encouraging the production and dissemination of children's books, as stated in Article 17. More generally the universalism of Bookbug supports Article 31 and equal access to arts and cultural life.
- 3.26 The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act introduced in 2014 offers wide-ranging legislation, embedding Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) principles and a belief in the primacy of the early years. Though some links might be sketched between Bookbug principles and all eight of the GIRFEC wellbeing indicators, 'achieving' and 'nurtured' are amongst the most relevant, linking to two key narratives: that by promoting sharing of books, song and rhyme, Bookbug contributes to children's speech, language and early literacy; and that this time together provides opportunities for physical closeness and bonding, while Bookbug Session leaders model behaviours such as using touch and eye contact during song and rhyme sessions.
- 3.27 In 2009, the Scottish Government and COSLA published the Early Years Framework. The following, drawn from the Framework's 10 elements for transformational change, are particularly relevant to the Bookbug programme:
- Helping families and communities secure outcomes for themselves
 - Breaking cycles of poverty, inequality and poor outcomes in and through the early years
 - A focus on engagement and empowerment of children, families and communities
 - Using the power of universal services to promote prevention and early intervention
- 3.28 The first and third of these relate to gifting and sessions, which provide families with resources, understanding and skills development. The second relates to the free and universal nature of Bookbug services and to targeted initiatives such as Bookbug for the Home and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library for Looked After Children. The concept of a wider 'Bookbug community' is relevant to the mobilisation of the fourth element, where Bookbug contributes to the work of practitioners working within universal services. Training provided through the Bookbug programme provides practitioners with highly practical tools to support parents in contributing to their children's early literacy.
- 3.29 The Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative (previously the Early Years Collaborative) is a multi-disciplinary coalition attempting to convert GIRFEC principles into action and adopting a prevention model. Areas of focus include attachment, child development and parenting skills. Bookbug principles are therefore in alignment and Bookbug gifting, Sessions and the Outreach Programme contribute in all three areas. The CYPIC 'stretch aims' set targets related to children meeting developmental milestones at 27-30 months and on starting primary school. Bookbug relates clearly to children's speech and language development in the two time frames, and through the modelling of behaviour in

Bookbug Sessions such as cuddling, singing, talking, reading and responding to the child, to wider developmental outcomes. The Outreach Programme has been shown to contribute in the areas of speech and language development and school readiness. Scottish Book Trust is one of the National Partnership which supports improvement work and sharing best practice at a national level. Bookbug has been identified along with other universal resources, such as play@home, as part of the key change package work around early literacy.

- 3.30 Bookbug relates closely to a number of the Scottish Government's National Outcomes that together form this Government's purpose. As a universal and free service, with an outreach dimension, Bookbug contributes to the focus in the national outcomes on tackling inequality ('We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society'). Bookbug and Scottish Book Trust also contribute to outcome, 'We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk', through its Outreach Programme and promotion of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library for Looked After Children. The Primary 1 bag contains three books by authors and illustrators living in Scotland, thus it promotes Scottish culture contributing to, 'We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity'.
- 3.31 Like the recent introduction of the Finnish 'baby box', Bookbug can be seen as an initiative which makes a statement about the kind of country Scotland wishes to be, both as a literary and a socially progressive society ('We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity'). Scottish Book Trust is actively working with Scottish Government to support the introduction of the Baby Boxes in Scotland and the pilot of this project included a Bookbug book and message about book sharing to be given pre-birth.
- 3.32 The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is also reflected in one of the national outcomes, along with the statement that 'Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed'. Bookbug clearly relates to the four capacities of CfE by encouraging reading practices at home from the earliest age (successful learners), and with this, encouraging children to explore their sense of self, emotions, ideas, issues and experiences through books (confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors).
- 3.33 The Scottish Government's Literacy Action Plan aims to raise literacy levels for all with a particular focus on tackling the impact of poverty and disadvantage, and Bookbug funding is specifically cited in its implementation. The Bookbug programme, including the Bookbug Library Challenge, relates to the Plan's aim to 'develop a strong reading culture in Scotland where reading is a valued activity from the earliest age'. Bookbug contributes to an ecology of support for early literacy, and through the Bookbug community brings together health visitors, library staff and early years practitioners in contributing to this specific area of work.
- 3.34 The publication of Scotland's first National Parenting Strategy in 2012 demonstrates awareness in public policy of the importance of supporting parents

to create better outcomes for children, with action points related to play, attachment, parenting support and parental involvement in education. Similarly, we see clear connections between the Play Strategy for Scotland and Bookbug principles, with their emphasis on the importance of modelling positive play experiences.

Policy influence and practice

- 3.35 The nature of the programme demands the cooperation and engagement of local partners. While there is a Bookbug Co-ordinator in each local authority area, practitioners in health, libraries and early years settings are required to position Bookbug within their own understanding of how they might meet national and local objectives for the early years. Here, we discuss each of the key sectors working in partnership with Bookbug, and the ways in which Bookbug complements their working practices.

In Health

- 3.36 Given their core role in gifting Baby Bags, the health visiting service is critical to the success of Bookbug. This inclusion of Bookbug as part of the everyday practice of the health visitor is acknowledged formally. Bookbug, for example, features in the Personal Child Health Record (the 'red book'), the national standard health and development record given to parents/carers at birth. Reading to your baby, and Bookbug, is also introduced by the health visiting service through 'Ready, Steady, Baby', and reinforced through Ready Steady Toddler, the NHS Health Scotland guide for expectant parents, and professionals.
- 3.37 The Universal Health Visiting Pathway has further embedded Bookbug into health visiting practices by including gifting of the Baby Bag. The Pathway is based on evidence that health visitors can have a positive impact on child and family health, but their effectiveness depends on practicing in particular ways. Home visits and face-to-face contact were identified as key routes to relationship building between families and health professionals, and improving outcomes. It was also noted that home visits provide the opportunity to deliver interventions aimed at improving vocabulary through instruction, such as dialogic reading and storybook reading (Woodman, 2016). The Pathway sets out a minimum standard of core home-visiting including eight home visits in the first year of life and three Child Health Reviews between 13 months and four to five years. It takes the following principles:
- To promote, support and safeguard children's wellbeing
 - A person-centred approach
 - To build strong relationships from pregnancy
 - A strengths-based approach
- 3.38 Bookbug complements this by offering a positive and practical starting point for work with families, including discussing the home learning environment. The recent adoption in Scotland of Finnish baby boxes echoes the idea that gifting can begin a positive relationship between families and health professionals, while

signifying commitment to early investment. Bookbug has been involved in early piloting of this new initiative by including a book and signposting parents to the programme.

- 3.39 Health visitors have always gifted Bookbug Bags but now receive more training input conveying key messages for families and showing where Bookbug can contribute to their practice. Training includes information and practical tips on how song and rhyme can aid attachment, for example by using skin-to-skin contact in actions.
- 3.40 The Scottish Government, in recent years, has invested in expanding health visiting services, recognising their role as a vital preventative service in the early years, and in delivering the 'Named Person' role (as outlined in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, health visitors will be responsible for children from 0-5). In 2014/15 the Scottish government invested £1.5 million in health visitor education and £2 million in creating 50 new posts, with funding for new posts rising in subsequent years. The consultation analysis report, 'A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland' (2017) again emphasises the valuable role of health visitors in supporting children in their 'early learner journey'.
- 3.41 Workforce expansion highlights further opportunities to embed the programme and its training. Nonetheless, UNISON reported (2016) significant shortages of health visitors in post, alongside increasing responsibilities. This poses risks in terms of how the Bookbug programme can sensitively complement an already stretched service.

In libraries

- 3.42 'Ambition and Opportunity, A Strategy for Public Libraries in Scotland 2015-2020' sets out the direction of travel for the service, asserting the role and relevance of public libraries in the digital age. This is oriented towards wellbeing, with activities and services becoming perhaps more important than borrowing. In this vision the library is a civic resource at the heart of the community. Bookbug is listed within the strategy as a key service.
- 3.43 Bookbug, and the training provided to those delivering sessions in libraries, contributes to the public libraries role as a civic resource. Local authorities and cultural trusts have reported that Bookbug Sessions demonstrably increase footfall within libraries, and provide opportunities for families to become aware of (and use) other library services. Bookbug can also present opportunities for new partnerships (with nurseries and schools for example) and facilitate links to wider services in the community. By providing a routine and space where young families come together, Bookbug Sessions make a contribution to positive social ties and networks (this is discussed further in chapter six).
- 3.44 The Scottish Reading Strategy relates to the library service's contribution to promoting literacy and Bookbug is a key part of this strategy. The strategy notes

Bookbug Sessions and gifting, Bookbug Week and Bookbug Library Challenge within its programme of activity and also carries a strong health and wellbeing focus.

- 3.45 Threats to public libraries, in turn, influence the effectiveness of Bookbug. Between 2010/11 and 15/16, local authority expenditure in Scotland was reduced by 11 per cent, with cuts being driven primarily by reductions in central government funding and also the council tax freeze (Hastings, Bailey, Bramley, Gannon and Watkins, 2015). Statutory services have been more protected so cultural services may be more exposed. 'Ambition and Opportunity' notes that at the time of publication, few libraries in Scotland had been closed since 2009/10, however 'small cuts' had taken effect, such as reduced opening hours, stock purchases and staff numbers. This, in turn, has prompted a rise in volunteer-led services, reduced staffing levels and co-located services. Together these factors may undermine service quality and initiate decline. The availability of Bookbug Sessions could clearly be impacted by these changes to library services, and more subtly the quality of sessions can be influenced by for example session leaders being unable to attend top-up training due to work pressures.

In early years settings and primary schools

- 3.46 Provision of early learning and childcare in Scotland is a rapidly changing area with significant challenges ahead, including the pledge to further extend free provision (to 1,140 hours) by 2020 for three and four-year-olds and disadvantaged two-year-olds, and current exploration of varying delivery models. Childcare in Scotland is a mixed and disparate economy, with services provided by public, private and not-for-profit sectors. Work environments, qualifications, recruitment, retention and staff progression routes diverge. Qualification routes for practitioners also vary, with training providers enjoying a degree of autonomy (see also section 3.20). An independent review of the early learning and childcare workforce published in 2015 highlighted concerns related to equity of access to high quality provision and a need for the advancement of the workforce. The complexity of the service area creates challenges in forming partnerships and initiating change. Through its programme of training for early years practitioners and childminders, the Scottish Book Trust can contribute to sharpening practice related to book sharing, parent-child interaction and literacy development.
- 3.47 Read, Write, Count, delivered by The Scottish Government, Education Scotland and Scottish Book Trust since 2016, targets children in primary one to three, encouraging families to make reading, writing and counting part of their daily activity at home. The programme comprises gifting of books, literacy and numeracy materials in school and outreach in some communities. Read, Write, Count extends Scottish Book Trust's programme of gifting to include primary two and three and also their partnership working with schools. By promoting home learning practices, Bookbug and Read, Write, Count contribute to what schools are trying to achieve with reference to for example early level outcomes for Literacy and English and Numeracy (CfE).

At home

- 3.48 By providing practical resources at home, the Bookbug Programme supports the Play Strategy for Scotland. The Bookbug Bags, combined with the information from the play@home programme, help to encourage and support parents in undertaking home learning activities. Bookbug can also support professionals, by providing the tools and resources to enable them to share messages about the importance of play with parents.

How staff view the programme

- 3.49 The final part of this chapter looks at how staff saw the programme, and their own role. Overall, we found that staff recognised the formal aims of the programme, and articulated strong and consistent messages about the role of the Early Years team. Notably, the Early Years Team emphasised the importance of recognising Bookbug not only as a literacy programme, but as an initiative which can produce “rounded” and “holistic” benefits, covering social and emotional relationships, well-being and happiness:

“The 360 degree benefits that come out of [Bookbug] aren’t all to do with literacy in itself, they’re actually to do with building bonds, attachments, happiness and shared experiences.” (staff member, interview)

- 3.50 While improving emergent literacy and attainment were deemed to be critical aspects of the programme, attachment, bonding and instilling a love of books were seen as the means of achieving this. Closely related was the commitment to the view that sharing books, songs and rhymes can help to close the attainment gap:

“We know from research that a love of reading and books is the most important thing, the greatest indicator of a child’s future success than anything else.” (staff member, interview)

- 3.51 Staff also talk extensively about Bookbug as an enabler or facilitator of “connections”, “relationships” and “communit(ies)”. As one staff member stated, “Bookbug is a connector”, acting as a “common language” between early years professionals:

“it’s really about having a group of professionals and parents and interested parties who are all speaking the same language and seeking the same aims.” (staff member, interview)

- 3.52 Connections also related to what Bookbug delivers on the ground. Bookbug was described as both a community in itself, and something that was part of existing communities. The programme was visualised as being at the centre of a triangle composed of family, nursery/school and public libraries. Bookbug mediates between these public and private domains, reinforcing the message about the benefits of sharing books, songs and rhymes:

“you’ve got all of these very rich areas of life and institutions that we’re really at the centre of because we’re providing quality resources” (staff member, interview)

Staff were also deeply committed to sustaining a universal programme, stating universalism as central to Bookbug’s ethos. Several staff described Bookbug as a “leveler” – a language that was reflected in professional interviews. Central to universalism is the aspiration that every child, within their family, gets the same experience of reading and singing, without stigma or punitive intervention:

“it’s seen as tangible, it’s friendly, we’re not stigmatising anybody” (staff member, interview)

“it doesn’t make them feel different to anyone else” (staff member, interview)

3.53 Staff were aware that universalism does not equate to equal access, and equal benefits. The role of the Outreach Programme, alongside the Bookbug Bags and Sessions was therefore deemed critical to targeting those in greatest need. Past evaluation of Bookbug for the Home is discussed at 2.38.

3.54 Finally, staff emphasised the importance of Bookbug being distinctly Scottish. Operating within Scotland, with its own identity, allowed the programme to have greater choice over the content of the bags, and include more Scottish authors and illustrators. It was also possible to address challenges and issues as they affected Scotland:

“finding Scottish solutions to Scottish problems, creating programmes that are appropriate and tailored to their milieu” (staff member, interview)

Concluding thoughts

3.55 In this chapter, we have elaborated the scale and reach of the Bookbug programme. We have also described some of the programme’s (growing) outputs. The qualities of Bookbug services will be explored in chapters five and six. We have explored Bookbug’s value base as expressed by Scottish Book Trust staff, relating to concepts such as a literary society, universalism, Scottish identity, and a rounded understanding of the benefits. A strong thread has been the concept of connectivity, with Bookbug making connections at the levels of policy, local/strategic level and practice. We have also described how thinkers and practitioners within the relevant service areas may position Bookbug relative to their own priorities for service development and/or other aspects of their practice. This discussion of connectivity frames chapter seven of this report and is central to our contribution analysis.

4 Family reading and singing practices

Key findings

- Reading frequency was found to correspond with children's age, with: 50% of the Baby sample; 80% of the Toddler sample; and 90% of the Explorer sample reading at least once a day.
- Closer examination of the 18% of parents who said they did not read with their babies at the point of gifting revealed relationships with age, social deprivation and English as an additional language.
- The bedtime story was an important part of daily routine in many families, with more variation in the time and location of reading with younger children. Some parents noted a shift in responsibility for reading as children grow, away from parental involvement and towards early years provision.
- Shared reading was felt to have different functions (becoming part of a repertoire of parenting skills), but was often used by parents to signal quiet time, with parents using language such as 'focused', 'attentive' or 'peace' when talking about reading together. Some parent accounts show their responsiveness to children's interests and wishes. Parents frequently referred to reading with their babies and young children as 'special time' together, for relaxation, closeness and attention. Parents found great rewards in children's responses to and learning from books.
- Two-parent households tended to report that both parents shared interest and involvement in reading and singing.
- Well over 80% of families with babies or toddlers reported singing at least once a day, and singing was found to be more common practice than reading from birth. In contrast with reading, singing declines in frequency with age, so 71% of the Explorer sample sang daily compared with 84% of babies.
- The survey data indicate a relationship between age and library membership, with younger children and younger parents being less likely to have joined. 53% of recipients of an Explorer Bag with a parent aged 30 or younger was a library member prior to gifting, compared to 73% and 72% respectively, with parents aged 31 to 40 or 41 and over.
- In families that do borrow library books, it creates excitement around books, giving the child a key role in book selection and bringing fresh literature into the home.
- Barriers to reading and singing at home include: time pressures on parents; for a minority of parents, negativity surrounding books and experiences or perceptions of libraries; and negative emotions prompted by their children's responses to reading, in particular feeling unable to hold the child's attention through the whole book.

Introduction

- 4.1 As highlighted in Chapter 2, home literacy activity in the early years has been associated with a range of positive outcomes in literacy, language and cognitive development, and children's motivations towards reading. However, the social, economic and cultural dimensions of family life, such as parents' own childhood experiences, family structures, working patterns, financial resources, and neighbourhood, have the potential to influence attitudes and behaviours relating to sharing stories and rhymes, singing and visiting the library. An appreciation of the context of families' everyday lives, and their attitudes to reading and singing, is crucial to understanding whether and how Bookbug activities achieve their intended impact.
- 4.2 In this chapter we draw on data collected from the parent surveys, telephone interviews and case studies to present an analysis of family reading and singing practices. Families' reported reading and singing in everyday life may have been shaped by receiving Bookbug Bags and attending Bookbug Sessions and we have highlighted instances where families themselves have made a connection between the Bookbug programme and their everyday practices.

Reading practices

- 4.3 The parent and carer survey asked respondents about their reading and singing practices *before* receiving their Bookbug Bag. It should be borne in mind that some of those receiving the Baby Bag already had children, and therefore previous Bookbug Bags. Similarly, those receiving Toddler and Explorer Bags would have received the earlier bags. Other initiatives, such as Every Child a Library Member, may also have impacted on membership numbers (see Scottish Library and Information Council 2016 for information about the ECALM pilot).
- 4.4 As shown in Table 4.1, approximately 50% of the Baby sample, 80% of the Toddler sample and 90% of the Explorer sample reported reading either once, or several times, a day. Reading frequency is thus highest for older children, with daily reading being a routine activity for the majority of families receiving the Explorer Bag. For the Toddler to Explorer age range, this suggests that there may be a need for finer grain questions, or questions focusing on quality rather than frequency of book sharing, to yield useful evaluative data in future. It also hints at the possibility of a 'ceiling effect' discussed in Chapter 2, when evaluating book gifting programmes at population level.
- 4.5 Overall, very few parents reported that they did not read, although this was notably higher in the Baby sample. Around a fifth (18%) stated that they did not read with their baby at the point of being gifted the bag, while a further 10% read only rarely or occasionally. This variation may relate to the age of the baby on receipt.

Table 4.1: How often did you read to your child before getting the Bookbug Bag?

	Baby	Toddler	Explorer	All
Several times a day	20%	54%	48%	40%
Once a day	31%	29%	41%	34%
A few times a week	21%	11%	8%	13%
Occasionally	9%	3%	2%	5%
Rarely	1%	0%	0%	0%
Did not read	18%	3%	1%	8%
Total no.	1,549	1,233	1,605	4,387

Source: Parent and carer survey

4.6 We looked further at the 18% of parents and carers who did not read with their baby at the point when they received their bag. A relationship by age, indices of multiple deprivation and English as an additional language was identified, although given the limitations of the survey it is not possible to state the statistical significance of this finding. No comparison by gender or disability was possible due to the sample size:

- 21% of those under 30 stated they had never read to their baby compared to 16% of those over 30.
- 29% of those in the most deprived decile reported, compared to 18% of those in the most affluent.
- 22% of those for whom English is an additional language reported having not read to their baby, compared to 17% for whom English is their first language.

When, where and why do parents read with their children?

4.7 We explored with parents and carers the time and location of reading. The most commonly mentioned reading time was, unsurprisingly, bedtime. In both case studies and the telephone interviews, the 'bedtime story' was frequently discussed as part of the daily routine, with the primary objective being to settle the child and prepare them for sleep. For many children, it had become an essential part of their bedtime routine, and something that they actively sought from their parents:

"my daughter won't sleep if she doesn't get a story...it's definitely something that's got to be done, which can be a pain if we're running late" (parent, telephone interview)

"even if he's really tired he'll say 'can I just get one story then?'" (parent, telephone interview)

4.8 More variation in the time and location of family reading practices was noted amongst younger children, a consequence of babies spending more time in the care of their parents, rather than in early years provision. Many parents identified specific points throughout the day when they read to their babies, such as bath time, the changing table, cuddling on sofa or bedtime.

4.9 As noted, most parents of older children in the sample reported reading on a daily basis and generally, it was rare for reading not to happen. However, parents did

report that planned reading might be postponed if their child was tired, unwell or disinterested. Reading was also talked about as having different functions, for example, when children needed to be distracted or to be soothed. Parents, especially those with babies, talked about taking books out with them as a tool for calming children in public spaces, such as cafes or long journeys, although tablets and mobile phones were also mentioned in this context. Books were often felt to signal “quiet time”, being using in association with words such as “focused”, “attentive” or “peace”. Similarly, books themselves were characterised as having the ability to perform different functions:

“To do that [settle child] it is mostly about reading a book, singing a song and just being silly with that. They need to interact with you and you need to do it for them” (parent, case study).

“she has books that she really likes that we use more in the day, and then there’s a couple of books that we keep for night time” (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.10 Others spoke of reading happening at a time when children were receptive to it. For example, one parent spoke about choosing to read with her baby in the morning, because that tended to be the time when her baby was ‘alert and calm’. Others emphasised the importance of the child choosing to read, with some suggesting that it was important not to ‘force’ children to read or enjoy books. Several parents reported “baby-led reading”: this involved making books available and accessible within the home, and if their baby indicated that they wanted to look at a book (for example, by crawling over to it), then they would read with them:

“if he crawls to them and starts going through them then we would read them for him” (parent, telephone interview)

“It’s always after his bath and throughout the day it’s whenever he goes to his books, which is quite often, and then I let him do a little bit on his own and then I go over and read a bit to him” (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.11 Children’s agency was also apparent in other age groups, with most parents emphasising the child’s role in selecting which books to read, and expressing which they disliked. Parents were aware that children had favourite stories, which they often returned to again and again.

Who reads with the child?

- 4.12 In both the case studies and telephone interviews, two-adult households tended to report that parents shared an interest, and involvement, in reading and singing with their children. However, where fathers worked full-time, book sharing followed a gendered profile, with fathers often assuming responsibility for bedtime stories:

“coming home from work I get to spend an hour with him, yeah, that’s the whole bedtime routine thing” (father, telephone survey)

“occasionally [I read] weekday mornings but not really (father, telephone survey)

“bedtime stories, that is when he [father] gets involved. There is no other time for him” (parent, case study)

- 4.13 Grandparents were frequently cited as the members of the extended family most likely to read with children (and, as will be discussed in Chapter 6, in some families are responsible for taking children to Bookbug Sessions). Grandparents were often described as reading far more stories than parents themselves would; and on this basis were generally framed as being “soft”:

“Granny is a soft touch; when she’s here, I read them one story or two stories, and Granny will read them like 1200 stories” (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.14 What parents also noted was a shift in responsibility for reading as the child aged. As parents returned to work, time – as the parent above suggests – becomes squeezed. Early years provision takes an increased role in reading activities, while parental involvement in reading has to be fitted into busy lives:

“generally it’s at bedtime he gets his stories cos he’s at nursery until um the afternoon, and they do some reading with him at nursery. It’s generally mum and dad with him at night” (parent, case study)

“Me and my wife both work full time, so maybe the weekends if we have time, maybe an afternoon, Saturday afternoon if it’s raining outside and we’re indoors and you know we’ve had enough of television and having some down town, we might pick up a book, whereas during the day he’s either at nursery or with the childminder in the afternoon they will read to him though” (parent, telephone interview)

Singing practices

- 4.15 Although similar data was collected in relation to singing, there is no parallel data on who sings to the child. Notably, Table 4.2 shows that singing is a more common activity from birth, with very few parents and carers stating that they never sing. For families with babies and toddlers in particular, singing appears to be a common, routinised aspect of family life, with well over 80% reporting singing at least once a day. Showing an opposing trend to reading practices, singing tends to drop off as children grow. It is unclear why this is the case.

Table 4.2: How often did you sing to your child before getting the Bookbug Bag?

	Baby	Toddler	Explorer	All
Several times a day	74%	77%	57%	68%
Once a day	10%	11%	14%	12%
A few times a week	8%	10%	20%	13%
Occasionally	3%	2%	6%	4%
Rarely	0%	0%	0%	0%
Did not sing	5%	2%	4%	4%
Total	1,549	1,207	1,605	4,361

Source: Parent and carer survey

When and where do parents sing to their child?

- 4.16 It appears from the survey that singing is an everyday aspect of family life. Indeed, the parents interviewed frequently mentioned music as something that was present in their household, either through the radio, CDs, or made up songs:

"I sing all day long....mainly nursery rhymes or if I happen to have a song in my head that I'll like I'll just go ahead and sing that, or I'll try to make up a song" (parent, case study)

"when I'm in the kitchen making the dinner, I'll put him in the high chair and put something in the CD player and sing along most days" (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.17 Singing was described as purposive, being used as a form of stimulation to distract, calm or entertain a bored or upset child:

"If she is about to get upset [I sing] to stop a tantrum in its tracks or just to have fun" (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.18 However, it was more frequently discussed as a more 'active' or spontaneous act, often taking place whilst walking, or doing an activity. That said, several parents showed sensitivity to others' perceptions of singing in public, with some noting that it can be embarrassing, and that people can "look at you as if you are bonkers". Some families reported not singing because of a perceived lack of musical ability:

"songs and rhymes are not really a daily thing. We're not really very musical". (parent, telephone interview)

"probably my own lack of confidence in my own singing ability probably prohibits me from singing too many more rhymes" (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.19 Conversely, some families stated that singing was part of their family life because of their own love of music – whether they judged themselves good singers or not. A number of parents spoke about Scottish songs, in particular, ones which they would remember easily and sing most frequently.

- 4.20 Notably, rhymes were distinct from 'everyday' music. They were most commonly discussed as being part of family life when there was a baby in the household. Rhymes, in this context, were associated with actions (such as peekaboo, or the actions to 'Twinkle Twinkle'), and the reaction that they provoked in babies. Rhymes, overall, appeared to be used less frequently in households with older children:

"Not really [use rhymes], no...we used to, with our older daughter when she was young we would sing nursery rhymes and she would come back from nursery having learnt something and she would sing it....um, but uh less so. I wouldn't say we never do it, but ... I think it's maybe because our older daughter is less interested" (parent, telephone interview)

*“um no so much now, I did when he was little, but he does quite a lot of that at nursery”
(parent, telephone interview)*

4.21 Again, like reading, there was a clear transition from singing as an activity that parents did, to something that children chose to do. Singing, for older children especially, was also connected to specific projects or at nursery or special events (Christmas was mentioned the most). Although it was less common, some parents felt that they did not have time for singing:

“to be honest, he’s at nursery every day, we both work, and it’s just something that we don’t find a lot of time to do unfortunately” (parent, telephone interview)

Book ownership and library visits

4.22 Book ownership and habits in visiting the library provide an insight into family reading and singing practices. The parent and carer survey provided data on the proportion of parents and children who were already members of the library before getting their Bookbug Bag (note, the data apply to the parent responding and child who received the bag). Overall, 66% of parents and 45% of children were already library members prior to being gifted their Bookbug Bags. A further 9% of parents and 14% of children reported having joined the library since receiving their bag (although we cannot be clear whether there is a causal link). The parent and carer survey does not give data on borrowing practices or library use.

4.23 For parents, and especially children, levels of library membership increased significantly with age. At the point of being gifted their Explorer Bag, 70% of children were library members. Library membership does appear to have a relationship to age, with membership amongst parents aged under 30 being lower for parents and children for all types of bag.

Table 4.3: Whether parent was library member before getting Bookbug Bag, by age of parent

Age	Baby	Toddler	Explorer	All
under 30	53%	60%	64%	58%
31 – 40	60%	64%	78%	68%
over 41	58%	68%	78%	72%
All	58%	63%	75%	66%
Total no.	1,549	1,233	1,605	4,387

Source: Parent and carer survey

Table 4.4: Whether child was library member before getting Bookbug Bag, by age of parent

Age	Baby	Toddler	Explorer	All
under 30	15%	41%	53%	31%
31 – 40	20%	48%	73%	48%
over 41	20%	53%	72%	59%
All	18%	47%	70%	45%
Total no.	1,549	1,233	1,605	4,387

Source: Parent and carer survey

- 4.24 We looked at the same data for other variables. For children, we found some relationship between library membership and deprivation. For example, 39% of children living in the three most deprived deciles were reported as library members before getting their Bookbug Bag, compared to 49% of those in the three most affluent. However, this relationship was not observed in relation to parental membership.
- 4.25 In interviews, parents were asked about the number of books they had at home, and where they were from. The answers were incredibly varied, with some having only a few books, to some families having “hundreds and hundreds”. Books at home came from multiple sources: purchased by parents, as presents (especially at Christmas), handed down from friends or family or from car boot sales or charity shops.
- 4.26 Very few parents spoke about having books at home from the library. We spoke to several parents who were worried about their child damaging books borrowed from the library, citing this as the main reason for not borrowing. This is a real challenge for libraries that many services are aware of, and have reported to Scottish Book Trust:

“We tend not to get library books which is me worrying about her damaging them. I know that’s not an issue for the library but it is for me. I’d hate to take back a book damaged.” (parent, telephone interview)

“I haven’t actually taken any books out of the library yet, cos she’s still chewing a lot of books and I kind of feel that’s ok on our books, but I don’t want her to destroy the library books” (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.27 This concern about damage, however, was not restricted to library books. One parent emphasised the difficulties of living on a low income and could not justify the cost associated with purchasing books – this particular parent valued the free books provided by Bookbug:

“I’m no spending 4.99 for a book that gets all torn up” (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.28 Those parents and children who did borrow books talked about this experience. Where it was taking place, borrowing created a particular form of excitement around the books. It provided the child with agency in selection, and at the same time introduced new books into the home that otherwise the child would not have been exposed to:

“Oh he loves his books, we actually got him a library membership so he goes and picks out his own little books as well, so he really likes books...his favourite is actually ‘Where’s Wally?’” (parent, telephone interview)

“He does look at books every day and especially if it’s a new book from the library then, like if it’s got flaps inside then he’s fascinated with that” (parent, telephone interview)

Reading and singing with English as an additional language

- 4.29 Reading and singing had special significance in families with English as an additional language. In examples from both the case studies and interviews, parents described reading and singing as a fun way of practising English with their child. One parent, for example, spoke about her child ‘bringing’ songs in English home from the nursery, and sharing them together. The parent below discussed action songs as ‘breaking down language barriers’:

“she don’t really want to sing at the moment, because she don’t speak English, so I think it’s a little bit harder for her. But when we do songs with actions, she sometimes starts singing, so I think it’s helping her to break the barriers, the language barrier” (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.30 In some families reading and singing was used as a means of introducing a second language to a child. Thus, many families spoke about sharing books or rhymes in other languages and, as in the second quotation, how this was seen to have improved the child’s command of the language:

“he’ll...try...um, he’ll put on nursery rhymes for him in [father’s native language] and sing along with them... I [mum] have no idea what the nursery rhymes are” (parent, telephone interview)

“we would read to her and speak to her in French as much as we could, and so she now is quite proficient at spoken French, and that make a big difference” (parent, telephone interview)

Reading and singing with children with additional support needs

- 4.31 The data available on the experiences of children with additional support needs is very limited. However, amongst the parents we spoke to, reading and singing held the same importance as for any parent and child – they were a way of spending time with their child, supporting their emotional needs and having fun.
- 4.32 It was noted that books and songs can be especially important to children who are unable to communicate verbally, allowing parent-child connection. Parents also commented that singing, in particular, can help reduce challenging behaviour, becoming part of a parenting repertoire of skills and techniques:

“we’ve always been singing songs to him and erm, it is just something I think because he doesn’t communicate, if he gets angry and upset we just need to sort of focus on something else and by singing that takes his mind off what was bothering him, gets him out of his little temper or frustration really I suppose I should say” (parent, telephone interview)

The socioemotional context of book sharing

- 4.33 Overall, the data shows that parents equate making time to read with making time to be with their child. As such, parents frequently referred to reading with their

babies and children as a “special time” to be together, a space for relaxation, bonding, quiet time, closeness, physical contact and one-to-one attention:

“I generally enjoy it, it’s not something that I thought I would particularly enjoy [...] but it’s quite nice [...] to be able to do something that’s quite close and kinda...feel like you’re bonding, sitting touching each other and doing something together, as opposed to chasing each other about the kitchen” (parent, telephone interview)

“Oh I love it, cos he sits and we get cuddles in, so I love it, any chance to get a cuddle” (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.34 Notably, parents with older children commented that this aspect of sharing stories was especially important to themselves and their child. Time spent at nursery and demands from other children can make “special time” more difficult to find:

“I think he enjoys the time that you spend with him when you’re reading” (parent, telephone interview)

“I think it’s the fact that we sit and snuggle with the torch and we read, and she loves the fact that it’s the three of us together cos that’s ‘our family time’, she calls it, before bed” (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.35 Many parents reported that they valued reading and singing because they could see their child’s positive responses and enjoyment:

“yeah, I think it just chills him out, makes him happy, he likes it I think. It just makes him feel good inside as well, happy singing” (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.36 Parents of younger babies commented on their child’s short attention span, but generally felt that their babies enjoyed looking at books, touching flaps and textures, if only for brief periods. Parents of older babies often observed their child’s progression in engaging and interacting with books: by turning the pages, pointing to images, lifting flaps, pressing buttons, making animal noises, and eventually repeating words:

“he’s very engaged now when you’re reading to him...he’s either trying to mimic you making the noises if there’s animals in it, or he’s trying to turn pages...he does get a lot of enjoyment out of it now” (parent, telephone interview)

“he’s at the stage where he takes our finger and points out things in the book and we need to repeat what that is, so he’s sort of finding out about things, he’s interested in what things are” (parent, telephone interview)

“He’s interested, intrigued, he likes turning the pages at the moment [...]he’s just getting the hang of the fact that the books move and then there’s something else, but he’s also intrigued by bashing them, turning the pages and chewing on them” (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.37 Parents often commented that they enjoyed watching their child respond to and learn from books. For some, this enjoyment was enhanced by anticipation of future benefits (literacy, speech) from current reading. For others, the emphasis

was on the sheer enjoyment that the books themselves offered. As noted, parents talked about children selecting favourite stories that they liked to read repeatedly. When stories became very familiar, children tended to join in to repeat favourite lines. Some parents acknowledged that they personally found it tedious to have to endlessly re-read favourite stories for weeks at a time.

Perceptions of the value of reading and singing

4.38 Overall, parents were aware of the many benefits of reading and singing, and these are summarised in the table below. While several themes emerged in the data, it was clear that personal preferences influenced which ‘values’ individual families promoted, or emphasised as being important. Thus, parental values would be connected to whether they enjoyed music, Scottish folk songs, or specific types of books.

“I have a strong memory of reading as a child. I’m a true Bookbug and I have always wanted to pass that on, and share the love I have always got from books” (parent, case study)

4.39 Similarly, the value of reading would be discussed in relation to parental views on education, on play and children’s rights. For several parents, the motivation for reading to their children was precisely because they had not been read to as a child and wanted ‘better’ for their own children.

Table 4.4: Parental perceptions of the value of reading and singing

Reading
Development: social skills; hand-eye coordination; speech and language; learning alphabet; expanding vocabulary; word recognition
Stimulating imagination, creativity and free play
Bonding and time together – a ‘special’ way of interacting with one’s child
Linking books to real-world experience
School readiness – learning letters and numbers
Joy of reading
Transmission of normative values, reading as a “normal activity” that is part of everyday life
Calming activity

Singing
Soothing when upset, reducing tantrums or challenging behaviour
Calming, pre-sleep lullabies
Development: social skills; hand-eye coordination; language, learning alphabet, counting
Child’s increased confidence, creativity and imagination
Bonding and communication
It is fun, an enjoyable activity for baby and child
Songs can represent a ‘common language’ within families, communities and countries.

Source: combined qualitative data from telephone interviews and case studies

Barriers to reading and singing with children

Time-squeezed parents

- 4.40 There is evidence that changes in family structures and working patterns over time can influence family reading practices. Parents with more than one child frequently spoke about how they had been able to devote more time to reading with their first baby. Parents also cited work commitments as a factor that constrained their ability to read with their children (although many of these parents also pointed out that their children still shared books on a daily basis with their carers):

“um so what happens more often now than when we just had one kid is that they go to bed, they definitely don’t get a story every night, whereas when we only had one it was pretty much virtually every night she’d always get read to...” (parent, telephone interview)

“Well I started working part time and that’s probably the days when I don’t really see her, but my partner’s with her, or his mum or my mum, so I’ve given them a lot of books as well and I think they read to her a lot, so it may not be me but I think someone else is” (parent, telephone interview)

“I see the importance of reading to my children. But it just takes up too much time” (parent, case study).

- 4.41 Other parents stated very strongly that, even though there were increased pressures on their time due to work commitments, they were still strongly committed to ensuring that they shared books with their children whenever possible.

“we’re really determined that reading’s part of our everyday life, my wife’s an English teacher, I’m a social worker, you know, we believe thoroughly in education and we believe it’s pivotal to children’s futures and helping them to develop and understand and learn and move on, so yeah, we ensure it’s there, it’s part of their everyday routine, for both our children, and so it’s never going anywhere” (parent, telephone interview)

“you know I feel that if I can make an effort when he’s here, then I can make an effort with my other son when he’s home from school, then they’ve both had time. I feel guilty if one gets and the other doesn’t, you know.” (parent, telephone interview)

“it’s [bedtime story] that kind of close time for 10-15 minutes at night that you kinda get, especially for me as I’m working, I don’t get the kind of time with him that I did before” (parent, telephone interview)

- 4.42 For several families, finding time for shared reading was challenging, and feelings of guilt and regret were associated with failing to read as much as they would:

“family life gets busier and less structured when you have two kids, especially because my wife and I both work full time so, probably regretfully, we don’t read as much to our four-year-old as we did to her older sister when she was the same age” (parent, telephone interview)

Perceptions of books and libraries

4.43 For the majority of parents involved in the research, books and libraries were to some extent positively valued. However, for a minority of parents their relationship to reading and singing was more complex. Several parents, while being aware of the benefits of reading commented that they had not enjoyed reading as a child, and as adults rarely read. Amongst this group of parents, the local library was described as ‘not for them’; a place in which they had to control their own, and children’s behaviour. In one case study area parents reported separate experiences of being ‘told off’ by other library users. In other case study areas, interactions with particular staff members had resulted in parents being less keen to return. These stories – although small in number - were shared and added to parents’ reluctance to attend and perceptions about the library.

4.44 Several parents found that their own experiences with reading were impacting on their ability to engage in reading with their child. For these families, reading had become a source of stress. Parents talked about their own lack of confidence, particularly around ‘expressing’ themselves:

“I was always worried about reading out loud. I do read myself, and that is fine. The main issue was about reading aloud because I didn’t want anyone to hear me making a jumble of my words. I really struggled with that – I knew I spoke too fast as well. I didn’t want pass my mistakes onto my kids. I didn’t worry too much with short stories, but as my daughter got older she wanted to read longer stories and this worried me” (parent, case study)

4.45 There was also discussion which suggested that some parents felt that there was a ‘correct’ way of reading a book; that is from start to finish. An unsuccessfully read book can therefore be seen as a failure. This relates to parents’ perception and experience of how their child responded to shared reading, and whether they felt able to engage and sustain their child’s interest. This could relate to both inappropriate expectations of children, and some children being more difficult to engage:

“She [daughter] wasn’t interested in books, she got bored easily. There wasn’t any fun in it” (parent, case study)

“I’m just not keen on reading. My daughter is just not interested and she just throws books away or screams, or doesn’t pay attention” (parent, case study)

Concluding thoughts

4.46 These findings illustrate the wider social, economic and cultural context in which Bookbug operates and, in turn, how context is mediating its capacity for impact. Many of these issues, for instance work-life balance or family income, are not directly within Scottish Book Trust’s sphere of influence. However, Scottish Book Trust do have a wider objective to inspire a lifelong love of reading. Providing accessible resources, and working with practitioners to support *quality* book sharing which can fit into busy lives, are areas where Bookbug can make a contribution.

5 Views and experiences of gifting and receiving Bookbug Bags

Key findings

- Survey data provide evidence of strong involvement of all core sectors in gifting Bookbug Bags.
- 80% of practitioners responding felt that gifting took place at recommended ages 'all' or 'a great deal' of the time. However, parents and carers reported wide variation in when they and their children received the Baby Bag. Case studies intimate that this might be linked to health visitor perception of the family's needs and also personal opinion of when gifting should take place. Real time gifting schedules may not be in line with those recommended in the Universal Health Visiting Pathway.
- Non-receipt of bags affected a minority of families and was found to be related to: family mobility and engagement with services; service reorganisation and practitioner workload; and sector complexity, with nurseries being hardest to engage.
- The majority of practitioners across sectors were either not using or unaware of Scottish Book Trust gifting advice, with front-line practitioners being far less likely than those in strategic posts to know the gifting messages. However, when gifting, the majority of practitioners said they 'always' or 'usually' talk about the bag's purpose, take items out, talk about the benefits of singing and reading, and give information about Bookbug Sessions and joining the library. There were predictable, sectoral differences in which messages were included or prioritised.
- Professional and parent perceptions of the messages communicated during gifting diverged, with families reporting fewer messages (although the groups were not commenting on the same gifting experiences). Overall, just over a third of families reported receiving the bag with no other message. A shift in practice was observed, following the age of the child, so: one fifth of Baby Bag recipients; one third of Toddler Bag recipients; and almost half of Explorer Bag recipients were simply given the bag. Few parents in the telephone sample and case studies could recall a gifting message accompanying the Explorer Bag in particular, suggesting that the issues are sharpest here.
- Qualitative data show that where practitioners explore the bags together with parents, particularly the Baby Bag, this is meaningful and connecting practice. Some reduction in the messages communicated as the child grows was found to be consistent with parent expectations.

- Factors that limit good practice in gifting include: professional assumptions about families' needs; parental engagement, in nurseries in particular; resources and capacity.
- Effective gifting was connected to the qualities of the relationships between gifter and giftee and the transmission of the messages. Accordingly, experiences of gifting were framed by wider experiences of service provision and in particular, the relationships that families felt able to form with their health visitors.
- The high quality of Bookbug Bags, particularly of the books included, was recognised by parents and practitioners alike. The books were the most valued aspect of the Bags. Parent and practitioner testimonies confirmed the appeal of the books to young children, and children's delight in receiving them.
- Additional items were used less frequently. However, the height chart, calendar and finger puppets were reported as being used more often by families in the most deprived parts of Scotland, emphasising the important role Bookbug Bags have in tackling inequalities.
- Particularly for first-time parents, the Baby Bag introduced the idea that babies can enjoy books from birth. It also helped to inform them about appropriate literature for babies and the type of literature preferred by their individual child.
- For parents already committed to the value of reading with their children, the bags may have a more nuanced impact on behaviour, encouraging and reinforcing regular reading practices.
- It appears that the Explorer Bag may reinforce already established reading routines, as well as building cumulatively on the impacts of having received earlier bags, echoing the evaluation literature on repeated gifting.
- The Bookbug messages were seen by practitioners as complementary to their existing understandings and practices. Bookbug could function as a 'springboard' for communication with a family.

Introduction

- 5.1 This chapter explores parents' and carers' and practitioners' experiences of gifting and their responses to the Bookbug Bags, including changes in their thinking and behaviours. It considers responses from each part of the research: the survey of professionals; the survey and telephone interviews with parents and carers; and finally the case studies. We have presented the results thematically with the data sources being identified within the text.

The scope and timing of gifting

Who gifts Bookbug Bags?

- 5.2 Of the 627 professionals who responded to the survey, 529 (84%) reported being personally involved in gifting, or working for a gifting organisation. As well as evidencing the involvement of the core sectors in gifting (health, public libraries, early years education and childcare), the survey revealed the diversity of practitioners gifting bags; ranging from health visitors, librarians and nursery staff, through to specialist roles such as family nurses, support workers, nurture specialists, literacy and speech therapists, physiotherapists, arts officers, mobility workers, physiotherapists and play specialists.
- 5.3 Professionals across all the main sectors expressed high levels of involvement in gifting, although a slightly lower proportion (82%) of those from the nursery sector described themselves as having a gifting role. Around half of those in the 'other' and family support sectors were involved in gifting. This is due to the fact that this group consisted largely of practitioners supporting families to use the bags, but not formally gifting them.

Table 5.1: Proportion of professionals involved in gifting bags

Sector	Personally involved	Organisation involved	Total	Number in sector	% sector involved in gifting
Early Years	34	25	59	65	91%
Education & schools	35	18	53	59	90%
Family support	13	19	32	57	56%
Health	82	10	92	95	97%
Library	79	98	177	192	92%
Nursery	63	29	92	112	82%
Other	11	13	24	47	51%
All sectors	317	212	529	627	84%

Source: Professional survey

When are bags gifted?

- 5.4 Scottish Book Trust recommends that Bookbug Bags be gifted at specific points in a child's life, with the Baby Bag expected to be gifted from birth to 16 weeks; the Toddler Bag between the ages of one and two, and the Explorer Bag at age three.

5.5 The survey asked those involved in gifting the bags about the timing of gifting. For all three types of bag, the majority (80%) reported that gifting was taking place at the recommended age 'all' or a 'great deal' of the time. Sixteen per cent stated that gifting in this timeframe happens only 'some of the time', while a small minority (from three to six per cent) felt that this 'never' happened. This was similar for all three bags.

Table 5.2: How often does your organisation gift at the recommended times

	All of the time	Great deal of time	Some of the time	Never	Number
Baby Bag: birth to 16 weeks	46%	33%	15%	5%	203
Toddler Bag: between 1-2 years	41%	36%	17%	6%	215
Explorer Bag: at age 3	54%	28%	15%	3%	184
All bags	47%	33%	16%	5%	602

Source: Professional survey

5.6 Parents and carers were also asked about the timing of gifting. Parents and carers were asked at what age their child received the bag which they had received the survey in:

- Baby Bag: 77% reporting receiving the Bag from birth to 16 weeks as recommended by Scottish Book Trust. 11% received the bag when their baby was five months or over. Unfortunately, 13% provided no, or unreliable data.
- Toddler Bag: 72% of parents and carers reported receiving the bag when their child was between one and two years. A further 20% stated that their child was over two years, and 7% were under one-year-old. Only one per cent were missing answers.
- Explorer Bag: 78% of parents and carers reported receiving the bag when their child was three, 13% when they were over three and eight per cent when they were under three. One per cent were missing answers.

5.7 The qualitative research - both telephone interviews and case studies - found wide variation within the Baby sample group regarding their child's age when they received the Baby Bag, from a few days old to 8 months old. Parents with awareness of the Bookbug Programme prior to receiving their Baby Bag were more likely to comment on the timing of gifting. For example, one mother expressed frustration that she had not received her Baby Bag until her child was 5 months old. Another, who received her Bookbug Bag at 3 months, said:

"I was expecting it at the first session [with my Health Visitor] – I have numerous nieces and nephews so I knew all about it before I even had her, and yeah, I was expecting it at the first session and I felt it was quite late" (parent, telephone interview)

5.8 Greater consistency was reported in the gifting of Toddler and Explorer Bags. The majority of families in the Toddler sample group received their bags either at their child's 12-month developmental check or at an immunisation appointment at around 12 to 13 months. All of the parents in the three-year-old group said that their children had received their Bookbug Bag in a nursery setting. Although at this age parents were less likely to recall the precise timing, gifting was most

commonly associated with a nursery class, with children in the same cohort receiving their bags together.

Factors influencing timing

- 5.9 The case studies explored the factors influencing the timing of gifting. Reflecting national policy (see chapter two) health visitors were aware of the changes introduced by the Universal Health Visiting Pathway, which states that the Bookbug Baby Bag should be introduced and explained at three to five weeks of age, and again at three months. However, health visitors' own opinions varied. We heard repeated concerns about the volume of information exchanged with parents during initial family visits. In case study areas health visitors were aware that senior staff had been discussing the timing of gifting, which in turn had prompted debate amongst those working directly with families:

"We have been debating this, is six weeks is too early? Can families actually absorb that volume of information so early?" (health visitor, case study)

"We are currently giving out Baby Bags most frequently at the second visit, and we are still having debates over whether there is too much information given out at this stage." (health visitor, case study)

- 5.10 Other health visitors were committed to the benefits of sharing books, songs and rhythms as soon as possible, with some suggesting that gifting should be a component of antenatal care. This divergence appeared to contribute to differences in practice and the decision to allow health visitors to make their own decisions about the most appropriate time to gift:

"We have had that conversation but we it is generally felt best to leave the timing of gifting at the discretion of the health visitor." (health visitor, case study)

"Sometimes it happens at six weeks, sometimes at 16. We have been debating it, but really it just depends on the worker and what they decide." (health visitor, case study)

- 5.11 With the exception of one locality, where gifting was the responsibility of the library service, Toddler Bags were provided by health visiting services. Although the Universal Pathway suggests that the bag should be gifted at the 13 to 15-month home visit, many health visitors still spoke about gifting at the 12 to 13-month vaccination appointment. There was agreement across the sector that this was not ideal, due to pressures on time and anxieties associated with vaccinations:

"The Toddler Bags are given out at the 12-month appointment. It is a 15-minute appointment, and they are given four vaccinations in that time, which all needs to be explained. We will go through Bookbug is if there's time but its very time restricted. I don't think it is the best time to gift the bag; the parents are anxious; the child is often upset as well. And then the bag ends up being sometimes used to placate a child, but doesn't always work." (health visitor, case study)

Similarly, parents and carers who had received their bags at the immunisation appointment commented they were unable to give the bag their full consideration:

“my daughter had also just had her jabs and so the timing of that maybe wasn’t the best anyway, you know, giving it to you at the end of the session after she’s stabbed needles into your daughter’s leg” (parent, telephone interview)

- 5.12 Where areas had moved to gifting the Toddler Bag at the 13 to 15-month home visit, experiences were mixed. Several health visitors in different case study areas commented that the Universal Pathway should mean that they have more time to spend with families. However, lack of staff has made this difficult to take forward and resulted in home visits being prioritised for families judged most in need of support. In two localities, parents interviewed expressed frustration over the restructuring of health visiting services and the resultant closure of drop-in clinics. While there was no direct evidence that changes in service provision were resulting in families not receiving bags, parents felt they were preventing them from developing relationships with their health visitors, giving fewer opportunities to talk informally about their concerns.
- 5.13 One case study area showed a positive experience of having moved Toddler Bag gifting to the 13 to 15-month home visit. This had both increased the consistency of their service and given health visitors more time to go through the bag with parents in their home environment. Health visitors also commented that it felt easier to model using the contents of the bag when the toddler was more relaxed.

Non-receipt of bags

- 5.14 Non-receipt of bags affected a minority of families but was, nonetheless, a source of concern for practitioners delivering Bookbug. Some of the perceived reasons related to family circumstances (examples included a family moving home, and families who were not linked into local services), while others represented systemic issues, such as the route through which bags were delivered locally, reorganisation of health visiting services and the difficulties of providing support to all parts of the early years sector.
- 5.15 Some Bookbug Co-ordinators expressed concerns that practitioners were not distributing bags consistently. This comment often related to service reorganisation and increased practitioner workloads. A small number of nursery staff reported children in their care had not received Toddler Bags, something they felt may be a consequence of the termination of drop-in clinics and perceived inaccessibility of health visiting services:

“As we take children from zero to five I know of a lot of babies and toddlers who did not receive Bookbug Bags until the ones we give out age three” (nursery, case study)

“Health visitors are not gifting as much. I think some are just forgetting to order their bags” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, case study)

“The uptake of Toddler Bags is going down, we have noticed this for a while and are trying to find out why this is happening” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, case study)

“The caseload they have and the amount of visits they have to make in a day it’s no wonder they sometimes forget” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, case study)

- 5.16 Irregular gifting was most frequently cited in relation to nursery provision, with all case studies highlighting differing levels of engagement with Bookbug within the sector. This was reported to be a consequence of logistics and relationships. In several areas the onus was on nurseries to collect bags from the library. While this was thought to be suitable for nurseries located near a library, for those further afield developing a working relationship with the library and its staff was more difficult. Some also commented that nurseries or early years services run directly by the local authority had better knowledge of, and connections to, the Bookbug programme. The difficulties of providing support to all parts of the early years sector relates to its complexity and diversity, described previously (see also chapter three):

“There are definitely examples of private nurseries not getting their bags and so there are children missing out” (education, case study)

“In an ideal world the nursery should contact the library to collect the bags. We know it doesn’t always happen like this” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, case study)

“We do have a problem with uptake of Pirate [Explorer] bags by nurseries - we think some nurseries have not taken up the offer but we are working to address this” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, case study)

- 5.17 Case studies emphasised the importance of having sufficient resources to support consistent gifting practices in nurseries, but for all, the amount of time committed to outreach activities, such as visiting nurseries, was limited. Staffing levels, in particular, made outreach activity impossible for many libraries. This was particularly the case in rural areas or local authorities with dispersed geographical areas, or locations where the nursery estate was large:

“There is only one of me and there are 113 nurseries in the city” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, case study)

“I would love to be out there visiting nurseries and other groups, but someone would need to cover my post, and there isn’t anyone to do that” (librarian, case study)

Gifting practices

Professionals’ use of the gifting advice

- 5.18 Gifting advice is provided with Bookbug Bags. Designed for professionals, and adapted for each type of bag, it includes tips for effective gifting, the key messages and contact details for further information. Professionals in case studies who used the gifting advice were universally positive about its content. However, the survey revealed that a large proportion of practitioners are either unaware of the advice (56%), or do not use it (8%). Notably, the health visiting service, alongside family support workers, were the sectors with the lowest awareness of the advice.

Table 5.3: Use of gifting advice provided by Scottish Book Trust

Sector	Use	Don't use	Not aware	Number
Early Years	37%	8%	54%	59
Education & schools	31%	10%	60%	52
Family support	27%	9%	64%	33
Health	30%	5%	64%	92
Library	44%	5%	51%	174
Nursery	29%	13%	58%	93
Other	46%	8%	46%	24
All sectors	36%	8%	56%	527

Source: Professional survey

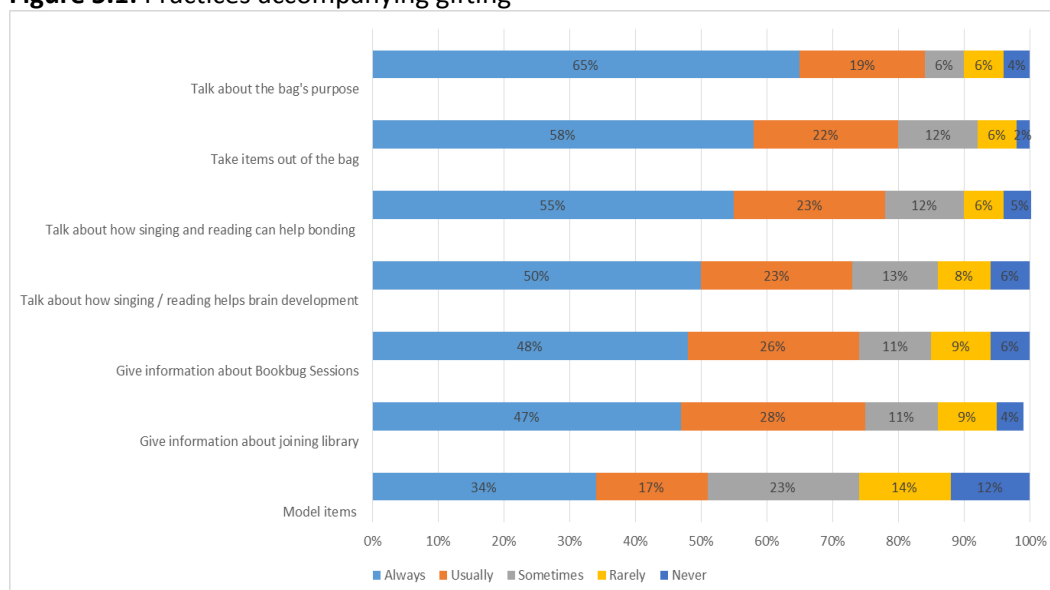
- 5.19 These findings also revealed variation in use of the gifting advice, with frontline workers being far more likely than those in strategic posts to report no knowledge of the gifting messages. Reasons given included lack of recent training (which discusses the gifting advice), as well distribution methods (where boxes are opened centrally, and bags are distributed to staff without advice included). Others we spoke to were aware of it, but had not managed to make use of it:

"I took that out and put it in a polypocket and thought, oh I must show that to [name] but that's as far as I got" (health visitor, case study)

Gifting practices reported by professionals

- 5.20 As shown in Figure 5.1 below, the majority of practitioners talk to families about the bag's purpose at the point of gifting and take out the contents (84% and 80% respectively did this usually or all of the time). Fewer practitioners reported doing more time consuming practices, such as talking to families about the benefits of singing and reading and modelling the bag contents (for example, by reading a story) always or usually. However, large numbers were still reporting that these activities were part of their everyday, routine practice. Most practitioners talk to families about joining their library, although around a quarter only do this sometimes, rarely or never.

Figure 5.1: Practices accompanying gifting



Source: Professional survey

5.21 The results varied by sector. Health visitors, for example, are the most likely to talk about the purpose of the bag (95% stated that they always do this, compared to only 37% of those in education and 44% of those in libraries). Taking the contents out of the bag was again something far more commonly done by health visitors (80% did it all the time, compared to less than half of nurseries and 38% of libraries). Modelling the bag was less common overall, although one case study area suggested that this was much more likely to happen if gifting occurred at a home visit. This implies that the Universal Health Visiting Pathway, if operating effectively, has the potential to increase more intensive gifting practices. Modelling the contents of the bag was almost universal for specialist workers involved in gifting (for example, family support workers or literacy workers) who responded to the survey.

5.22 Practitioners that did use the bag to model sharing books, songs and rhymes, and talk to families about the benefits of reading and singing, found this a useful approach:

"I like the books as these can be used immediately to engage with a child and their parent and demonstrate modelling; parents have enjoyed the books but also the Bookbug CD as they can put it in their car and listen to the songs/learn them" (health visitor, professional survey)

"I like them all. I empty out the bag in front of the parent/carer and talk about each item. They are all really useful resources" (health visitor, professional survey)

"The books - always well-chosen and [for professionals] are easy to demonstrate and encourage use. The CDs are excellent for jogging memories and for pointing out to parents who feel they don't know the songs" (early years, professional survey)

5.23 We see a similar breakdown of results in relation to conveying messages about bonding or brain development, with this practice being fairly common for health

visitors or those working more directly with families (support workers for instance). However, for those with less direct contact with parents and carers, such as nurseries and libraries, conveying these messages was far from being a regular practice. Libraries are a standby rather than main gifting point for Bags therefore it makes sense that library staff would have a lesser role in communicating Bookbug messages. The role of nurseries however is core in gifting Explorer Bags and communication surrounding gifting here could be optimised.

- 5.24 Not surprisingly, librarians were those most likely to talk to families about joining the library, with 85% stating they do this usually or all the time. Conversely, 27% of nursery staff, 17% of education staff and 16% of health visitors rarely or never discuss library membership at gifting.
- 5.25 There was also a minority of professionals who rarely or never provided families with information about Bookbug Sessions (15%). This was highest for education and nursery staff, although over a tenth of health visitors stated that they rarely or never provided information on Bookbug Sessions at the point of gifting. A minority mentioned that this information was included in the Bag but that they did not necessarily share it explicitly.
- 5.26 Those most likely to report gifting without any advice or information were nurseries. Over a tenth reported that they ‘always’ or ‘usually’ provide no information at gifting, while a further tenth stated they do this ‘some of the time’.

Gifting experiences reported by families

- 5.27 The parent and carer survey asked families about their experiences of gifting and the messages they received. Significantly, families heard fewer messages during gifting than the testimonies of practitioners would imply, although the samples were unrelated. As shown in Table 5.4, just over 40% of families reported that a practitioner had explained the purpose of the bag to them. Messages relating to bonding or brain development were less frequently remembered, with only a third reporting these. Just over a third of families reported being given the bag with no other message. These findings broadly correspond to the proportion of parents and carers within the case studies:

“the woman just gave it to us, she didn’t say anything, just handed it over. They were quite busy though, so it might have been lack of time” (parent, telephone interview)

“she [health visitor] didn’t even come in [to the house] – she just handed it to me” (parent, telephone interview)

“Nope! Nothing!! She just handed it to me and that was it. I didn’t think to ask” (parent, case study)

- 5.28 No parents in the telephone sample whose child had received the Explorer Bag could recall receiving any gifting messages: most reported that the bags had been left on their child’s peg or in their tray, or that they were handed out at nursery pick-up time. This was strikingly similar to the data from the case studies where

only a small number of parents could recall a gifting message accompanying the Explorer Bag. This is not to say that the nursery is not participating in gifting activities with children, but rather that parents and carers are not aware of the message being delivered (for example, where the Bags are gifted to the children, or where the gifting message is delivered to the adults collecting the child from nursery). Although memory may influence these responses, the quality of the gifting experience is likely to have an effect on recall.

- 5.29 Of significance in families' reports is the shift in practice as the child gets older (see Table 5.4). A fifth of Baby Bag recipients reported just being given the bag – this increased to over a third (35%) for the Toddler Bags, and almost half of the Explorer Bags. Similarly, information about Bookbug Sessions was conveyed to over half of those receiving Baby Bags, but only a third of Toddler Bags, and a tenth of Explorer Bags. In both the interviews and case studies, parents noted that the level of information they received reduced with second and subsequent children.

Table 5.4: Messages accompanying Bookbug Bags

Message	Baby	Toddler	Explorer	All
Purpose of the Bookbug Bag	58%	45%	21%	41%
Reading and singing helps you bond with your child	54%	35%	14%	34%
Reading and singing helps children's brain development	49%	31%	12%	31%
There are free Bookbug Sessions in your local area	52%	34%	12%	32%
No, they just gave me the bag	21%	35%	48%	35%
I wasn't the person who received the bag	1%	3%	21%	9%
Other	4%	6%	7%	6%
Total number	1,549	1,233	1,605	4,387

Source: Parent and carer survey

The significance of gifting practices

- 5.30 Parents were clear that the way that books are gifted matters. Data from both the telephone interviews and case studies showed that parents appreciate the time taken to explore the bag together and that being shown the contents can positively influence how it is subsequently used:

"I think seeing what was inside encouraged you to go in and get the things out of it. I think if you had been given a closed bag, with a new baby you might not have looked in the bag afterwards, it might have been put somewhere and kind of forgotten about" (parent, telephone interview)

"I used to play the baby Bookbug CD to her all the time, cos obviously when they are young they don't do much. I probably wouldn't have done it but he [her health visitor] just encouraged me and showed me each item in the bag and said 'oh just cuddle her and dance and move to the beat', and I'm glad I did it cos she loves music now" (parent, telephone interview)

- 5.31 Generally, parents viewed their health visitor as a trusted source of advice and information about child development and considered her the most appropriate person to gift the bags:

“I think that there’s something about it seeming more important if it’s a health visitor that’s handing it out [...] if you know you’re getting it from a health visitor then it’s a trusted source” (parent, telephone interview)

“if she says that it’s good for your baby then it must be. She is the person you see the most and I would think that she’s a good person [to gift the bags] because you trust her” (parent, telephone interview)

- 5.32 Despite a general sense of trust in health visitors, parents’ experiences of being given the Baby Bag varied widely. Some families reported poor relationships or limited opportunities for contact with their health visitor, which in turn impacted negatively on their enthusiasm for the Bookbug Bag. Some negative experiences were reported across all the case study areas, but were particularly common in the areas where health visiting services were being re-structured and drop-in clinics reduced. The quotations below show how influential the quality and consistency of a relationship are to knowledge exchange (we discuss literature in support of this point at 2.27):

“I wouldn’t listen to a thing she says. She hasn’t been helpful. In fact, if she told me to try something, I would more than likely not do it” (parent, case study)

“you can’t get hold of any of them. You need to phone this central number, but you have no idea who you are calling. There isn’t really any way of asking about wee issues, or dropping in for a chat” (parent, case study)

- 5.33 However, there was a strong sense amongst many families, especially those with babies, that they would have appreciated being given more information about Bookbug and the benefits of reading and singing:

“there wasn’t much information about it at all, it probably would have been good to have got a bit more information to be honest. I think when we got the [Baby] Bag originally it just sat there for a wee while cos we didn’t really know what to do” (parent, telephone interview)

“when I think about how much he enjoys it now, I kind of wish we had tried a bit harder, sooner maybe, so if we had extra encouragement when we got the bag....I guess when it’s your first one you’re not really sure how you should be doing things” (parent, telephone interview)

- 5.34 A further theme in the interviews and case studies was health visitors’ use of the Bookbug Bag to carry extra items, such as toothbrushes and toothpaste, sippy cups, the play@home book, vouchers and information about healthy eating. Subsequently, it was these additional items that were sometimes highlighted by health visitors and parents, rather than the actual Bookbug items themselves. This, at times, led to confusion amongst parents, many of whom were unsure as to what was from Bookbug and what was not. This also explains why some families

interviewed accepted a Bookbug Bag from their health visitor and a second from their local library.

- 5.35 Whilst there is a risk that adding extra items to Bookbug Bags may dilute the core messages about reading and singing that Scottish Book Trust seeks to convey, this was not a concern widely held amongst parents. On the contrary, parents tended to express the view that, as everything in the Bag was for the benefit of their children, the source of the contents did not matter. What was critical to the positive transmission of the message was the approach taken by the practitioner and the quality of the relationship. This is expressed well by one parent who, after receiving two bags, contrasted her gifting experiences:

“She [health visitor] handed it over and said that there was a cup [...] it wasn’t really kind of taking the stuff out and telling me about it” (parent, telephone interview)

“it’s the same girl [in the library] that does the sessions and she’s just really enthusiastic about it [...] when she brought the bag down she opened it up and she showed me the books and the CD and the wall chart and here’s everything, and we run the Bookbug Sessions, and she went and got the sheets and said here’s the time, do you want to book your daughter in?” (parent, telephone interview)

- 5.36 While a quality relationship was connected to effective gifting, gifting was also a practice that facilitated the formation of relationships between families and practitioners.

Factors that limit gifting

Assumptions on need

- 5.37 Interviews with professionals in the case studies suggested several reasons for variations in gifting practices. First, as indicated above, is that some practitioners perceive the gifting message as being most important within the first year. By the second and third bags, it might be assumed that the family has already received the message and that it does not need to be repeated, that other issues (for instance behaviour, eating or sleeping) take precedence, or that the family has a second child (and therefore is getting the message for the new baby). Second, some practitioners reported targeting the time they had available to delivering the gifting message to those families thought to be most in need of it:

“People who are delighted with the Bookbug Bag already have lots of books would be reading a lot of books anyway and health visitors don’t have concerns about them anyway. For families that I am concerned about, I would use the bag as a springboard for talking about brain development and building bonding and attachment” (health visitor, case study)

- 5.38 Such comments reflected evidence from several parents and carers in the case studies who felt that health visitors made judgements on what information to share based on assumptions about their family, their home, their employment and existing activities:

"I think she assumed that I already knew about it [Bookbug message] because I work with kids, but it was a complete surprise" (parent, telephone interview)

"I've had one child through that nursery already so I suspect they would have expected us to have known what Bookbug was all about...the Pirate [Explorer] Bag just appeared with the pile of coats and lunch bags that came back from the nursery" (parent, telephone interview)

"I mentioned I went to Bookbug Sessions. After that I think she assumed that she didn't need to tell me anything. Thinking back, I shouldn't have mentioned that I went" (parent, case study)

Parental engagement

- 5.39 Variations in the nursery sector were closely related to their ability to involve and engage parents. Several discussed efforts to involve parents in sessions. Examples included bedtime story corners (where parents were encouraged to 'borrow' books to take home from nursery for bedtime reading); actively inviting parents to attend Bookbug Sessions (something which was more common in Council run provision) and special events involving Bookbug which parents were invited to. One area had run a very successful parental involvement in literacy class. This was for parents only (childcare was provided) and was designed to support parents to engage in reading at home. These initiatives had varying success, and it was often commented that it was not attracting those families who might benefit most. With ongoing activities (such as the bedtime story borrowing) it was common for participation to dwindle over time, emphasising the importance of refreshing activities regularly. Examples were given of Bookbug Sessions where children were upset since their parents were unable to attend:

"I find it difficult to engage parents in Bookbug at nursery. Often some children have parents who attend while others do not which can cause upset amongst the children. Often parents are unable to attend due to work commitments" (professional survey)

"The parents who come in [to Bookbug activities] are the ones who are already reading to their children" (nursery, case study)

- 5.40 The relationship between the nursery and parent or carer is also important. Nurseries fulfil many different roles, one of which is as childcare for working parents. Practitioners within nurseries commented that parents often pick children up from nursery after a long day at work, and they only wish to receive key feedback on how their child has been. In terms of Bookbug Bags, this meant that parents were more likely to pick up their bags and leave. It was also noted that the adult collecting the child may be a grandparent or family friend, and therefore may not transmit any gifting message.
- 5.41 Others also commented on the way in which parents and carers perceive the role of the nursery: while the health visitor's job is to support the whole family, the main role of a nursery is to support the child. This resulted in some nurseries describing parental attendance and engagement in Bookbug events as challenging. Many parents, it was commented, would attend nursery activities, but see their

role as supporting their child. Relatively few parents, it was suggested, see the nursery as having a role in supporting childcare practices in the home.

Resources and capacity

5.42 While the Bookbug Bags were enjoyed and recognised as an important part of their role, a minority of professionals nonetheless felt that their ability to explain and go through the Bag was constrained by a lack of time and resources. Around 42% agreed that they were constrained by their other duties, 38% agreed that they were constrained by pressures on parental time, and a fifth felt constrained by a lack of interest from parents and carers (Table 5.5).

Table 5.5: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total number
Constrained by other duties	15%	28%	16%	29%	12%	295
Constrained by parental time pressures	8%	30%	23%	31%	9%	294
Constrained by lack of parental / carer interest	4%	17%	27%	38%	14%	293

Source: Professional survey

5.43 Lack of resources was a theme frequently mentioned within the case studies:

“It is often difficult to continue to support and ensure quality standards of gifting as just one person, more resources or support to carry out role would benefit the initiative” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, survey)

“The bags fit in very well, but time is so short that they have no time to really tell parents about the value of reading with children, or even to go into the bag to show parents the items inside” (health visitor, case study).

5.44 A lack of capacity may result in practitioners making choices about when to prioritise gifting practices (as discussed above). Throughout the study, we found examples of assumptions being made about families, and the extent to which the message was necessary. For example, some practitioners suggested that certain types of parents (for example, those who already have lots of books, or those working in the early years sector) might enjoy the bag, but may not need to be shown the bag, or have the contents modelled. Others, emphasising time pressures, focused gifting practices on those families considered more vulnerable:

“As a health visitor, I don’t have enough time to focus on those people who do really need the service” (health visitor, case study)

“Health visitors are so [...] busy and I can totally understand that if they think a family is already doing ok then they will just give them the bags and be done with it” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, case study)

Interestingly, we found that our presence prompted some professionals to reflect on the Bookbug programme and how they could use it. Similarly, nursery practitioners in one case study area discussed how they had not thought about how their gifting practice until they had been to a training course and been asked the question:

“I am guessing from the questions asked that I need to know more about the Bookbug programme and what its aims actually are!” (nursery, professional survey)

“I normally just give the bags over: Even this brief discussion that we’ve been having this morning has been giving me a whole new look on it” (health visitor, case study)

“I didn’t know that there are other items in the bags, such as calendars/height charts” (health visitor, case study)

“I have made an assumption that it’s best just to give the bag as a gift, but I’ve realised that I’m not going into the purpose of the bag. On reflection, I think it would be better to explain to parents why I’m doing it” (health visitor, case study)

Responses to the bags

Families’ responses

- 5.45 Responses to the bags were overwhelmingly positive, with the key theme from both practitioners and parents being quality. Parents regarded them as a free gift, and on the whole, something they were grateful to receive. Parents interviewed in the case studies commented that the quality of the Bags made them more likely to use them. The quality implied that they were an important gift. Several parents also spoke about the bags making them feel valued and respected as parents:

“They’re such lovely books and I mean they’re proper books, you know they’re from authors that you would have bought books from if you see what I mean, they’re not just freebie things, which is really nice” (parent, telephone interview)

“Every book that we’ve had I’ve just thought it’s been great to have. The books are just so, they look like expensive books to buy and I just think that’s great, obviously a government thing that’s been...I think it’s great for all the children to get that. There’s maybe a lot of children who are not given books and I don’t know, maybe parents can’t afford to buy them, so I don’t know, but to get that as a starter for your child, I think that’s great.” (parent, telephone interview)

“You feel like you are respected, that people are thinking about you properly, not trying to get you to spend money” (parent, telephone interview)

- 5.46 Specific comments made in relation to the bag contents are summarised below:

- **Books** were the most popular component of the bags.
- The **calendar** was used infrequently, although several family support workers commented that the prompts were useful for supporting families, and returning to the Bookbug message regularly. A key theme was that the calendar was gifted too late to make best use of it.

- The **CDs** were most commonly used in the family car (this often being the only place families had a CD player). Some parents commented that access via the internet or as an MP3 would encourage greater use.
- The **crayons and scribble** pad were the most popular item in the Toddler Bags (aside from books).
- The **height chart** was the one item that was least used by parents.

5.47 As shown in Table 5.6, almost all parents, regardless of type of bag, looked through the bag contents. The proportion of parents reading the books with their child is also fairly high for all types of bag. There was little variation when analysed by parental age or the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

5.48 While overall use of certain items was low, more detailed analysis by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation shows important differences across families in Scotland. For example, height charts were used by 46% of families in the most deprived areas, compared to 22% in the most affluent. Similar differences were noted for the calendar (37% use in most deprived, compared to 23% in most affluent) and finger puppets (54% use in most deprived areas, compared to 40% in most affluent). It is important to re-state that the data collected from parents is not representative. Nonetheless, the evidence points to the importance of thinking about Bookbug Bag contents beyond the books, particularly in relation to the significance of additional items as a tool for tackling inequalities.

Table 5.6: Reactions to the Bag

Reactions	Baby	Toddler	Explorer
Looked through the content on own/with child	94%	94%	93%
Gave the books to my child to look at on his/her own	42%	82%	69%
Read the books with child	83%	92%	88%
Sang a song or rhyme from the CD with child	44%	61%	35%
Put up the calendar	28%	-	-
Used the buggy book with child	52%	-	-
Used the finger puppets with child	41%	-	-
Used the drawing pad with child	-	62%	
Put up the height chart	-	29%	
Listened to the CD with child	-	-	44%
Haven't done any of the above yet, but planning to	7%	3%	4%

Source: Parent and carer survey

5.49 There is a notable difference in the reaction to the Toddler Bag, with parents with toddlers being most likely to give the books to their child to look at independently, read the books or sing a song from the CD. This was explored further in the interviews and case studies. Relative to the children's developmental stage, one of the key differences identified in parents' accounts of the Explorer Bag was a focus on their *child's* reaction, rather than their own. These accounts described children's excitement about receiving the bag, and children's perception of the bag as a gift to them. Children, as such, were seen as having a sense of ownership over the bag, and parents felt that this was very positive:

“it’s something that’s theirs as well, you now, it’s theirs to keep so they look after it [...] you know, to be careful with them and not tear books and things” (parent, telephone interview)

“She’s been enjoying it because it’s like a gift for her, she’s been quite excited about that” (parent, telephone interview)

- 5.50 Several parents described the way that their children had taken an active role in exploring and using the contents of the bag; for example, by taking everything out:

“It was him that opened it up and rummaged through, he gave me the booklets and the crayons and said ‘mummy you hold that’, while he automatically flicked through every single book he was given, cos I think there were three books in it.” (parent, telephone interview)

“Everything got torn out of it and all the books had to get read instantaneously one after the other” (parent, telephone interview)

- 5.51 According to parents, the bags themselves proved popular with children; they were used for library visits, items to take to nursery and storing toys:

“She used just about everything in it and she still uses her bag to go to the library” (parent, telephone interview)

“The wee canvas bag, it’s so handy, I use those when we’re travelling or whatever” (parent, telephone interview)

- 5.52 Most parents in the Explorer interview sample group expressed favourable reactions to all of the items in the bag; a frequent comment was that everything in the bag was used. Books were the most popular part of the bags, with the book selection being valued. Confirming the appeal of the books to children, many parents reported that the books they received were more popular than others they had at home, and the majority reported that they had integrated the books from the bags into the bedtime story routine. For many children, the stories from Bookbug became favourites and were frequently requested, even several months later:

“Lost and Found, he loves that, we’ve read that to him loads of times” (parent, telephone interview)

“well he reads all the books and he goes back to the books, especially the little book, he can do that almost himself. Yeah, he reads his books all the time” (parent, telephone interview)

“The one thing that stood out was the owl book [...] it’s been one of the favourite books ever, such a good pick [...] we’ve read it non-stop since we had it” (parent, telephone interview)

Professionals' responses

- 5.53 82% of professionals strongly agreed and 17% agreed that the bags were of good quality. Particular emphasis was given to the quality of the book selection, which was variously described as age appropriate, insightful, easy to read and enjoyable.
- 5.54 Positive comments were frequently made in relation to the buggy books, crayons in the Toddler Bag, the CD, calendar, the information leaflets and the bag itself. The CD, in particular, was seen as being of high quality and a means through which to link the bags with the sessions. Notably, a minority of professionals emphasised that the calendar was especially beneficial, a view that contrasts somewhat with those of parents. Overall, there were few negative comments about the content of the bag
- 5.55 Professionals' comments about the bag were largely shaped by their experience of how families react to the bag. Professionals universally agreed that families respond positively to the bag. In parallel with parent responses, a particular comment was in relation to children's reaction to the bags, with several describing the way a child's face 'lights up' on receiving their gift from Bookbug. The combination of the quality of the bags and the positive reaction of families resulted in professionals describing Bookbug Bags as a resource of which they were proud, and motivated to gift.

"The FANTASTIC selection of books. Wonderful to be able to give these books out and to demonstrate for parents how babies' eyes pop out of their heads when you hold a gorgeous colourful book for them to see" (professional survey)

"Children love to open the bags up to see what's in it. It gives some kids the chance of a brand new book" (professional survey)

"For children it is always exciting to read a new book and doubly exciting to take the book home" (professional survey)

"The toddlers' faces light up when they see themselves in the mirror and they enjoy the peek a boo type books" (professional survey)

"They are so well received, the children and parents love them" (professional survey)

"Children have a real sense of ownership & delight at having a book of their own" (professional survey)

"The Scottish Book Trust have done a brilliantly good job of creating something which is quality product. I can be sure that when we are gifting a bag that we are giving something really good" (librarian, case study)

The effect of bags on parents

Reading

- 5.56 Particularly for first time parents, the Bookbug Baby Bag introduced the idea that babies have the capacity to enjoy books from birth. The books provided in the bag

and the suggestions offered on the calendar provided parents with useful information about the types of books that are suitable for young babies, as well as introducing them to new authors. So, for many parents within the Baby sample group, the Bookbug Baby Bag had a tangible impact upon their attitudes and knowledge:

“A lot of the things I may not have thought of doing...I would never have thought about getting wee books, because I would have thought “well she can’t read”, so I would say it’s a great benefit to myself and to her” (parent, case study)

“I don’t think I would have known what kind of books to buy for a newborn, I don’t think I would have thought of buying something like that but when we got given the books I was more sort of inclined to use them, you know...reading at an early age is still relevant, kind of thing” (parent, telephone interview)

“I am pretty sure that the free books is what makes me read now. I wouldn’t be reading to my kids if it wasn’t for these books” (parent, case study)

5.57 Several parents reported reading and singing regularly with their babies at an earlier stage than they would otherwise have done. Parents also talked about buying new books for their babies after witnessing how much their babies had enjoyed the Bookbug books and making decisions about the books that they buy based on their observations about the books that their child preferred.

“I definitely do think that it’s made a difference, it’s made me make sure I set, you know, 10 to 15 minutes aside every day, to do that [reading] with him” (parent, telephone interview)

“if the books are out with her other toys she makes a beeline for the books, so that’s encouraged us to get more board books, and the sort of style of books she likes as well, the peekaboo ones, so we went and bought the other peekaboo books because she really likes lifting up the flaps” (parent, telephone interview)

“I think because it gives different types of books, you can see what kind of books your baby likes, and then kind of build on their interests. And it kind of gets you into the routine of bringing books into the baby’s daily routine” (parent, telephone interview)

5.58 In this example the parent concerned talks about the very real ways in which the Bag, combined with positive modelling from her health visitor, prompted real behaviour change.

Interviewer: “I’m just wondering whether you feel that getting that Bag has made any difference to what you do with your son, in terms of reading and singing?”

Parent: “It has, yeah, I think it has in a way [...] it’s maybe just taking just a wee bit more detail to his books that he’s looking at, speaking about them more and he makes up songs now about his stories and things now, so it does help. I can still remember doing some book-based animal thing and we got to jump around doing lions and bears and things...you do get some good wee tips that you wouldnae have really thought of yourself [...] I think the way that a book can lead onto something else is really good”

- 5.59 There is also evidence in the interview data that, for some parents, the Explorer Bag had an influence on the way in which they read with their children. Parents talked about spending more time reading with their children, talking about the story and the pictures, and making up games based on the stories they were reading.
- 5.60 Many parents stated that they placed a high value on reading before receiving the Bookbug Bag. For these parents, however, the Bookbug bag served as a prompt, or a reminder, nudging parents to engage in reading and singing with their babies at an earlier age:

“I would have thought “oh, she’s too young”, so it prompted me to think “oh well if they’re giving it to me, she can’t be too young...These things are good to remind you to do it...like in theory I should know what I’m doing because this is number two, but getting books does make you think ‘oh yeah, I should actually be reading to her and not just to her sister’” (parent, telephone interview)

“I knew that children liked books, but not at such a very young age, so I wasn’t going to introduce it for another two or three months, so introducing it from a very young age, that’s one of the best reasons I guess, for the bag” (parent, telephone interview)

“I did use a rhyme book before six months, but that was the only thing I done in terms of books, I wasn’t until I got the Bookbug bag that I started other books and other things” (parent, telephone interview)

Rhymes and songs

- 5.61 The CD in the Bookbug Baby Bag can also be considered to have a positive impact on parental knowledge and skills. Whilst not all parents had used the CD, those that had tended to express the view that it helped them to learn new songs and rhymes, or had at least jogged their memories about songs they had known as children. As with reading, some parents spoke about how they had not previously known that singing and music could be enjoyed by babies, nor understood its significance for child development and bonding. They felt that receiving the CD had been valuable in raising their awareness of the importance of singing to their babies, as well as equipping them with the skills to do so:

“I think the biggest impact was on my husband, he wasn’t much of a singer, I think just having the CD and cos I’m singing to her a lot more and he sees the response I get from it, he then does it a lot more [...] he does bath time and I’ll hear him singing to her” (parent, telephone interview)

“The CD, I thought “oh I don’t know if I’ll put that on, but I actually have...it just wasnae something that I had ever thought about, being new to it all [...] it’s quite good, quite entertaining when you’re singing away to a new baby” (parent, telephone interview)

“we sing a song from the CD now every morning when she is getting dressed. It’s like a wee part of her routine, we jump around like loons and it’s just fun” (parent, case study)

- 5.62 There is little data from the evaluation on the experiences of gifting to families where English is an additional language. However, in both the case studies and

telephone interviews, the parents responding were keen to emphasise that the books and CDs were useful for their own language development. This is also a theme highlighted in relation to singing and rhymes learnt from using the CD:

“The CD is really nice because you know, I’m Polish so I don’t really know all the rhymes in English” (parent, telephone interview)

Reinforcement

- 5.63 All of the parents in the Explorer sample group talked about having well-established reading routines with their children by the time they received their Explorer Bags. This is consistent with the Explorer survey data, which indicates that 88% of respondents read to their children at least once a day before receiving the bag. Whilst none of the parents regarded the Explorer bag as having prompted them to begin reading with their children, around three quarters of the parents felt the bag had some kind of influence on their attitudes and behaviour. Most frequently, as with the Toddler sample, parents said that receiving the bag was a useful reminder of the importance of reading to their child, and that it helped to reinforce existing reading behaviour. Three parents commented that receiving books in the Explorer bag reinforced the value of reading physical books, as opposed to screen-based reading.

“I would say that it continued to stimulate the reading that we were doing with our daughter, it just opened us up, cos we weren’t you know, confident, and you don’t know exactly what kind of books you should be reading with your children” (parent, telephone interview)

“I would say the impact would be just to reinforce reading as an activity at home, and it has prompted me to do more reading [...] it sort of reinforced a feeling that we were on the right track with the amount of reading that we were doing, and it encouraged us to do a bit more of that” (parent, telephone interview)

“When you get them [Bookbug Bag] it does kind of jog your memory to think ‘oh yeah, better start reading some books now, now he’s at that stage’, so it’s a good kind of reminder as a parent to start doing all these different stages” (parent, telephone interview)

Cumulative effect

- 5.64 Parents in the Toddler and Explorer interview samples often reflected on their previous experiences of receiving a Bookbug Bag, and their comments indicate that book gifting may have a cumulative impact over time. Whilst parents of three and four-year-olds may not necessarily have felt that the Explorer bag had a particularly significant impact upon their current experiences of book sharing and singing with their children, some of these parents did make connections between their current experiences and receiving the Baby and Toddler bags. These connections ranged from the perceived impact that book sharing had had upon bonding and attachment, to links parents made between their child’s current enthusiasm for books and their early introduction to books through the Bookbug Baby Bag.

“I still really remember that book with the mirror and how much we done that together, and how happy she was reading that, so to me that’s like really happy memories, and I think to her it must have been some happy times for her as well, so yeah, I think they’ve helped to facilitate some happy times together.” (parent, telephone interview)

“it’s something that I’ve done ever since she was wee, cos I’m a keen reader, so obviously that’s part of the bedtime routine, so I wouldnae say that it [Explorer bag] made loads of difference, but I would say it was just a continuation of what we had previously been doing since we received our very first Bookbug bag [...] it’s hard for me to gauge the impact of it, but she has a full bookshelf now, so it’s something that she’s grown up being very used to reading and I think her literacy skills for her age are, you know, she’s on track, really good, confident wee reader” (parent, telephone interview)

Interviewer: I’m just wondering whether you think that getting that pirate [explorer] bag has made any difference to what you do in terms of reading and singing with her, or not?

Parent: Um, not necessarily that one, because obviously I’ve had experience with Bookbug, and I would say that definitely being given the first bag had a big influence on how we were with [daughter], because from basically about 3 months we started reading to her before she went to bed (parent, telephone interview)

Effect of bags on children

Enjoyment and learning

- 5.65 Like professionals, parents and carers were keen to comment on how much their children enjoyed the books gifted to them. Almost all the families we spoke to in case studies were able to tell us about a favourite book, and more often than not, families’ noted that the Bookbug books were the ones that children enjoyed the most, and returned to again and again:

“I was never read to but the health visitor explained it all to me. And I can see how much she loves it now. The Bookbug books were the best, the ones we keep going back to” (parent, case study)

- 5.66 Several parents talked about how much their children had enjoyed drawing and writing in the activity book. Whilst the focus of these comments was primarily on the children’s reaction to the activity book, the fact that children were using it is an implicit indication of its contribution to early writing skills. Similarly, many of the parents made reference to how much they enjoyed the CD, through which their children would have learned new songs and been exposed to a range of musical styles.
- 5.67 Parents repeatedly commented on how their children had learned new language and developed their skills as a result of reading and enjoying reading. It is, however, impossible to quantify how much of that learning was as a direct result of the Bookbug programme, especially as many of these parents suggested that they would have read with their child, had they not received the bags. Bookbug’s input is therefore mediated by the whole body of parental effort in supporting

literacy. A few parents commented on how their children had learnt particular words through reading the Bookbug books:

“she learned all the animal noises...she knew what a lion would say, and she would go, get the book and bring it over to me and make me read it to her four or five times a day at least” (parent, telephone interview)

“Wow said the owl” is memorable because that seems to have become our son’s favourite book and he doesn’t say much still, but he can say “wow” [...] every night he points to the books and says “wow, wow” (parent, telephone interview)

5.68 There are a range of ways in which the contents of the Explorer Bag can be understood to contribute to child development. Parents mentioned that their children acquired new knowledge from the content of books, alongside general language development and literacy skills. The bag often led to parents using pencils with their children for the first time, thus contributing to babies’ motor skills, creativity and early literacy. The pirate book [title in here] was specifically cited as aiding children with their numeracy skills:

“it’s helping her count as well, with the wee 10 pirates” (parent, telephone interview)

“I liked the repetition of numbers, going in both directions” (parent, telephone interview)

Effect of bags on professionals’ knowledge, skills and practice

5.69 We asked professionals how their knowledge, skills and attitudes had changed as a result of their involvement in gifting. The main theme emerging from the case studies was that practitioners already felt that they had a strong understanding and awareness of the principles underpinning Bookbug. The majority of health visitors and early years workers not only recognised the Bookbug messages, but saw them as complementary to what they already know:

“We already do all that in the nursery. It is not new or different to what we already know as nursery nurses” (nursery, case study)

“I already understood the importance of these [principles] - Bookbug gives me a tool to use” (professional survey)

“Yes, the Bookbug messages are consistent with other messages that health visitors would be delivering anyway, on speech and language development, brain development, bonding, attachment. I feel that Bookbug is a really good tool for delivering those messages” (health visitor, case study)

5.70 This connects to the understanding of Bookbug as part of the practitioners’ tool kit (a theme we return to in chapter 7). Those gifting emphasised that gifting a bag of free, high quality bags can help to establish a relationship with a family. This was particularly the case for families distrustful of professional interventions. Critically, the bag was referred to a ‘springboard’ upon which discussions about bonding, brain development, attachment and literacy could be framed. Others commented that Bookbug could help them move into more difficult conversations

about wider support issues. Bookbug, in this sense, was regarded by many professionals as supporting and enabling them in supporting families:

“It is just a great tool for engaging with families, not just on reading, but on other issues and just getting to know them” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, case study)

“I use the bag as a springboard for talking about brain development and building bonding & attachment. I will take the things out of the bag – show them the calendar and suggest how they could record baby’s first smile etc; I would read a couple of the books, especially the one with the mirror – I use that to talk about child development, and the use of black and white to talk about the relevance of contrast; links that to the wider environment and maybe talk about not having the TV on all the time. I would then talk about the CD and the importance of songs and rhymes (health visitor, case study)

“Advice leaflets for parents [provide] a structure for conversation and give parents and carers who are nervous or lack confidence something to focus on during conversations, [they] also provide a visual cue for asking questions” (professional survey)

“All of the bags are a good starting point for explaining to parents the benefits of reading and singing with their children” (professional survey)

“gifting is one of the best bits of my job, families love it and it becomes a great starting point for conversation about literacy” (health visitor, case study)

- 5.71 The survey revealed many examples of how Bookbug Bags have been used to facilitate creative approaches to gifting. For example, in one case study area, a third sector organisation had teamed up with Bookbug to develop advent calendars with a book each day for the parents that they supported. There were also numerous examples of nurseries using the bags to organise activities with children, which culminated in the gifting of bags:

“I think the bags are wonderful! The books in them are fantastic and interesting for the children and the activities look fun too! For the first time this time our staff read the books to the children throughout the week and expressed to the children that at the end of the week they would get their very own copy. This created much excitement and surely had an impact with regards to children engaging with these books at home” (professional survey)

“We have a theme for our gifting every year. Last year we had a sleepover. All the children came to nursery in onesies and we got lots of parents to come in and we did a whole bedtime routine. It was good fun, but also hopefully got some parents to think about reading to their child before bed.” (nursery, case study)

- 5.72 These examples of good practice were discussed with great enthusiasm, but overall appeared to be the exception rather than the norm. Of the 66 cases of practitioners involved solely in the book gifting element of the Bookbug programme, only a third (22) agreed that their involvement in gifting had increased their involvement in collaborative working. Reflecting comments made in case studies, it would appear that gifting is an important element of practice, and for health visitors in particular it is embedded into their narratives about their role – a role which focuses on their relationship with families.

*“I just hand out the bags. I already have professional links with other agencies and I am trained to understand the importance of books in the development of children's learning”
(professional survey)*

Concluding thoughts

- 5.73 In this chapter we have explored parents', carers' and practitioners' experiences of gifting and their responses to Bookbug Bags. Overall, the evidence shows that parents and practitioners were overwhelmingly positive about Bookbug Bags. Parents and carers felt valued and respected on receiving them.
- 5.74 While the majority of families received their bags within the timeframe suggested by Scottish Book Trust, there is evidence of variation in the timing of gifting. This appeared to be particularly relevant for the Baby Bags, where health visiting teams at a local level have been debating the most appropriate timing for gifting. While the timing of gifting in nurseries generally took place at the age of three (as recommended), there were challenges in engaging parents in the gifting of the bag.
- 5.75 Comparing the contents of the bags, overall parents said that they valued the books most and the calendar and height chart least. This was reflected in figures describing use: 83% (Baby), 92% (Toddler) and 88% (Explorer) of parents had read the books with their child; 28% had put up the calendar (Baby Bag only); and 29% had put up the height chart (Toddler Bag only). Critically, however, the height chart, calendar and finger puppets were reportedly used more often by families in the most deprived parts of Scotland. The evidence points to the importance of thinking about all the Bookbug Bag contents, and particularly the importance that additional items have to Scotland's most disadvantaged families.
- 5.76 The Bookbug messages were seen by practitioners as complementary to their existing understandings and practices, and Bookbug could act as a positive starting place for work with families. However, lack of capacity and resources placed increasing pressure on staff, and their ability to prioritise Bookbug activities (whether gifting, sessions or outreach).
- 5.77 The evidence emphasised the importance of the gifting interaction. Where practitioners were able to dedicate time to show and model the resources in the bags, this made a connection with parents. Furthermore, experiences of gifting were framed by wider experiences of service provision and, in particular, the relationships that families felt able to form with their health visitors.

6 Views and experiences of Bookbug Sessions

Key findings

- Of those practitioners surveyed, the main groups involved directly in providing Bookbug Sessions were located in library, family support and 'other' services (mainly delivering targeted interventions).
- The parent and carer survey revealed high levels of awareness of Bookbug Sessions, with variation according to age, social deprivation and English as an additional language (although the sample was self-selecting and not therefore representative). Friends/word of mouth and health visitors were the main sources of information about Bookbug Sessions, with health visitors apparently particularly important for recipients of the Baby Bag living in the most deprived areas.
- Families' responses to Bookbug Sessions were overwhelmingly positive, with accounts drawing attention to the personal qualities of the session leader in particular. Qualitative data give a strong sense of children's delight in the sessions, and also the contribution they can make to social networks for adults.
- Qualitative data from parents give important insights into how Bookbug Sessions may support children's learning and development. Parents identified that their children learned songs and rhymes, improved their speech and language and gained social skills. Some parents reported increasing their singing at home and introducing new, creative elements to their play at home (relating to home learning environment – see chapter two).
- Session leaders shared their observations of both children and parents gradually deepening their participation in sessions, over time.
- Professionals felt that Bookbug was highly beneficial to staff and families alike, with the benefits to staff including improved understanding of the evidence for book sharing and changed public perceptions of libraries.
- This evaluation indicates that most Bookbug Sessions broadly follow the intended structure. Session leaders find reading a book to a large group and using the lycra to be more challenging elements. There is evidence of attempts to be responsive to different age groups and community needs, and of the inclusion of unique elements relevant to that group or area.
- Session leaders mostly enjoyed and felt that they benefited from their role. Finding preparation time (although this became easier with experience), managing large groups, drawing in parents reluctant to engage and protecting the service in the face of staffing pressures were areas of concern.
- Attendance of Bookbug Sessions appears to decline with the child's age, and younger parents and those living in deprived areas are less likely to attend. Many practitioners expressed concerns about the inclusion in Bookbug Sessions of younger parents, parents living in deprived areas and parents who they perceive to be less engaged with literacy.

- Some parents did not experience the groups as inclusive and professionals commented on emotional barriers to attendance, such as lack of confidence. Outreach provision and alternative provision in spaces where families felt at ease were seen as important in overcoming the barriers for families seen to be more vulnerable.
- Some parents expressed concerns about the scheduling and capacity of sessions in their area, including inappropriate timing, insufficient regularity, waiting lists and lack of weekend provision. Professionals echoed these concerns, with some wishing to develop for example a weekend service.
- Fathers in the interview sample suggested that they felt uncomfortable in Bookbug Sessions predominantly made up of women. Targeted approaches, dedicated groups, building up a core group of men who can support others and providing sessions at times to suit more men were all mooted as ways of including fathers. Interestingly, the gendered nature of groups is matched by delivery, with the majority of session leaders being female.
- Some parents said that they stopped attending Bookbug Sessions as their child grew because of changing circumstances (the child starting nursery or parent returning to work). Others expressed concerns about managing their toddler's behaviour within the session.
- Factors such as room lay-out, the qualities of the session leader and group size can substantially impact on the experience of the session and on attendance.

Introduction

- 6.1 In 2015-16, a total of 22,634 Bookbug Sessions were delivered across Scotland, involving 344,909 children and their parents and carers. Of these, 7,332 were run in areas of deprivation, and 462 sessions were run in Gaelic (in Argyll & Bute, East Ayrshire, Highland and the Western Isles). In this chapter we consider the different ways these sessions are delivered and experienced. As with previous chapters, we have drawn on evidence from different elements of the research to consider the perspectives of both professionals and families.

Engagement and involvement of professionals in Bookbug Sessions

- 6.2 Bookbug Sessions (or in a small number of cases, comparable sessions) are available, free, in every local authority in Scotland. The majority are delivered within public libraries or early years settings (such as nurseries, toddler groups and third sector projects), although an increasing number are taking place in community spaces, such as shopping centres and parent and toddler groups. Libraries and nurseries also run Bookbug Sessions to mark the gifting of the Explorer Bag.
- 6.3 Of the 627 professionals responding to the survey, 407 (65%) were directly involved in Bookbug Sessions, or worked in an organisation that was. Unsurprisingly, the majority of those involved were based within the library service (97% of those in the library service were involved in providing sessions). A significant proportion of those working within family support or 'other' roles were also delivering sessions, principally through targeted group work or within family homes.

Table 6.1: Professionals involved in Bookbug Sessions

Sector	Personally involved	Organisation involved	Total	Total in sector	% sector involved in sessions
Early Years	36	13	49	65	75%
Education	7	16	23	59	39%
Family Support	36	12	48	57	84%
Health	7	16	23	95	24%
Library	153	33	186	192	97%
Nursery	28	12	40	112	36%
Other	18	10	38	47	81%
All sectors	295	112	407	627	65%

Note: 'other' largely consists of family support services and specialist practitioners

Source: Professional Survey

- 6.4 Only a quarter of health professionals were involved in Bookbug Sessions, reflecting the fact that the majority were health visitors whose primary role was gifting. Just over a third of nurseries reported that they were delivering sessions, although many more reported visiting sessions at their local library or having local

authority early years workers deliver sessions on their behalf. The examples below show the diversity of the activities taking place within nurseries:

“we deliver a Bookbug Session every week at a local community centre to encourage the local community beside our nursery to come and join us for songs and stories. Some of our parents from nursery come to our sessions” (nursery, professional survey)

“My job role involves leading play sessions to parent and toddler groups all over the local authority. I sometimes deliver a full Bookbug Session, but I will always end the play sessions with a short ‘Bookbug style’ session to help calm the children before I leave” (early years worker, professional survey)

“We are a very small nursery with three children, so I take them to Bookbug, with the parents too, at the neighbouring school for some social interaction, as well as rhymes and stories” (nursery, professional survey)

- 6.5 Some nurseries reported difficulties in running Bookbug Sessions within the nursery (due to the challenges of parental engagement), or were unable to visit their local library due to the lack of transport. Several nurseries did report using Bookbug materials – without parental engagement - to support and facilitate other activities or themed learning:

“We don't specifically hold sessions for children with their parents/carer. We read to the children in nursery and have copies of the books from the Bookbug Bags in our topic boxes.” (nursery, professional survey)

Families’ awareness of Bookbug Sessions

- 6.6 The parent and carer survey can only tell us so much about involvement of families in Bookbug Sessions since those completing the survey were a self-selecting, motivated sample. We return, in section 6.23 onwards, to discuss issues around non-engagement in more detail. Taking account of the survey limitations, awareness of sessions was, in general, high across the sample and influenced by age, deprivation and English as an additional language. So, parents and carers who are older (especially 31-40 year olds), living in the less deprived areas or with English as their first language, are more likely to have heard of Bookbug Sessions. It is a reasonable expectation that were this survey issued to the general population, these results would be more pronounced.

Table 6.2: Awareness of Bookbug Sessions, by age of respondent

Age	Baby	Toddler	Explorer	All
under 30	77%	85%	71%	78%
31 – 40	87%	91%	85%	87%
over 41	81%	89%	82%	84%
All	83%	90%	82%	85%

Source: Parent and carer survey

Table 6.3: Awareness of Bookbug Sessions, by Index of Multiple Deprivation

IMD Decile	Baby	Toddler	Explorer	Total
most deprived 1	76%	71%	75%	75%
2	84%	87%	81%	84%
3	78%	88%	73%	80%
4	79%	89%	81%	82%
5	76%	86%	81%	81%
6	83%	87%	79%	83%
7	91%	92%	82%	88%
8	86%	93%	85%	88%
9	84%	94%	87%	88%
least deprived 10	90%	92%	91%	91%
All	83%	90%	82%	85%

Source: Parent and carer survey

Table 6.4: Awareness of Bookbug Sessions, by English as Additional Language

Language	Baby	Toddler	Explorer	All
EAL	77%	79%	70%	75%
English first language	85%	92%	85%	87%
All	83%	90%	82%	85%

Source: Parent and carer survey

- 6.7 Becoming aware of sessions is highly dependent on two sources, friends/word of mouth and health visitors. Both remain important information sources across the different bags. Libraries and the bags themselves are also points for information to be shared.
- 6.8 Other ways of finding out about Bookbug Sessions included web searches (specifically finding information on library websites or social media), having already gone with older children, National Childbirth Trust classes, local play group organisers, and the Registrar. Few parents mentioned the information placed in Bookbug Bags as the primary means through which they found out about Bookbug Sessions. A handful of parents talked about going to Parents Early Education Partnership groups (PEEP) with their babies, and experiencing Bookbug Sessions as part of these sessions.

Table 6.5: How did you find out about sessions?

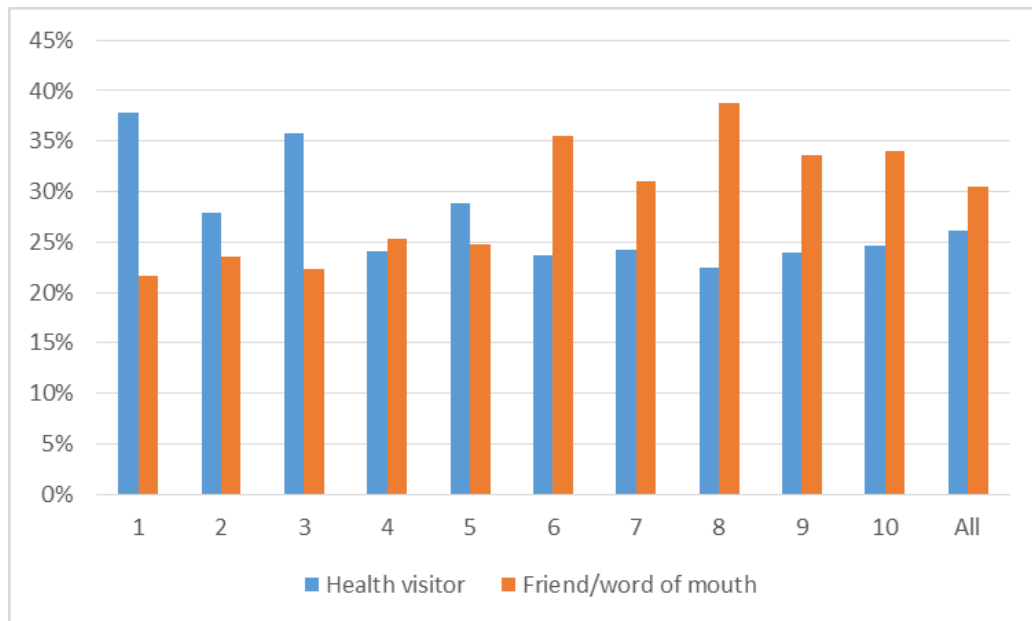
	Bookbug bag	Librarian	SBT website	Health visitor	Mid-wife	Poster	Friend /word of mouth	Other	Total No.
Baby	8%	13%	4%	26%	3%	5%	31%	10%	1,032
Toddler	12%	18%	4%	25%	3%	5%	27%	6%	1,061
Explorer	9%	30%	2%	20%	3%	7%	23%	6%	729
All	10%	19%	3%	24%	3%	6%	27%	7%	100%

Source: Parent and carer survey

- 6.9 There was a notable relationship, for Baby Bags only, between how a family came to know about sessions and deprivation. The table below looks at two information sources by deprivation (with one being the most deprived and 10 being the least). Here we see that those in the most deprived areas are far more reliant on their health visitors for information than those in more affluent areas, where word of

mouth and friendships are more significant. This draws attention to the influential position that the health visiting service has when gifting, and the importance of this relationship being empathetic and trusting (see section 5.32).

Figure 6.1: How did you find out about sessions? – health visitor and friends/word of mouth by deprivation (Baby Bag only)



Source: Parent and carer survey

Families’ attendance of Bookbug Sessions

- 6.10 Awareness does not necessarily translate into attendance (although it is important to bear in mind that the survey only asked about current attendance, not previous or planned attendance). Around a third of parents (32%) reported going with their child, a figure which declines by age of child (from 45% for those receiving Baby Bags, to 26% for the Explorer Bag). A small proportion of children attended with another carer, and again unsurprisingly this increased with the age of the child, and was likely associated with parents’ return to work. Around a tenth (9%) attended an alternative song and rhyme session.
- 6.11 We also looked at whether respondent characteristics (age, deprivation, EAL) influenced attendance. Again we found a relationship between age of parent and deprivation, with younger parents and those from more deprived areas being less likely to attend. Notably, we did not see the same relationship between attendance and those with EAL.

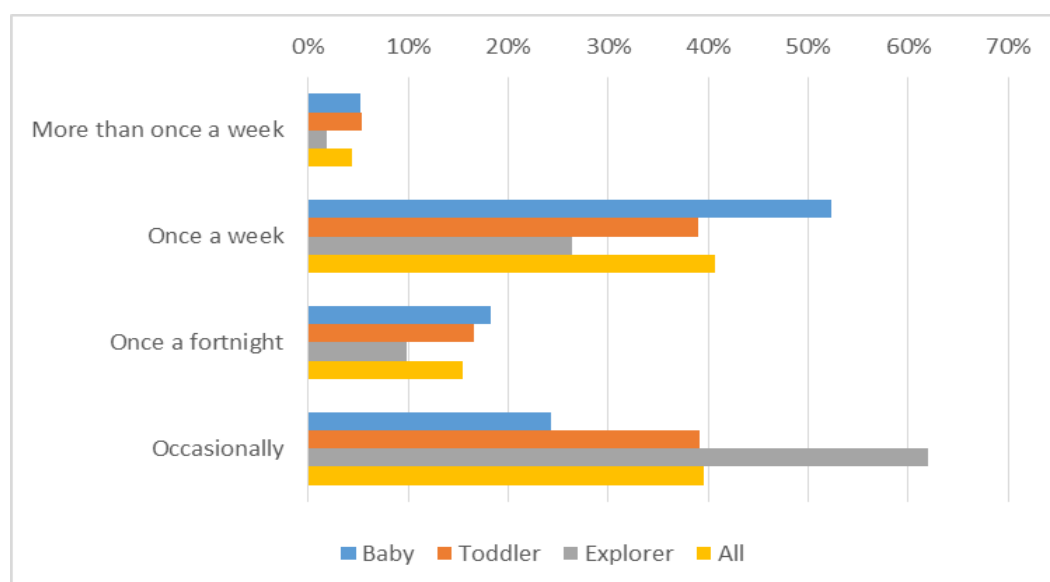
Table 6.6: Attendance at Bookbug Sessions, by bag type

	Yes – with my child	Child goes with someone else	No, go to other song & rhyme sessions	No	Not heard of Bookbug	All
Baby	45%	1%	9%	28%	17%	1549
Toddler	50%	6%	11%	23%	10%	1233
Explorer	26%	6%	8%	43%	18%	1605
All	32%	4%	9%	38%	17%	4,759

Source: Parent and carer survey

6.12 Narrowly, the most common frequency of attendance was ‘once a week’ (41%), although this was higher for those with the youngest children. Again, this is likely to be a result of parents returning to work or children starting in funded nursery places.

Figure 6.2: How often do you attend Bookbug Sessions?



Source: Parent and carer survey

6.13 A similar profile was shown in the telephone interviews and case studies. The majority of parents who attended Bookbug Sessions did so once a week, and a small number at least twice a week, often travelling to a range of different locations. One parent reported travelling seven miles on the bus in order to attend the nearest Bookbug Session. A minority of parents reported going to Bookbug Sessions about once a month, or even less frequently. Variation in frequency of attendance appeared to be influenced by the age of the child, the number of children and family circumstances (such as working patterns).

6.14 Attendance was also affected by the scheduling of sessions. Several parents expressed concerns about the timing of sessions in their area (being at lunch time, just after collecting children from nursery). Others stated that there was

insufficient provision – this was particularly common in rural areas. One mother in a small rural town commented,

“I would love to attend one a week, would be good, but obviously it’s just one a month. But then living in a small town as well, maybe they think that there’s not going to be enough people to attend them” (parent, telephone interview)

- 6.15 This patchiness in provision of Bookbug Sessions is illustrated by one parent who had lived in a large city before moving to a Scottish island, where Bookbug Sessions are offered only a few times a year:

“we used to live in [city] and I used to take my son every week to Bookbug Sessions at the local library, and when I moved back to [island community] I really felt that he was missing out cos it didn’t happen very regularly” (parent, telephone interview)

- 6.16 Another key issue relates to weekend sessions. Some parents reported going to Bookbug Sessions on a Saturday, which allowed them to maintain attendance after returning to work. Others stated that it made it possible for both parents to experience Bookbug Sessions. More parents, however, expressed disappointment about the lack of weekend Bookbug Sessions in their localities:

“I do think that in terms of the sessions, there does need to be a little bit more thought about how they meet the needs of working parents, so you know is there something on a Saturday morning? We would definitely go along.” (parent, telephone interview)

“our library has reduced, they only do it now on a Tuesday afternoon, and because I work now I haven’t been able to [go]. Cos none of them seem to do it on a Saturday morning near us, they only do it during the week and the one where we used to go was weekly, but now they only do it once a month cos not many people go to it” (parent, telephone interview)

- 6.17 One of the strongest themes within the data was the concern that Bookbug Sessions principally attracted middle-class families, older mothers and those who were already engaged in literacy and reading.

- 6.18 Practitioners repeatedly expressed concerns that those families who might benefit from Bookbug the most were also the least likely to be aware of, and participate in Bookbug Sessions. In particular, librarians were aware of the negative perceptions some families had of libraries (see 4.43), and the impact this had on Bookbug attendance:

“Libraries can be difficult places, and for many it is entrenched views that keep them away. All the people who come are already engaged. They aren’t the ones that really need it.” (librarian, case study)

Professionals’ views on capacity and demand

- 6.19 Overall, session leaders report that the majority of sessions are in very high demand and, as highlighted by parents above, waiting lists are used in some cases. The following is a selection of the many comments made in the professional survey about demand for sessions exceeding supply:

“Although we run many sessions, we are not meeting demand in some localities”

“Bookbug is a popular session with many families but can be fully booked or not on weekly”

“Bookbug Sessions are often overcrowded”

“The demand for Bookbug Sessions is high, but my organisation is not able to meet the demand”

“We could hold sessions every day but don't have resources or staff available”

“Wish we could work out a fair way to limit the numbers - sometimes we have 100 people!”

- 6.20 Many practitioners spoke about not having adequate staffing to meet demand, especially in rural areas or single-staffed venues. Interestingly, there were several examples of low demand, some of which were rural areas. Practitioners were often at a loss to explain why this was the case:

“I'm perplexed by low attendance in a few areas, such as [area names]. We have changed time, days, location, but nothing seems to increase uptake. I don't know why” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, case study)

“We struggle to get a good number of attendees in some rural areas. The idea of ‘those who need us the least use us the most’ is good for this area. We are working to attract more people but do struggle” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, professional survey)

- 6.21 Several leaders spoke about a desire to undertake a mapping of local events and activities to determine whether the current sessions are fully meeting the needs of their local neighbourhood. Echoing parents' views, some expressed specific interest in exploring the potential for Saturday sessions, stating that without running a weekend service they are not providing access to all. Weekend sessions, in particular, were regarded as a means of providing both parents the opportunity to gain the benefits of Bookbug. Those who were offering Saturday sessions reported them being very popular with fathers in particular. Limited resources for staffing was the main issue limiting weekend delivery and for many libraries the priority was ensuring the branch had cover during core hours.
- 6.22 Several practitioners emphasised the importance of building communities through social media (Facebook was mentioned most frequently). They felt that the advertising of sessions was inadequate and focused mainly on health centres. More, it was argued, could be done to advertise Bookbug in alternative public spaces (such as supermarkets, bus stops or park notice boards) and ensure that posters and leaflets were regularly checked and updated.

Reasons for families not attending Bookbug Sessions

Age and stage

- 6.23 We further investigated the reasons for not attending Bookbug Sessions with parents and carers in telephone interviews and case studies. Those parents who had previously attended Bookbug Sessions but no longer did, generally offered one of three reasons: they had returned to work and now did not have time to attend; session times were no longer suitable, either due to their own work commitments or because their child now attended playgroup or nursery; they found the behaviour of their child difficult to manage during Bookbug Sessions and as a result chose not to go anymore. This last reason was particularly relevant for the parents interviewed in the Toddler sample; several parents commented that once their baby started walking, they were less inclined to sit down for the duration of a Bookbug Session, and they felt that their child's behaviour had the potential to disrupt the group:

“he would just get up and leave the room and walk into the library, and then he'd start pulling DVDs out of the shelves and pulling books off the shelves and it just became more of a stress than anything, so we just stopped going” (parent, telephone interview)

“I can't really judge when he's going to be in a book kind of mood, I mean you know, if we turn up and then he decides 'no, I'm going on a wrecking spree' (parent, telephone interview)

- 6.24 One aspect of the organisation of Bookbug Sessions is the practice in some areas of offering different sessions according to the age of the child. Whilst this was regarded positively by some parents of babies, for other parents with more than one child, this policy led to difficulties in attending Bookbug Sessions if their children straddled the age limits of the groups:

“that's one of the things that I think isn't great with the Bookbug Sessions, which is that once you've had more than one child, you know to go to the baby session I would have had to take [my toddler] with me, and the session is not suited for toddlers” (parent, telephone interview)

- 6.25 A small number of parents who had never been to Bookbug Sessions indicated that, although they knew about the sessions, they felt that they “weren't for them” as a family. This tended to be presented as a matter of personal preference, rather than reflecting negative impressions that they held of the Bookbug programme. However, it is possible that this also reflected lack of confidence in attending a group session and or singing and reading with their child. Only one of the twelve parents who had never been to a Bookbug Session said that this was because they had never heard of them.

Delivery of sessions

- 6.26 How Bookbug Sessions are organised can influence whether or not parents are able to attend, for example the practice of using a waiting list. One parent

commented that, although she would like to attend Bookbug Sessions, they are frequently oversubscribed in her area:

“every time I’ve gone to sign up they’ve always been full [...] you put your name down and if they were full you could put your name on a reserve list in case anyone couldn’t make it, and there wasn’t that many spaces available” (parent, telephone interview)

6.27 Parents who attended sessions in more than one location often highlighted differences in the way that sessions are run, and noted how this impacted on the “feel” of the groups. The lay-out of the room in which sessions were held was perceived to impact on experience; one parent contrasted the relatively formal set-up of a session in which parents sat on chairs and children were encouraged to sit on the floor, with a different session in which parents sat on the floor with their children, which the parent described as more chaotic but also more enjoyable. Parents also drew contrasts between different sessions, or between leaders:

“The one I go to, the woman gets a sheet out and does different things, wee games on it, whereas they don’t do that at the other one” (parent, telephone interview)

“The ones at [library] are great, slightly set away from the main crowd, easy to hear and easy to join in with. Here, I found it’s right in the centre and I’ve found the ones leading it very quiet, so I have liked the ones here less” (parent, telephone interview)

“She’s just really friendly, she really makes the effort to know all the kids and to talk to the mums and she makes us all feel welcome. My daughter just loves her.” (parent, case study)

6.28 The size of the group can also influence parents’ enjoyment of Bookbug Sessions. Very large groups can be overwhelming and off-putting for parents and babies:

“it was too busy and I suffer anxiety so going into a big group like that, it made me feel quite uncomfortable” (parent, telephone interview)

“I have a support worker who comes and helps me cos I have trouble getting out the house and we went to one at the library once but I couldn’t go on my own cos there are so many people I don’t know” (parent, case study)

“Some of the sessions are just massive Like in the [locality] there are rows of people, and it feels quite fragmented, like no one talk to each other. The smaller ones folks are more like to say ‘hi’ and to chat” (parent, case study).

“I think for some people it can be intimidating going to Bookbug. I am quite outgoing so I feel happy going into groups, but I understand that it can be difficult” (parent, case study).

6.29 Large Bookbug Sessions can also mean that it is harder to hear the leader. A few parents reported that if the leader is inaudible whilst singing or reading a story, both children and parents are likely to lose interest in what is happening in the group and this affected the quality of the session:

“sometimes they read a story...but he’s just distracted at that point, he’s not paying attention at all...and I don’t know whether that’s because it’s such a large group, and in order to get everybody’s attention you’d have to shout the story [...] probably like 50 people, I mean it’s pretty big” (parent, telephone interview)

Vulnerable families

- 6.30 There was general agreement amongst professionals that more work was required to reach low income or socially excluded families. Many professionals spoke about how difficult it was to reach families who were ‘vulnerable’ or ‘disadvantaged’ for some reason, and commented that Bookbug Sessions do not necessarily represent all families. As well as families living in deprived areas, professionals also commented on the lack of families attending with children who have additional support needs:

“There are very few children attending from families with needs whether social emotional or health needs.” (professional survey)

- 6.31 Notably, issues around the inclusivity of the group were highlighted by families as important. Several parents attending family support groups had attended a Bookbug Session, and had decided not to return. Here, some parents described their experiences:

“We didn’t feel very welcome by the other mums. I wouldn’t say it was cliquey, it was just too big for you to be able to become part of it. Not one single mum spoke to us” (parent, case study)

“I know I don’t meet a lot with other mums and I find that very difficult and I get isolated. I have found the library hard to get into with the buggy, and the sessions are on every other week that makes it difficult for me to remember when it is on. The leader was nice, but my experience is that the group is very cliquey. The time I went I was made to feel really unwelcome. I have spoken to my friends about this and they felt the same way. The group all huddle together and you are left sitting by yourself. I’m just sitting thinking this isn’t why I came today. And it is always the young mums that are left sitting alone. I just know that I don’t feel like part of them. I don’t plan to go back.”

- 6.32 Professionals were acutely aware of these types of views, emphasising that more vulnerable families can often find a busy Bookbug group too difficult and daunting to attend at first. It was noted by several librarians that families identified as more vulnerable will either decline invitations to sessions, or come once and not return:

“more vulnerable groups find it difficult to attend the library, they can be supported to come, but often after an initial visit do not return.” (librarian, case study)

“We know there are lots of parents who don’t come [to the Bookbug Sessions]. Sometimes we can see them sitting outside the library in the café and we’ve tried all sorts but we can’t get them to come in.” (Bookbug co-ordinator, case study)

- 6.33 It is here that professionals were keen to emphasise the importance of outreach activities as a means of supporting families to overcome the barriers they experience in accessing Bookbug’s benefits:

“I think the families I work with are some of the hard to engage parents and they don’t always feel welcome (by other families) or have the confidence to attend the sessions in the library. This is where we would step in to support them to attend or perhaps do individual sessions first then accompany them to library sessions.” (family support worker, professional survey)

“By having the Bookbug Outreach programme in place we are able to offer Bookbug Sessions in the community and in their home to build confidence before attending main group sessions for families.” (literacy development officer, professional survey)

“Families receiving support in the home do often get some Bookbug-type activity included in that support, and sometimes support workers come with children and/or parents to regular Bookbug Sessions. My personal view is that outreach is the best answer to bridging this divide, but that is where library services often lack resourcing (both staff time and budget) and I would say this is true here.” (library assistant, professional survey)

- 6.34 In several case study areas, Bookbug Sessions targeting families who may feel uncomfortable attending public sessions were run in family support centres and third sector organisations. Some professionals saw these sessions as a way to build parents’ confidence to come to public Bookbug Sessions, while others saw them as an alternative provision.

“It’s a good thing to have lots of choices, some parents will prefer one session and others another. I think there is maybe one parent who comes here who also goes to the library but most will probably never feel comfortable going into that group because they have preconceptions about what it will be like.” (third sector worker, case study)

“It would be good if we had a better handle on all the different sessions going on in the area because then we could try to bring them into the library!” (librarian, case study)

- 6.35 While all professionals were keen to emphasise the important role of outreach, the difficulties of delivering sustainable outreach in the context of limited resources was also highlighted. Most practitioners, especially librarians, felt constrained by what they could provide to more disadvantaged families, and were keenly aware that more could be done to bridge the divide.

Ability to appeal to fathers

- 6.36 Fathers were generally underrepresented at Bookbug Sessions. This can be the result of reasons already identified: that fathers are more likely to be working full-time and that Saturday sessions are less frequently available. It is notable that more fathers were present at the one-off Christmas Bookbug Session that was observed in one case study area. On this occasion several fathers had taken time off work to attend something that they knew their partner and child enjoyed throughout the year.

- 6.37 However, fathers in the interview sample reported feeling uncomfortable attending sessions that were predominantly comprised of mothers – although one father overcame this by choosing to go to a group aimed specifically at fathers. Fathers interviewed in the case studies expressed similar views, indicating that

they would normally only go “if they had to”, or if they were going “with mum”. Two mothers in the case studies made observations about this:

“I think the problem is that dads don't know what to do with themselves. It does sound weird, but they don't know how to behave since they don't come to these kind of things a lot” (parent, case study)

“It is full of mums so I can understand why they wouldn't come.” (parent, case study)

- 6.38 There were exceptions to this pattern. One Bookbug Session observed in a library had a very small number of parents participating, but more than half of these parents were fathers (three out of five). In one family support centre a member of staff had spent time targeting fathers and a group of three fathers attended the session together and stayed at the edges of the session.
- 6.39 Professionals were keen to explore solutions for encouraging fathers to engage more in book sharing. The most common response was to introduce different – and specifically more ‘active’ – ways of engaging with fathers. However, others were more supportive of approaches which either provided a typical Bookbug Session, but targeted at fathers, or simply found ways of supporting fathers to attend (such as weekend sessions). There was also mention of comradery, in the sense that if one person said ‘I'm not going’, then the rest follow. To encourage fathers to come, you need to successfully attract a group of fathers who can then support others. The worker above who had successfully attracted a group of fathers to the session that she ran cited her ongoing relationship with the individual men as important, emphasising that because she had known them for some time she could ‘banter’ with them and ‘nag’ them to come along.

English as an additional language and providing sessions in other languages

- 6.40 Several professionals expressed a desire to run a greater number of sessions in other languages and incorporate other languages into mainstream sessions. However, overall there was a lack of clear evidence on demand, and on which languages to focus resources. Staffing was identified as a reason for not being able to expand this provision. Conversely, professionals also spoke about parents with English as an additional language attending Bookbug Sessions, who were gaining confidence with the English language through song and rhyme.
- 6.41 Parents from a multi-cultural group in one case study area were divided between those who perceived that their English was not good enough to go along to Bookbug Sessions and those who had attended a session and found it useful for learning English songs, developing their language skills and meeting new people. Several parents made favourable comments about Bookbug compared to services available, and attitudes to book sharing in their countries of origin.

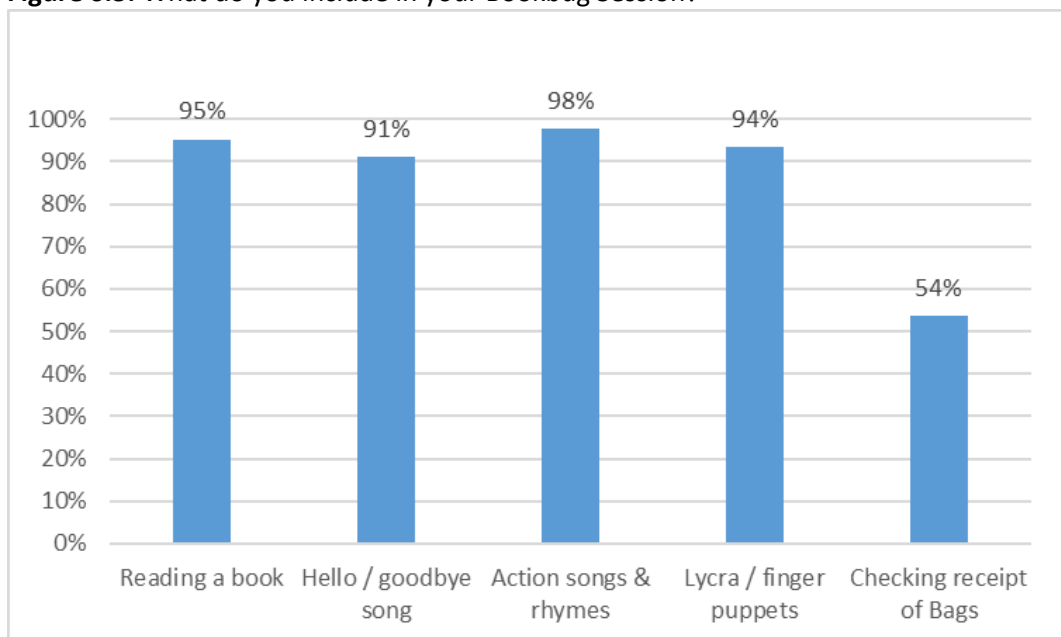
“I always come to Bookbug because there was nothing like this in Bangladesh and I want my son to have all the advantages of everything amazing that happens in Scotland.” (parent, case study)

“My English is not good so I don't go.” (parent, case study)

What to expect at a Bookbug Session

- 6.42 Scottish Book Trust sets out the recommended structure of a Bookbug Session through its training. This includes a 'hello' song, rhymes and songs, a book, activity with movement, more rhymes and songs, and finally, a 'goodbye' song. Materials are available to those delivering sessions, including a Bookbug doll, Bookbug Bags, finger puppets, lycra (stretchy material used to facilitate movement in sessions, and encourage parents and children to work together) and stickers. Specific resources for additional support needs are also provided, including a stickered ASN book and gifting guidance.
- 6.43 Overall, the survey suggested high levels of consistency in delivery, with the majority of respondents normally including all the recommended parts of a session. The main exception was checking whether participants have received their Bookbug Bags, with just over half usually including this in their session. Several practitioners did report regularly ending their sessions by suggesting appropriate books, advertising local and national events (such as the Library Challenge and Bookweek Scotland) and encouraging book borrowing.

Figure 6.3: What do you include in your Bookbug Session?



Source: Professional survey, n=295

- 6.44 Further insights into the Bookbug Sessions were gained from open responses to the professional survey, interviews with practitioners and direct observations of sessions. In most of the observed sessions, one member of staff was responsible for delivering the session. Bookbug T-shirts were worn in approximately half of the sessions we observed. The majority of practitioners spoke confidently about the purpose of the sessions, talking confidently about the benefits of book sharing, and issues such as repetition, rhyming versus singing, and eye contact. Counting in songs was practiced in the majority of sessions. Few mentioned children's vocal range.

“when they leave me I hope that they will know how to share books, how to interact with others, and understand and enjoy songs and rhymes” (librarian, case study)

“For me it is about getting parent and child together and getting them to engage with stories. In a session everyone is at the same level, we can use silly voices. I’m there in a role-modelling capacity” (family support worker, case study)

“you are their first music concert!” (librarian, case study)

- 6.45 Staff delivering sessions were frequently (but not always) female, and several session leaders commented on the role being highly gendered. This reflected the gendered profile of the Bookbug community overall as reflecting in the professional survey (see para 1.15). Indeed, several male members of staff commented specifically on this during our case studies:

I ask the male librarian if he ever delivers sessions. “No way”, he replies. “I do enough of that at home, I’ll leave that to the girls” (library Bookbug Session, case study)

The group joked together about the time that the male worker ran the Bookbug Session. They said it was “hilarious” (apparently he didn’t know the rhymes and made a mess of it). Speaking to the worker after, he emphasised that although he did attend the training it wasn’t him. “It’s not my kinda thing, well it is not a guy kinda thing, is it?” (third sector Bookbug Session, case study)

- 6.46 Having more male session leaders might help to foster fathers’ attendance and participation, as suggested in one case study area:

“It’s great when [name of leader] leads sessions cos you can see dads looking at him and thinking ‘I could do that’, but he doesn’t do it very often, it’s usually just us old women!” (librarian, case study)

- 6.47 The time and frequency of sessions varied across Scotland, although weekly sessions were most common. Less frequent sessions were more often the consequence of restricted staffing than low demand. This appeared to be a particular issue in rural areas, where the difficulties in staffing libraries during session times were greater. Practitioners emphasised the importance of scheduling sessions in a way that complemented other events and activities taking place locally. However, evidence from the case studies suggested that local mapping of venues or activities was not always possible. Moreover, consultation with families on the best time for Bookbug activities was limited, and in one example only involved those currently attending sessions. This meant that there was scant awareness of the views of those families not attending.

- 6.48 Session leaders, however, did as much as they could to respond to the needs of their local community and in some cases this involved experimenting with session times to determine when demand was greatest. In many areas, session leaders operated sessions targeted at different age groups (i.e. ‘baby’ groups, ‘toddler’ groups and ‘story time’ sessions for older children). Staff felt these sessions worked well, noting that while they would not exclude parents who wanted to attend, it allowed leaders to structure the sessions to better meet the needs of

the children (for example, by having more gentle songs for babies, and more movement for toddlers). Not only did this help manage high demand, but a separate baby session meant that babies, in particular, could enjoy time lying on the floor, without fear of accidents.

- 6.49 Practitioners reported, and were observed, using a range of activities as part of their session, such as ‘themed’ sessions, or the inclusion of arts and crafts activities in the middle of the session. There were also several examples of practitioners bringing in their own specialist knowledge into sessions (for example, using Kodály method – an approach to music education through singing - when singing songs). Others, on occasion, invited specialists to speak at the end of sessions (for example, health visitors, speech and language therapists or baby massage). Notably some activities had become part of the local sessions – such as the use of dressing-up boxes, bubbles or messy play. In some areas Bookbug partnered with other local organisations to offer multiple activities at the same time or to provide food at Bookbug Sessions on special occasions such as holidays. There was, therefore, a sense that the Bookbug Session plans are being followed, but also developing unique local elements, in line with the interests of the families attending.
- 6.50 The spaces available for sessions varied considerably. Generally speaking, renovated or new build libraries provided more spacious, flexible and attractive spaces for Bookbug Sessions. Some older buildings had separate spaces, but this meant that the Sessions were removed from the main library space and impacted on post-session book borrowing. In some areas, the space for Bookbug Sessions was restricted which resulted in families squeezing into double rows and latecomers having to resort to sitting uncomfortably at the side. Practitioners did routinely welcome latecomers.
- 6.51 In some libraries, poorly designed spaces meant that sessions were held close to the main desk. This resulted in the library space being closely shared by different users and in two cases led to complaints about the noise. It was also not uncommon for sessions to have restricted space for buggies, which can make it difficult for parents. Some parents interviewed avoided the library for this reason, preferring to attend a local community centre instead.
- 6.52 Sessions generally followed the structure recommended by Scottish Book Trust. ‘Hello songs’ varied in different areas: in some cases, it provided the opportunity for children to share their name with the group, in others the ‘hello’ was more generic (for example, saying hello if you are wearing a particular colour). In about half of the sessions observed, finger puppets or soft toys were chosen by the children, which in turn determined the rhymes and songs selection. In others, staff pre-planned their sessions. Some used cue sheets listing the session plan, and in one case, the leader displayed numbered songs on a board (parents were provided with a numbered song book so they could find the song and follow the words). In one case, the staff member used a CD as an accompaniment to the session. Some practitioners stated that such plans provided them with security and gave them confidence in delivery. It was also noted that providing song sheets

helped parents learn the words, and gave them something to take home. Another expressed concern, noting that she knew it “wasn’t the right thing to do but sometimes forgets the words and it gives me a bit of confidence”. Experience and recent training clearly shaped the confidence of the leader and the ‘flow’ of the session:

“the more you do it, the easier it is. You can see you are losing them, and you can select a dead cert, one you know will get them back” (librarian, case study)

- 6.53 In line with the survey, observations showed leaders using a wide range of rhymes and songs, including those with actions or movement. Lycra activities were universally loved by children and parents, although practitioners held mixed views. Some practitioners noted that they had decided not to use it due to the size of the group, or the age range. Others stated that they did not feel confident using it or, as in one case, had stopped using it:

“Using the lycra is utterly terrifying. I have basically stopped using it because I just can’t control the children” (librarian, case study)

I asked about the Lycra activities. It wasn’t used at the session I attended. There appeared to be a consensus amongst staff that the Lycra was better suited to older children as too difficult to run with mixed age groups (observation of third sector Bookbug Session, case study)

- 6.54 Similarly, books were used within most but not all of the observed sessions. Practitioners talked about book selection being difficult. It was important, they stated, to choose one that was short, universal and entertaining:

“You need a book that is at the right level, where kids are to make noise, respond and join in guessing what happens next. That is not always easy to find” (librarian, case study)

“It’s difficult when you’ve got kids of all different ages. Rhymes seem to cut across the ages more easily.” (librarian, case study)

- 6.55 In one example, a session leader noted that she often finds herself selecting books that she does not personally like, but that work in a large group. In another session, the leader took time to move around the group to show a page to all the babies. She noted that it was important to allow each baby the opportunity to interact with the book, but acknowledged that in taking time to do this you can “lose the crowd”. In one area, it was noted that books were only included in sessions for older children.

- 6.56 Practitioners enjoyed using the Bookbug doll, emphasising that children loved it, seeing it as the recognisable face of the session. The Bookbug was used by practitioners to support them ‘on stage’ and is always present at Bookbug Sessions. Staff talked enthusiastically about children’s excited reactions on the rare occasions that Bookbug ‘visited’ their session in the form of a member of staff in a Bookbug costume.

“Bookbug gives a focal point, so it is not me telling them to sing. It is Bookbug.” (librarian, case study)

“I can use Bookbug as my fall guy, we are a double act. So Bookbug might tell me that it is getting too noisy, or going too fast” (librarian, case study)

“Bookbug gives us a shield, but it is also a leveler, so we are all coming from an equal position” (librarian, case study)

“When you are talking to Bookbug, you are talking to a friend” (librarian, case study)

I asked if the children knew who was inside the Bookbug costume and (the librarian) laughed: “I come back into the room and every time they say to me ‘you missed Bookbug. He was here. How come you always miss him, it’s so sad’ (librarian, case study)

“Bookbug is more popular than Santa!” (librarian observing children at a Bookbug Christmas party)

- 6.57 Goodbye songs featured in all the observed sessions, and was something that practitioners reported always doing. Often this was followed by stickers. In several observed sessions, workers actively encouraged families to stay behind and select books. In one session, leaders brought dressing-up clothes for the children, and stayed to chat to parents. In another, the leader brought several new books to the session, and encouraged families to borrow them. This did not happen in all the sessions we observed, and overall, there was minimal evidence of book borrowing post-session, although in many cases, groups of parents left the session together to have coffee, or go for a walk. This is an area that local authorities are aware of, and many are developing initiatives to encourage book borrowing through Bookbug:

“It’s good to see the parents arrive early before the session with their children and talk to each other and hang around in the library afterwards. They always stay for a chat and I really like that bit of the week.” (librarian, case study)

“The sessions are great, and they are taking the step towards using the library in the right way [reading and borrowing books]. But there still isn’t enough opportunity for that to happen” (librarian, case study)

Responses to Bookbug Sessions

Families’ responses

- 6.58 Families attending Bookbug Sessions overwhelmingly conveyed positive responses, both on their children’s behalf and their own. Bookbug Session leaders were described as friendly, welcoming, upbeat and enthusiastic. Parents valued those session leaders who were flexible and responsive to individual children, and those who were relaxed with the unpredictability of children’s behaviour. The personal qualities of the Bookbug Session leader were seen as being key to the tone and feel of the sessions, and ultimately, this was connected to how positively Bookbug Sessions were regarded by parents. For example, one parent commented,

“There is a woman called [name], and I think she’s brilliant...all the children just love her, which is great. She really enjoys what she’s doing and she’s open to everybody, and she wants the children to join in the actions...it was really good” (parent, telephone interview)

- 6.59 By contrast, another parent explained that part of the reason why she had stopped going to Bookbug Sessions was because the leader she was familiar with had moved on:

“I wouldn’t go to the [location] if you paid me. They [leaders] just don’t have the enthusiasm, that happiness. Basically they look like they have got the short straw, which some of them can.” (parent, case study)

“I totally agree that the Bookbug Sessions held within the library should be fun. Unfortunately, we stopped attending ours as the person leading it did not fully engage the children with the session and seemed extremely disinterested in the service she was providing and the needs of the children.” (playgroup leader, professional survey)

- 6.60 A key theme in the telephone interviews and case studies was babies’ and children’s enjoyment of Bookbug Sessions. Virtually every parent who attended Bookbug reported that their child enjoyed participating in songs and rhymes, and interacting with their peers, although for some it took some weeks before feeling comfortable. The children at the observed sessions expressed their excitement about being at the sessions, and were able to identify their favourite songs. Similar to when receiving the Bookbug Bags, children were described as “lighting’ up in sessions:

“I actually go to two Bookbug Sessions because [daughter] loves them...sounds a bit excessive but she really enjoys it. She likes the interaction with other kids [...] she just loves it, she just lights up” (parent, telephone interview)

“He gets excited when I tell him he is going to the Bookbug Session. If I give him a choice, it would be Bookbug he would choose, every time.” (parent, case study)

“Oh, she just looks so happy when you are there. The eyes just light up, it was especially when she was a baby. They lie under the lycra and just chill out, it is brilliant seeing them like that” (parent, case study)

- 6.61 Parents were also very positive about their own experiences of Bookbug Sessions, which was partly linked to their children’s enjoyment. Parents also talked about different ways in which they themselves directly benefited. For first-time parents in particular, Bookbug Sessions were seen as a good opportunity to get out of the house and meet other parents. Some parents even talked about having made good friends at Bookbug Sessions. The following quotations illustrate the widespread theme of valued social contact through Bookbug Sessions:

“There were other mothers you could speak to, cos up until then I wasn’t going anywhere either [...] so it was a couple of hours out, you know what I mean, getting your books and a coffee...so it was good socially” (parent, telephone interview)

“It was a time to get out of the house and meet other people and for [daughter] to meet other babies of her own age [...] and it was nice to see other mums” (parent, telephone interview)

- 6.62 Several parents in the interview sample group expressed appreciation for the fact that Bookbug Sessions are free:

“I love them; I think it’s great. We go to a lot of classes but I think Bookbug is the one she gets the most out of and the fact that it’s free is great” (parent, telephone interview)

- 6.63 Bookbug Sessions were also valued by parents as a context in which they could sing and rhyme with their children outside of the home environment. One interviewee, a lone parent, remarked that Bookbug Sessions were a great opportunity for the parent to have a break from the responsibility of “leading” a fun activity, whilst at the same time enabling the parent and child to enjoy time together.

Professionals’ responses

- 6.64 Practitioners mostly enjoyed delivering the sessions and felt a sense of pride in their role. A further key theme was confidence, with practitioners stating that since their involvement with Bookbug, they have gained wide-ranging benefits:

“The Bookbug Sessions have built my own confidence with songs and rhymes” (play practitioner, professional survey)

“It is a positive and rewarding part of the job. You make a difference in people’s and young children’s lives” (librarian, professional survey)

“Librarians are used to being on the other side of the counter, but Bookbug brings you out. It breaks down the stereotypes of librarians...we are not all stuffy. It helps build relationships and then the parents will ask you other things and it breaks down the barriers.” (librarian, case study)

- 6.65 This came across in their delivery, with all observed sessions being delivered with enthusiasm, fun and energy. Some leaders expressed feelings of nervousness and anxiety about delivering sessions, although the confidence to manage sessions and respond to challenging groups improved with experience and training.

“I am finding my feet and confidence. With the training I am learning when to plan, and when to change the plan. Basically understanding how a group works” (librarian, case study)

“Preparation times varies, and is difficult to find the time, but the more I lead these events, the easier it becomes.” (librarian, professional survey)

- 6.66 Preparation time was a key issue, with many leaders (particularly those with less experience) noting that they do not have adequate time. Nursery staff, in particular, commented that extended nursery hours has resulted in less time to plan and prepare activities, including Bookbug. In response, several practitioners spoke about preparing sessions on their days off or in their lunch hour. In some

areas, it appeared that there were core staff who led Bookbug. Whilst most staff were happy with this arrangement, in some cases this resulted in those staff feeling pressures, particularly when colleagues expressed a disinterest or reluctance to support these activities.

6.67 Some areas reported that they were undergoing, or planning, re-structuring of library services to integrate with generic customer services. This had introduced concerns around the staffing of Bookbug Sessions, since new staff transferred from other departments required support to ensure there were both comfortable and confident in taking Bookbug training and delivering Bookbug Sessions. As suggested in 6.59, the Session Leader's motivation and investment is highly important to quality.

6.68 Staffing levels within libraries, more generally, was an issue repeated across Scotland, with many reporting pressure in delivering day-to-day services, and a resultant squeeze on their ability to dedicate time to early literacy.

6.69 The main challenge for session leaders was engaging parents and carers in the sessions. Practitioners agreed that sometimes parents do not participate, and that this can be challenging, especially in large groups. It was suggested that some parents see Bookbug Sessions as their 'down time', and as something to entertain their children. Some practitioners had found some parents to be resistant to singing:

"The resistance from families is singing. We have some parents who absolutely, persistently, will not sing. And what do you do about that?" (family support worker, case study)

"Some parents find it difficult to engage with children – they treat the session as a chance for catch-up with friends whilst children sing." (session leader, professional survey)

"Many parents feel embarrassed to sing in front of others and some see Bookbug as just another club" (session leader, professional survey)

6.70 More generally, practitioners found large groups difficult to engage, likening their role to that of a comedian or performer:

"I have respect for comedians now. It is a live performance, and you can feel when you are losing the crowd!" (session leader, case study)

"It is me with jazz hands, it is the most confident version of yourself" (session leader, case study)

6.71 We observed practitioners' strategies for managing challenging behaviour. For example, one practitioner gave the most active child the job of handing out and collecting toys. In another area, a reading tent and drawing activities were available to those children who did not wish to participate. Space had an important role to play. In those areas where space was more confined, adults had

to make a greater effort at managing and containing children's behaviour and physical movement.

The effect of Bookbug Sessions on parents and children

Parents' views on the impact of Bookbug Sessions

6.72 Parents interviewed by telephone and in the case study areas identified several ways in which Bookbug Sessions have contributed to their child's learning and development. Key areas mentioned (which are discussed in more detail below) include:

- Learning new songs and rhythms
- Learning new words and phrases
- Applying new learning to other aspects of life (for example through play)
- New social interactions with peers and adults
- Establishing routines
- Introducing turn taking, sharing

6.73 Most obviously, parents reported that they had learnt new songs which they continued to sing at home:

"when we go home and sing the songs in the car she knows them and knows all the actions" (parent, telephone interview)

"we sing the songs on the way to sessions, and continue on the way home!" (parent, case study)

6.74 Parents also believed that Bookbug Sessions helped to develop their child's speech and language:

"I just thought that that really brought him on with his confidence and his talking" (parent, telephone interview)

"I came because he didn't have many words, I've been coming for a year now and I can see the different in his language, he is mouthing out the words of the songs and he is using words he has never used before" (parent, case study)

6.75 A key theme within the parent interview data is that Bookbug Sessions are regarded as being a good context for babies and children to learn about the norms of social interaction: listening, taking turns, talking to adults, watching other children. The following quotations illustrate this point:

"once he settled down, he was starting to get a bit closer to playing with other children and learning, I think listening, he did learn to listen quite well, so yeah I think he did gain a few core skills from having to go to them" (parent, telephone interview)

"being able to mix with the other kids, learning a wee bit of patience because she couldn't control it" (parent, telephone interview)

- 6.76 Parents also felt that children benefited from the structured, yet flexible, Bookbug model of delivery. Many parents cited Bookbug as being part of their “routine”, and as something their children found familiar and comfortable:

“I like the structure and the routine ... It is the one time of the week that he gets this” (parent, case study)

“We’ve been going to [area] since she was a few weeks old. She really enjoys it and because it’s been the same people who’ve been doing it, every time she goes now she knows who they are and she’s comfortable” (parent, case study)

- 6.77 Some parents felt that going along to Bookbug Sessions increased their confidence in singing at home with their babies and children, and that observing their children’s positive response to singing and rhyming has encouraged them to do it more often. For example, one parent commented:

“now I’ve been through the bags and been to the sessions I can see how excited my daughter gets about it and I think that’s kind of what encourages me to do more of it...she just loves it, absolutely loves it” (parent, telephone interview)

- 6.78 Learning new songs was seen as particularly beneficial for those parents for whom English is an additional language. Professionals emphasised that they had observed clear examples of increased confidence of parents and improved socialisation of children with EAL. Parents interviewed agreed, noting that they felt that Bookbug Sessions had provided a means of integrating themselves and their children within the local community:

“For us it was a lot about integration here. [It was about] going and meeting other mums who have the same aged kids, and learning the nursery rhymes that we didn’t know before” (parent, telephone interview)

- 6.79 Parents also reported putting into practice new play ideas that they had seen modelled by Bookbug Session leaders at home:

“things like Old Macdonald, getting out the toys and acting them as puppets, things that you’d think would be natural and normal were things that I hadn’t really thought about and it was like ‘oh, I’ll do that at home” (parent, telephone interview)

“She’s given me ideas as well you know [...] like she has a wee spider in the bag and you know I could get him to take it out the bag and play a game with it...just things that you never think of doing with them, it’s just something different” (parent, telephone interview)

- 6.80 Parents also described, very clearly, the social benefits of coming to Bookbug stating that it helps them “get out of the house”, establish routines, and have an “opportunity to meet other adults”:

“I absolutely love it, it’s a great idea, and a lovely way to meet other mums, it’s a really nice social thing as well, children benefit from singing, and the enthusiasm from the staff” (parent, case study)

Professionals' views on the impact of Bookbug Sessions on parents and children

6.81 Professionals, like parents and carers, saw Bookbug Sessions as delivering important social benefits (see table 6.7). The professional survey found that the large majority of respondents saw Bookbug as being extremely beneficial in providing children the opportunity to have fun and bond/interact with others. Closely connected was agreement from a large proportion of professionals that Bookbug Sessions supported confidence building and language development. Fewer professionals felt that the benefits of Bookbug extended to encouraging library use and book borrowing, although this includes respondents delivering sessions outwith library settings. Nonetheless, it remains an important challenge for Scottish Book Trust to ensure this link is maintained, particularly given the desire to make reading a life-long activity.

6.82 Similar views (see table 6.8) were expressed in relation to the benefits of sessions to parents and carers. Most regarded sessions as a fun, sociable activities, which can contribute to positive reading practices at home. Again, the benefits to libraries and book borrowing were expressed less strongly.

Table 6.7: Professionals' views on benefits of Bookbug session to children (1 not beneficial at all, 10 extremely beneficial)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total no.
Interaction with peers	3%	0%	0%	1%	1%	3%	6%	19%	9%	58%	297
Language development	3%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	9%	15%	70%	298
Increased confidence	3%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	5%	14%	16%	60%	298
Bonding / interaction	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%	14%	15%	63%	298
Fun	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	8%	14%	73%	298
Encourage library use	2%	1%	0%	2%	5%	5%	11%	17%	13%	43%	297
Encourage borrowing	2%	1%	2%	2%	7%	8%	12%	14%	14%	37%	297

Source: Professional survey

Table 6.8: Professionals' views on benefits of Bookbug session to parents and carers (1 not beneficial at all, 10 extremely beneficial)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total no.
Meet new people	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%	4%	10%	11%	15%	56%	297
Fun	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%	2%	9%	12%	12%	61%	298
Encourages use of books & rhymes at home	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	7%	13%	17%	58%	298
Increases parent confidence with book / reading	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	5%	14%	18%	56%	298
Encourage library use	2%	1%	1%	2%	6%	6%	10%	16%	16%	39%	297
Encourage borrowing	2%	1%	2%	2%	6%	8%	12%	15%	16%	34%	297

Source: Professional survey

6.83 Session leaders were also keen to share their observations on the effect sessions had had on families. A key theme was that professionals observed or received feedback on children who attended on a regular basis becoming more confident, and gaining the skills necessary for nursery and school:

“A lot of the feedback we get shows that children, after coming to sessions for a while, often settle down and understand what is coming next and it helps them concentrate.” (librarian, professional survey)

“Over the years I have found big changes in most of the children attending Bookbug Sessions and with their parents. When some initially start to come both can be shy and some parents feel a bit uncomfortable to join in, however after a few sessions or more I have noticed the children interact more freely and their speech has become clearer.” (senior librarian, professional survey)

“There was one girl, she hardly spoke at all, she sat on her mum’s lap all po-faced and then all of a sudden she just started joining in. They are taking it in even if it doesn’t look like it.” (librarian, case study)

- 6.84 Several examples were also provided of children developing their literacy and numeracy as a direct result of Bookbug Sessions: for example, learning to recite Bookbug songs and rhymes, or having conversations with staff about the sessions:

“[Bookbug Sessions] encourage experimentation [with] language in songs, it allows children to add to songs. The lyrics evokes a response from even the most quiet child - they start to talk about the patterns, movement and become more engaged.” (adult learning assistant, professional survey)

- 6.85 Similar views were expressed in relation to parents. Professionals noted that parents gradually grow in confidence after attending regularly, and reported that some parents’ resistance to participating did weaken:

“We see a big difference in parents from the first few weeks of attending a group where they appear to struggle with the Bookbug part of the session, often shy or uncertain of what to do etc. After a few weeks we begin to see them becoming more confident, joining in, and in some groups after continual Bookbug input, can help the parents to lead certain sections of a session e.g. a volunteer parent to read the book to the group” (early years practitioner, professional survey)

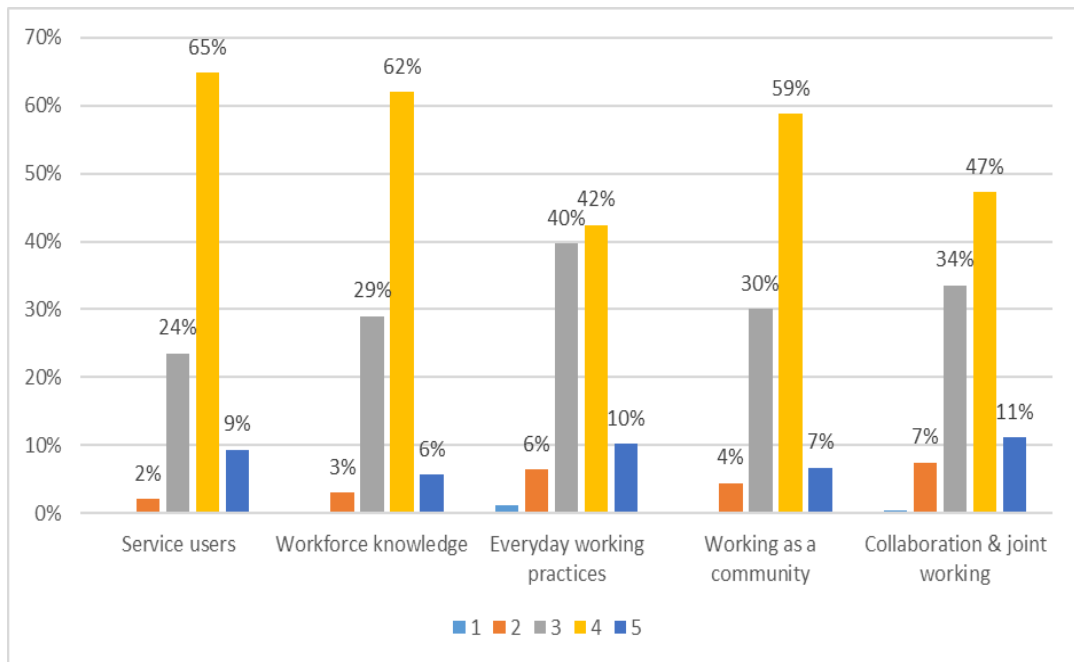
- 6.86 Many practitioners provided examples of parents making new friends as a direct result of attending Bookbug Sessions, and noted that many parents combine sessions with social activities:

“I strongly agree that Bookbug Sessions play not only an important part of parenting but also contribute to good socialisation skills. I have noticed many friendships (parent and toddlers) are formed at our Bookbug Sessions and many young mums now leave together to have lunch afterwards.” (senior librarian, professional survey)

Effect of sessions on professionals’ knowledge, skills and practice

- 6.87 Finally, we asked professionals about the impact that sessions have had on their own knowledge, skills and practices. It was generally agreed that Bookbug Sessions were hugely beneficial to those attending (as discussed previously) and members of staff. Scottish Book Trust training in particular was cited as positively contributing to workforce knowledge on the evidence supporting book sharing. Figure 6.4 shows perceived moderate impact across a wide range of areas.

Figure 6.4: Impact of Bookbug Sessions on different aspects of organisation



Source: Professional survey

Note: 1 negative impact, 2 small negative impact, 3 no impact, 4 small positive impact, 5 large positive impact

- 6.88 Professionals repeatedly offered examples of collaborative and innovative practice that aimed to get more families involved in book sharing generally and the Bookbug programme specifically. While some initiatives were more strategic, others relied on individual practitioners making connections with others in different roles and working together to meet the needs of a particular group of families:

“I worked very closely with my local library on a small initiative. Many of the families with whom I work within my project love Bookbug activities at home or in our drop-in group. However, they were not attending Bookbug Sessions in their local community independently from our group. I liaised with my local library who were fantastic in opening the library half an hour earlier to run a 'closed' Bookbug Session for six weeks for families who work within our service. Some of these families often find large groups daunting. This was really successful and I am so glad I worked in partnership with my local library to offer this to families, all of whom gave very positive feedback” (play worker, professional survey)

- 6.89 Some practitioners argued that the sessions were having a positive impact on public perceptions of libraries:

“They (the sessions) demystify libraries for some (not nearly enough, alas) parents who would otherwise never set foot in a library.” (writer, professional survey)

“Of course it’s about literacy and getting them to read early but it’s also about getting communities together, getting parents to have quality time with their child and it gets everyone in to see the library. [Once they come to the Bookbug Session] they see that the library isn’t that dark boring dowdy place any more, it’s a place to have adventures.” (librarian, case study)

6.90 Others argued that the Bookbug programme offers further potential for encouraging library membership and book borrowing that, at present, has not been fully exploited. Nonetheless, it was clear that Bookbug was sustaining footfall in some libraries, and encouraging some families who otherwise would not use the library to visit. It was noted that much of that potential lies in the ability of the session leader to motivate parents and children to borrow. However, several professionals noted that staff limitations mean there can be limited opportunity for session leaders to interact with attendees after the session.

Concluding thoughts

6.91 In this chapter, we have described practitioners' involvement in and families' awareness and attendance of Bookbug Sessions, providing a detailed discussion of inclusion in particular. The chapter highlights good levels of awareness of Bookbug Sessions and high levels of demand (often exceeding current services, such that balancing supply and demand within the available resources is a persistent challenge). In our discussion of Bookbug Sessions we have described reasonable consistency, and also areas for development such as encouraging book borrowing and library membership at the end of the session, community consultation or neighbourhood mapping and addressing the gender imbalance amongst session leaders. The importance of session leaders' practice was highlighted in parents' experiences of Bookbug Sessions, underlining the continued importance of staff commitment, motivation, training and support. Pressures on the library service in particular pose risks, discussion of which is continued in chapter seven.

6.92 We also noted the impact of local context on this issue. Rural areas, in particular, was highlighted as having latent demand (that is demand that services are unable to satisfy). This was due to a variety of issues including insufficient staffing, lack of training and ability to travel / access provision.

6.93 In this chapter we have provided qualitative evidence of the impact of Bookbug Sessions, adding to the sparse literature in this area (see chapter two). Professionals' accounts indicate the contribution of Bookbug to their knowledge of the benefits of book sharing (through Scottish Book Trust training), collaborative projects and changing public perceptions of libraries. The contribution of Bookbug to workforce development specifically is considered in the following chapter.

7 The contribution of Bookbug to workforce development, practice and strategy

Key points

- Training and skills development is a key part of spreading the Bookbug messages and effectively delivering the programme. Overall, professionals valued the training and found it to be useful, particularly in refreshing their knowledge of the programme and in raising confidence in their delivery. Some would appreciate opportunities for local conversations focused on sharing practice and local service development.
- Some session leaders had not received recent training which may create difficulties in session quality (as indicated in chapter six, the qualities and practice of the session leader are highly significant to enjoyment and attendance of sessions).
- Practitioners saw the Bookbug messages as being integrated with or complementary to the main body of their practice. The idea of Bookbug being a flexible 'tool' supporting work with families was often repeated; this work could move in different directions.
- Although practitioners agreed that more must be done to engage with families facing barriers to accessing services, almost three quarters of respondents believed that the Bookbug programme allowed them to reach families that they otherwise would not.
- It was largely agreed that Bookbug helps and supports professionals to meet their strategic aims and get their messages across to families and, correspondingly, that it is a good strategic fit for their organisations.
- All co-ordinators brought enthusiasm and commitment to their role, although the time allocated and organisation of the role varied across authorities, as did strategic support for the programme, creating mediating factors. Resources were repeatedly described as being a limiting factor.
- Overall, professionals felt that when gifting, health visitors and nursery staff could make stronger links with library services and Bookbug Sessions. The benefits of Bookbug were suggested by some to be cumulative for families engaging with the different aspects of the programme.
- Professionals were keen to praise Scottish Book Trust staff for the support that they had received, and for their dedication in promoting early literacy.

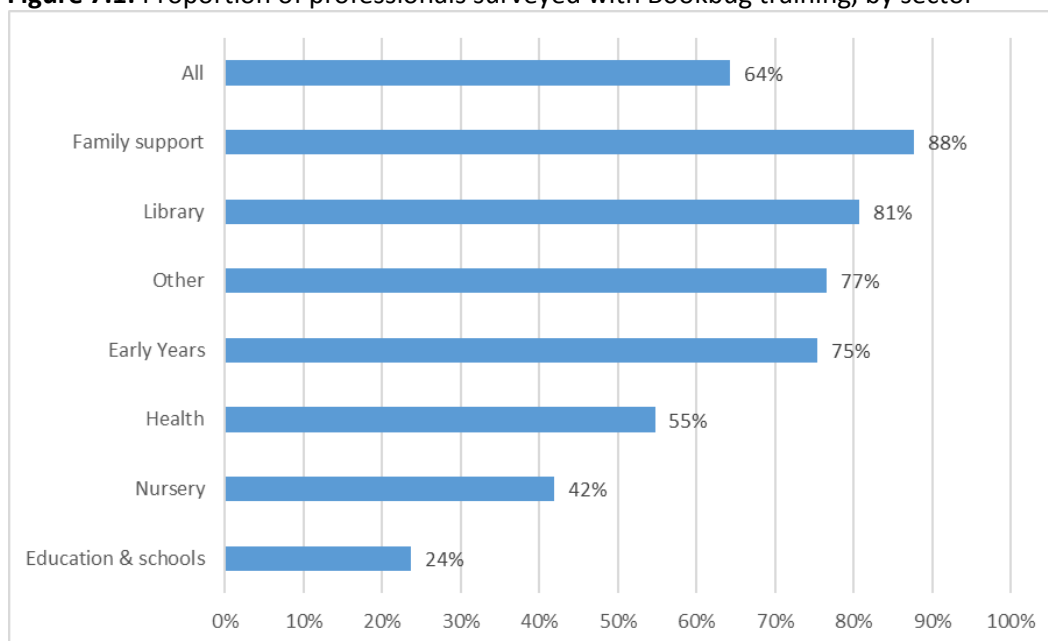
Introduction

- 7.1 In the final evidence chapter, we discuss the contribution of Bookbug to workforce development, practice and strategy (chapter two considers how the programme contributes to national policy). Here we look at Bookbug's contribution as a whole programme, considering first the impact of its training programme. We move on to discuss the extent to which Bookbug supports local, strategic objectives, and complements the existing roles and responsibilities of those delivering the programme. It concludes by reflecting on the links between the different parts of the project.

Training and skills

- 7.2 Training and skills development is the main way in which Scottish Book Trust equip professionals from a variety of roles and settings to understand the Bookbug messages, and effectively deliver Bookbug through high quality and consistent gifting practices and session delivery. As discussed in section 3.19, Scottish Book Trust offer many different types of training (at the time of reporting, 10 different training courses were being delivered across multiple locations and sectors). Those answering the survey were responding in relation to the training they had received.
- 7.3 Overall 64% (403) of the professionals consulted in the survey had received Bookbug training. However, this varied considerably according to individual role. Those delivering Bookbug in the Home and those *leading* Bookbug Sessions had the highest training levels, with 98% and 90% respectively reporting training (at some point in the past). The majority of those co-ordinating Bookbug locally (85%) had received training, although this was lower (69%) for those with a more general management or strategic role in delivering Bookbug. Individuals with strategic responsibility who did have training emphasised the positive benefits it had, and is therefore an area that could be targeted in the future. The lowest level of training reported was for those gifting Bookbug Bags to families (55%) and 'other' roles (41%). Other roles tended to include those helping or supporting session delivery, or working in specialist areas (such as foster care or adoptions services, or story telling).
- 7.4 Across sectors, training was highest amongst those working in family support or library services and lowest in nurseries and health services: a finding which reflects the type and frequency of training offered by Scottish Book Trust. The type of training accessed corresponds broadly to an individual's role and sector, although nurseries were more likely to have engaged in a diverse selection of training, reflecting the various roles and types of organisation within this sector.

Figure 7.1: Proportion of professionals surveyed with Bookbug training, by sector



Source: Professional survey (n=627)

- 7.5 As shown in Table 7.1, the main motivation for attending training was to ‘gain confidence in delivering Bookbug’. This was mentioned by attendees who were updating their skills (through leader top-up training), and those undertaking training for the first time. This corresponds to interviews with staff emphasising the importance for session leaders to have self-confidence and the ability to ‘perform’. Motivation for those already delivering sessions or gifting bags was to update or ‘freshen up’ their existing training, gain new ideas and working practices. Rather fewer saw the training as a means to ‘understand the benefits of book gifting and sharing in early years’ and to ‘better understand the benefits of song and rhyme in the early years’. This corresponded to interviews with professionals who suggests that this is knowledge that is already acquired through more general professional training. However, those who attended training emphasised that while they may not gain ‘new’ knowledge, Scottish Book Trust training is successful in refreshing knowledge, prompting reflection on existing practices, and supporting the development of new approaches.
- 7.6 Comments by Bookbug Co-ordinators and those in managerial positions emphasised the importance of Bookbug training as a way of keeping new and existing staff ‘creative’, ‘fresh’ and ‘motivated’.

Table 7.1: Motivation for attending training

Reason	Number	Percentage
Gain confidence in delivering Bookbug	230	57%
Update training & skills	206	51%
To understand benefits of song & rhyme in early years	149	37%
CPD opportunity	137	34%
Required by organisation	130	32%
To understand benefits of book gifting / sharing in early years	91	23%
Other	31	8%

Source: Professional survey (n=403)

Impact of training on professional capacity, knowledge, skills and attitudes

- 7.7 Training supports professionals in developing their knowledge, skills and attitudes relevant to the Bookbug programme. Almost all of the professionals surveyed spoke about the training in a positive and enthusiastic way and overwhelmingly found the training useful, 72% described it as ‘very useful’ and 22% as ‘fairly useful’. Key points were that training is of a very high quality; that the trainers are welcoming and supportive; that it provides a forum for sharing experiences; and that it helps to build confidence:

“The Bookbug training is fantastic, It is always very upbeat, well-delivered and relevant. I have really enjoyed the sessions I have attended” (Early years, professional survey)

“Scottish Book Trust training is always inspirational and informative. The trainers are so enthusiastic and knowledgable” (library, professional survey)

- 7.8 Overall the data suggest that the majority of professionals already come to training with some understanding of the benefits of book sharing. With only a small number of exceptions, professionals interviewed had strong awareness of the Bookbug messages, and were able to articulate the programme’s key aims. However, the majority felt training had ‘refreshed’ their understanding of the programme and its benefits, enhanced their knowledge and skills, and raised their confidence in their role. The word cloud in Figure 7.2 reflects the positive reaction of professionals towards Bookbug training.

- 7.12 ‘Train the trainer’ training, and the local training evolving from this, offers some possibility for these local conversations to happen. However, it appeared that professionals wished for more dedicated time to share practice, discuss approaches and plan service developments – issues not necessarily fitting into conventional training, even of the type run by peers. It was noted that regional meetings (involving co-ordinators) and shared practice meetings (with all Bookbug practitioners) do take place (see section 3.10 for more detail). However, these do not take place consistently across Scotland, and may not include all front-line practitioners. Some areas had begun (or were planning) their own shared practice meetings (independently from Scottish Book Trust) between session leaders, an approach which was considered to be yielding benefits:

“Within our area we have had Bookbug sharing days, where we swap ideas, song, rhymes. I have found this very beneficial as everyone has little difference in the songs they sing and actions rhymes etc. It’s good to get a different perspective” (professional survey).

- 7.13 While many made requests for more training across their area, others were keen to emphasise that they were highly committed to Bookbug but that services, and teams, were understaffed. This – rather than training provision – was the core issue in terms of quality delivery. A small number of respondents highlighted the possibility of small groups of parents being trained to support and enhance session provision (especially in nurseries).

Bookbug’s relationship to existing policy and practice

Bookbug programme’s relationship to individual practice

- 7.14 The majority of professionals saw the Bookbug programme and messages as integrated with their role and complementary to existing practices. As the professionals’ comments below describe, Bookbug was commonly discussed as being part of their everyday practice. This was especially true for health visitors:

“now Bookbug is just something that we do. It is not seen as an addition. We are not just mentioning it, we are modelling it” (health visitor, case study)

“Yes, the Bookbug messages are consistent with other messages that health visitors would be delivering anyway, on speech and language development, brain development, bonding, attachment. I feel that Bookbug is a really good tool for delivering those messages.” (health visitor, case study)

- 7.15 As touched on in the previous two chapters, the notion of Bookbug as a ‘tool’ was mentioned repeatedly: helping to facilitate, support and enable quality, family reading practices. In line with some of the literature discussed in chapter two, the Bookbug model was described as being most beneficial in supporting families to develop their own reading practices, rather than seeking to impose or dictate a particular type of behaviour or technique:

“Bookbug is always the starting point. It’s not an extra, but a tool to start things off” (health visitor, case study)

“Sometimes you don’t want to be in a position where you are treating parents as stupid or telling them what they don’t know. Role modelling means I’m not saying it directly, ‘this is how you read to your child’” (nursery, case study)

“For me, it is just another strand to my toolkit. It is one of the easiest things to engage with parents on because children just love it” (nursery, case study)

7.16 Professionals were not only aware of Bookbug’s key messages, but saw the Bookbug approach as a resource; supporting and enabling them in their role and providing a non-threatening ‘way in’ to engaging parents in books, songs and rhymes (see Table 7.2). Although professionals largely agreed that more work was needed to engage with families who face barriers in accessing Bookbug, almost three quarters agreed that the programme allowed them to reach families that otherwise they would not, while 60% agreed that it helped increase the numbers using core services. This latter point was largely made by libraries (see table 7.3).

Table 7.2: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about Bookbug’s impact overall on your professional practice?

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Bookbug helps me...				
Understand role of book sharing in child development	61%	30%	9%	1%
Establish positive relationships with parents/carers	63%	30%	6%	1%
Signpost families to other services	54%	33%	12%	1%
Have conversations with parents/carers about child’s development	59%	31%	9%	1%
Understand impact of home environment on children’s learning	55%	32%	11%	1%
Link into the Bookbug community	57%	33%	8%	2%

Source: Professional survey

Table 7.3: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about Bookbug’s impact on your organisation

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Bookbug helps my organisation to...				
Increase number of families using core services	60%	25%	11%	4%
Reach disadvantaged children & their families	73%	17%	7%	4%
Provides a resource to engage with families on wider issues	76%	15%	5%	3%

Source: Professional survey

Bookbug programme’s relationship to local organisational policy

7.17 Professionals agreed overwhelmingly on the benefits that Bookbug brought to their organisation, and emphasised its complementary nature. It was largely agreed that Bookbug helps and supports professionals to meet their strategic aims

and get their messages across to families (see Table 7.4). Correspondingly, professionals responding to the survey generally saw Bookbug as having a good strategic fit. 79% of professionals felt that Bookbug contributed in tackling inequalities between parents and 87% in building strong communities. Some professionals – mainly those in library service – were unaware of the SHANARRI (safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible and included) indicators.

Table 7.4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the Bookbug programme?

Bookbug is...	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Beneficial to my organisation	99%	<1%	<1%	0%
Complements the work of my organisation	97%	2%	1%	0%
An unnecessary burden for my organisation	4%	4%	92%	0%
Creates staffing capacity issues for my organisation	28%	15%	57%	0%
Creates storage capacity issues for my organisation	24%	15%	60%	1%
Helps us to get our message across to parents/carers	97%	2%	1%	0%
Helps my organisation meet its strategic aims	89%	9%	2%	1%
Encourages collaboration and joint working with other service providers	73%	19%	4%	4%
Helps achieve our organisation's outcomes	84%	12%	2%	3%

Source: Professional survey

Table 7.5: To what extent does the Bookbug programme support the following wider social and policy objectives?

Bookbug supports...	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don't know
Local strategic priorities for the early years	96%	4%	0%	1%
Getting it Right for Every Child	93%	4%	1%	2%
SHANARRI well-being indicators	75%	8%	0%	17%
Tackling inequalities between parents	79%	15%	2%	4%
Improving families health, happiness and well-being	91%	6%	1%	2%
Building strong, resilient and supportive communities	87%	13%	0%	0%

Source: Professional survey

The important role of the Bookbug Co-ordinator

- 7.18 Notably, among the most important people in delivering the Bookbug programme are those not employed by Scottish Book Trust. The Bookbug Co-ordinator is one such role, and takes on a significant level of responsibility in ensuring quality and consistency:

“Our co-ordinators are among the most dedicated and knowledgeable people but they are stretched and under threat.” (SBT staff member, interview)

- 7.19 All co-ordinators expressed dedication, commitment and enthusiasm for their role, yet many also commented on the pressures and the difficulties involved in balancing Bookbug delivery with other parts of their post. There were also notable variations in the role of the Bookbug Co-ordinator, with some authorities having dedicated more resources to this role than others. Co-ordinators across Scotland spent on average 30% of their working hours on Bookbug activities, although this proportion ranged from five to 80%. Additionally, some areas benefited from having more staff involved in Bookbug co-ordination, an attribute which was not necessarily related to the size of the population or geography of the authority:

“It is often difficult to continue to support and ensure quality standards of gifting as just one person - more resources or support to carry out this role would greatly benefit the initiative.” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, professional survey)

“I am lucky in so much as I have a member of staff to support me in the administration of the Bookbug co-ordination. [...] situations may change, and to be honest I would probably answer differently about staffing capacity. Bookbug would definitely be a priority, however having two people involved makes a great difference in my experience ... I hope this will continue...” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, professional survey)

- 7.20 For co-ordinators in particular the presence of strategic support for Bookbug at a local level was valued, and where this was found wanting, weaknesses in delivery and impact were identified.

“I think we have suffered from Bookbug not being at the heart of the Early Years Strategy, we are trying to get across the impact of Bookbug but this requires support from senior management level.” (Bookbug Co-ordinator)

The Bookbug community

- 7.21 Just over half (52%) of the respondents in the survey stated that the Bookbug programme had resulted in them, or their organisation, working with external partners (such as third sector partners, volunteers, schools, nurseries). Even more, shown in Table 7.4, believed that the programme *encouraged* collaboration. The case studies revealed many positive examples of joint working framed around the Bookbug model. At the same time, these were often limited to connections within the local authority, and third sector partnerships or collaborations with private nurseries were less frequent. Regular quality partnership working between libraries and nurseries, and library outreach in community settings were the most

commonly mentioned areas that professionals wished to develop. Capacity and resources were considered a key barrier to developing these further:

“it [outreach] feels like a luxury... I don’t think it is a luxury, it’s geared to people who really need the service, who we need to reach. You have to do outreach work first at then bring them in I really don’t have the time” (librarian, case study)

7.22 Almost all respondents stated that they understood the aim of Bookbug, and almost four fifths (79%) felt involved in the programme. Reflecting evidence from the case studies, lower proportions of professionals felt that Scottish Book Trust understood their role, or felt part of a Bookbug ‘community’ (Table 7.6) – although these responses were still in the majority.

Table 7.6: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Don’t know
I understand the aims of Bookbug	97%	2%	0%	0%
I feel involved in Bookbug	79%	17%	4%	1%
SBT understands my work and role in Bookbug	58%	30%	5%	7%
I get all the support that I need from SBT	61%	31%	5%	2%
I feel part of a Bookbug community	60%	32%	7%	1%

Source: Professional survey

7.23 Those working within the nursery sector were far more likely to state that they did not know whether Scottish Book Trust understood their work and role in the programme. Nursery staff were most likely to disagree with the statement, ‘I get all the support I need from SBT’ (13% disagree) and ‘I feel part of a Bookbug community’ (13% disagree). Those working in libraries and family support were the sectors most likely to ‘feel part of a Bookbug community’.

7.24 Part of the notion of ‘community’ was formed around the strength of the brand: professionals expressed confidence in the Bookbug mascot and resources. Overall, it was a programme that they felt extremely proud to be a part of, and they were keen to use all aspects of the programme in their practice wherever possible. They also recognised that they were part of a community of professionals using the model.

7.25 Professionals not only spoke of Bookbug as providing a framework within which individuals and organisation could come to together, but as helping build links and local communities of practice:

“Bookbug has helped us build links with our community and key partners. It has helped us develop an ‘identity’ in the community” (professional survey)

“...the Bookbug community, provides the base to bring people together” (case study, nursery worker)

- 7.26 Outreach was regarded as the key means through which to support more vulnerable families' progress from home to library. However, outreach was not being used to its full potential, an issue in part related to funding and capacity issues. It was suggested that libraries have limited capacity to make strong links with families so making collaboration with other agencies is central to success.

Connectivity between components of the programme

- 7.27 As discussed in chapter four, there is an association between gifting practices and impact: where families reported that professionals had spent time talking to them about the bag, showing them the contents, reading a story and talking about Bookbug Sessions, they were more likely to recall the message about book sharing, use the bag, and be aware of Bookbug Sessions. Professionals agreed that there was a cumulative impact of bags and sessions. So, while gifting the bags has a positive effect, this can be reinforced when accompanied by sessions, activities at nursery and events such as Bookbug Week or the First Minister's Reading Challenge:

"I think that gifting on its own gives benefits - but there are more benefits for babies/children and families who attend Bookbug Sessions - even more reason for us to provide Bookbug Sessions in all libraries." (Bookbug Co-ordinator, professional survey)

"Those who access the Bookbug Sessions gain huge benefits, but those who just receive the bags but do not attend any song and rhyme sessions have a much diminished benefit." (early years, professional survey)

- 7.28 Overall professionals felt that gifting, both by health visitors and nurseries, could make stronger links to sessions, and to the library. Although this view was particularly strong within libraries, several nurseries and, to a lesser extent, health visitors felt these connections could be established. This points to the importance of working across sectors to address the needs of particular groups, rather than maintaining cultural and organisational silos:

"Gifting is not always leading to the development of a link to the library, this needs planning more. Times of sessions need considered, days of week and so on to maximise involvement. We need to reach out from the library more and make much more of the resources given out with events locally linked" (early years, professional survey)

"I don't feel it always establishes a link to the library. For some of our families who are more socially isolated we find they are still not able to make the next step to go into the library or to access public Bookbug Sessions." (third sector, professional survey)

Barriers to impact

- 7.29 Professionals participating in all aspects of the evaluation voiced concerns about capacity and budgets:

"It is an excellent programme but it will become harder to deliver within shrinking budgets and staffing" (Bookbug Co-ordinator, professional survey)

“I think that the Bookbug programme is fantastic and I am so pleased to be involved. There are challenges including staffing capacity issues and storage capacity issues. In our current economic times staffing capacity issues are no surprise but we must press on to do our best in the circumstances” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, professional survey)

“Things are bad and things will need to be dropped. I want you to know that when this happens Bookbug will be the last thing we drop, that's how much value I place on the sessions” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, professional survey)

- 7.30 Notably there were distinct sectoral responses to competing demands on resources. Library staff, overall, were the strongest advocates for the Bookbug programme, articulating clear and tangible links between Bookbug and sustaining libraries. Health visitors did value Bookbug and saw it as complementary to their work – however, confirming evidence presented in chapter three health visitors were most likely to be discussed in the context of a sector dealing with growing responsibilities in their daily practice. This was voiced by health visitors, professionals in other sectors, and recognised by Scottish Book Trust staff:

“the role of the Health Visitor is increasing more and more and more, so we're not the only organisation asking them to do things ... I think they're being pulled in many directions” (SBT staff member, interview)

“I would love to have more time to devote to this but we are swamped with new responsibilities at the moment” (health visitor, case study).

- 7.31 Unsurprisingly, in nurseries book sharing, singing and rhyming were more likely to be part of daily practice. Bookbug was positively valued where it provided nurseries with activities and resources to use, and as a tool for making connections between nursery and home life. It was often this latter element (and the associated engagement of parents) that was described as most challenging, and in several examples, not an issue that was prioritised. Again, extended nursery hours and pressure on staff resulted in core nursery hours being the main concern.
- 7.32 Professionals were committed, but restricted by resources and capacity. Therefore, they felt that it was important for Scottish Book Trust to have realistic expectations about what they could and could not deliver:

“I think the Scottish Book Trust would be dismayed as I am how little time or value we are allowed to spend on delivering the Bookbug Bags to children and parents and believe me it is not for the want of trying.” (nursery, professional survey)

“All staff at SBT are wonderful, however I sometimes think that they don't have an understanding of the pressures on library authorities in terms of staffing budgets and all the other things we are trying to deliver.” (Bookbug Co-ordinator, professional survey)

Final message

- 7.33 The final and overarching message from the professionals to Scottish Book Trust was that Bookbug is an asset that families value. Professionals were also keen to voice the significant impacts that they believed the Bookbug programme had on

individual families. They were keen to praise the staff at Scottish Book Trust who they believed worked tirelessly to provide this resource:

"I have nothing but praise for the staff at SBT who are involved in the Bookbug Programme. They have been extremely helpful and knowledgeable since the programme started five years ago. I do hope the programme continues for many years to come as it is such an asset not only to the parents and children but also to the wider community."

"Bookbug is a brilliant resource. Families welcome it, without exception. Really innovative resource. Please keep it going!"

"The impacts are huge. I wish there was a way to make attendance at sessions compulsory"

- 7.34 Professionals were also deeply committed to delivering Bookbug, in spite of cuts in resources. Case studies provided examples of such commitment resulting in staff preparing and delivering Bookbug in their own time. Across Scotland, professionals were seeking more sustainable solutions.
- 7.35 In locations where libraries had become part of a community hub, there was emerging evidence that Bookbug, specifically, was contributing to the business model (for example, by encouraging footfall and use of facilities, such as cafes). Those working within this model agreed that libraries and leisure spaces can work symbiotically, if well planned and managed. Bookbug in other areas, was seeking sustainability, by evidencing the success of the model. In one area this involved extending the framework for use in a programme for older people. In other areas, Bookbug was being used in community spaces, outside the library. Overall, libraries were not – in the words of a practitioner – “precious about Bookbug”. Rather, there was a view that bringing Bookbug into other public spaces can be used to advertise the modern identity of the library. Others had begun to investigate the use of volunteers, typically parents, as a low cost means of delivery.
- 7.36 Overall, professionals agreed that there is a strong case for early investment in child literacy, and that Bookbug was an absolute priority for protection. As a universal programme, Bookbug has the potential to capture all families throughout a child’s early years. For some families, this might mean a major change in the quality of parent-child attachment or parental confidence. For others, it might be a small, but important, change such as a childminder singing a song while walking down the street, nursery staff attending more to children’s responses when reading a story, or a parent making time to read a story.

Concluding thoughts

- 7.37 In this chapter we have considered Bookbug training, how Bookbug complements existing practices and local strategic objectives, and how different elements in the programme interrelate. The emergent picture is one of highly valued training and resources, with Bookbug broadly complementing what practitioners are trying to achieve in their work overall. We have highlighted some possible areas for development, such as: providing opportunities for local discussion of Bookbug

amongst practitioners; improving take-up of training amongst session leaders; increasing community outreach and partnership working; and improving the links made in gifting to sessions and library services. In the next section of this report, we draw together the learning from all four data chapters to form realistic conclusions and recommendations for the service.

8 Conclusions and recommendations

8.1 Overall, the evaluation has found that the Bookbug programme is **high quality, understandable, transferable into different local settings, and hugely respected** by those involved. **Families and professionals value the Bookbug programme** and regard it as **having positive impact on families and the early years profession**, as outlined throughout this report.

8.2 In Chapter 1 we outlined the outcomes chain that Bookbug stakeholders developed to tell the story of the contribution that the Bookbug Programme makes to families and professionals. This story can be expressed as follows (see also Figure 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4):

- **What the Bookbug programme does:** The Bookbug programme comprises Bookbug Sessions, Bookbug Bags to all families in Scotland and ongoing targeted outreach for families who may face barriers to sharing books together. The programme also includes regular events for families, as well as support and training for professionals working in local communities.
- **Who with:** Free bags and sessions are available to every baby, toddler, three and five-year-old in Scotland, and their parents and carers in Scotland. The programme is delivered by staff working in early years settings.
- **How they react:** All families receive their Bookbug Bags and feel able to attend Bookbug Sessions, and families experiencing barriers to book sharing are reached through outreach services. Parents feel valued and supported by receiving the Bookbug Bags and attending Bookbug Sessions and, in turn, feel motivated to spend quality time with their children sharing books, songs and rhymes. Scottish Book Trust engages with all early years professionals, and works with them to embed Bookbug into everyday practice. Early years professionals see clear links between the Bookbug Programme and their own role, and recognise the added value that Bookbug can bring to their practice.
- **Why they learn and gain:** Bookbug practitioners recognise that parents have varying levels of knowledge about the importance of sharing books, songs and rhymes with their children from birth. For parents with an awareness of sharing books, songs and rhymes, Bookbug can remind parents, and prompt behaviour change. For parents less aware of the benefits of sharing books, songs and rhymes, Bookbug supports new knowledge and new behaviours. For all parents, engagement with Bookbug provides new knowledge about books, songs and rhymes, and new skills for using them in way that works for their own family.
- **What they do differently:** Families enjoy sharing books, songs and rhymes as a part of their everyday practices. Increasing numbers of children become library members and families enjoy visiting libraries. All professionals share key gifting messages consistently and model sharing books, songs and rhymes in their professional practice. Scottish Book Trust, professionals and parents work in partnership to ensure that children develop a love of books, songs and rhymes.
- **Final outcomes:** No child in Scotland will grow up without books and there will be Bookbug Sessions accessible to all families across Scotland. Songs, stories and rhymes will be an enjoyable part of everyday life for all families, as will local library services. Overall literacy in Scotland will improve and inequalities in attainment reduced.

Challenges, risks and assumptions

- 8.3 Inevitably there are factors identified by research participants which were thought to limit the impact and effectiveness of the programme. These challenges pose a risk to the narrative outlined above. The following sections outline these factors and offer a set of recommendations for Bookbug moving forward and, finally, a series of questions for Scottish Book Trust's ongoing consideration.

Strategic commitment and collaboration

- 8.4 The evaluation shows that at a local level the Bookbug Programme is most effective where there is strong strategic commitment; visible and adequately resourced leadership through the Bookbug co-ordinator; and a supported, trained and motivated community of Bookbug professionals. Risks occur when the capacity of the Bookbug co-ordinator is under-resourced, or where Bookbug becomes overly dependent on individuals championing the programme.
- 8.5 Examples of collaborative working across sectors demonstrated a range of innovative practices. There is potential for developing such work, and in so doing, improving strategic links between sectors. There was a strong case for Scottish Book Trust supporting the development of links between libraries and nurseries (with a focus on Explorer Bag gifting); and libraries and third sector organisations (with a focus on engaging libraries in outreach activities and embedding services in local communities).
- 8.6 Spaces for reflecting on practice and opportunities for multi-sector collaboration support communities of learning, and enable professionals to think about Bookbug as a programme (rather than focusing on their own part in isolation). However, such spaces were often restricted, or were limited to those in strategic or management positions. Fewer opportunities were available for frontline practitioners to discuss good practice and explore opportunities for programme development with colleagues.

Consistency and quality

- 8.7 There are opportunities for Scottish Book Trust to increase the consistency and quality of the programme. A key issue was variations in, and differing opinions on, the timing of Baby Bag gifting. It was also noted that while many early years professionals show and model the contents of Bookbug Bags, these practices are not fully embedded into everyday practice. Gifting advice – when used - was valued and useful however, awareness of the advice was low.
- 8.8 Messaging upon gifting the Explorer Bag was a further area requiring improvement, with the need for Scottish Book Trust to support nurseries and early years providers to engage parents being a priority. There was evidence of assumptions being made by professionals about whether a family required a gifting message. Lack of capacity and time pressures were thought to be factors which might result in practitioners adapting or limiting gifting practices to those families considered most vulnerable.

- 8.9 While training was well received, further work is required to ensure that Bookbug practitioners have up-to-date training. Rural areas should not be neglected in this regard. It is especially important to target early years professionals currently in training to deliver the message that Bookbug can support and add value to their work with parents, carers and children.

Widening benefits

- 8.10 While families and professionals articulated the range of impacts of the Bookbug Programme, there was nonetheless agreement that more could be done to ensure these benefits are reaching all families. ‘Disadvantaged’ families (normally described by practitioners as families living in areas of multiple deprivation) were commonly cited as those most likely not to engage with the mainstream Bookbug Programme. Lack of confidence, existing family reading practices and parental literacy and poor parental-child attachment were all considered as factors in this. Consequently, Bookbug Sessions were frequently described as being most popular with more affluent families, or those already actively sharing books, songs and rhymes with their child. Families experiences, however, cannot be determined by social class alone. Assumptions about family reading practices can mean that needs are overlooked, or specific groups are prioritised over others (without evidence to support such targeting).
- 8.11 Institutions can also act as barriers to engagement. Entrenched views about libraries can mean that some families are not prepared to visit, and many first time users were frequently described as not returning. This points to the need to make the ‘first library visit count’, as well as having quality outreach services which can support families until they are confident enough to come alone.
- 8.12 The structure of nurseries can also disincentivise parental engagement, with parents’ time in the nursery setting being limited to ‘drop off’ and ‘pick up’. Barriers for working parents are particularly evident since opportunities for involvement compete with other demands on time. While nurseries and early years settings are clearly committed to children’s learning in literacy, there are opportunities for further promoting parental involvement and engagement and, in turn, strengthening connections between learning in the home and in the early years setting. The Bookbug Programme is a means through which such connections can be made.
- 8.13 Some felt that provision of sessions was unequal for working parents, and in some areas there was demand for early evening and weekend sessions. Indeed, demand was reported as outstripping supply in many areas. Limited staffing levels and resources were preventing demand being met. Large sessions, in turn, can make sessions less inclusive for less confident families. Rural areas appeared to suffer the most in terms of meeting demand for sessions, with some areas reporting that sessions could not run due to the lack of trained staff.
- 8.14 Professionals emphasised that there was potential demand for Bookbug Sessions to be delivered in other languages (Arabic, Urdu, Mandarin, Bengali and Polish

were all mentioned). Others, however, expressed ambivalence about the value of such sessions since one of their key aims is to bring communities together and promote integration.

- 8.15 Fathers were underrepresented at sessions and were also the least likely to receive the gifting message. It was generally felt that there are cultural and social barriers to fathers attending Bookbug Sessions. While many felt that there was a need to engage fathers in different ways, there was also support for finding ways of making mainstream sessions more attractive.
- 8.16 Similarly, children with additional support needs were also underrepresented in sessions. Although professionals were aware of, and spoke positively of the 'touchy feely' books available, the needs of children with additional support needs were mostly discussed with respect to the Early Years Outreach programme.
- 8.17 Ten out of 32 local authorities run Gaelic Bookbug Sessions. Those delivering Gaelic Sessions emphasised that it is often the first time that families hear their language accepted in a public setting. Several parents mentioned that Gaelic Bags can be difficult to obtain.

Making the link between gifting, sessions and home

- 8.18 Gifting gives its own benefits, but these are maximised when combined with sessions. Gifting, in practice, does not make a strong enough link to sessions, and the library. There were also opportunities for improving the consistency and quality of joint working between nurseries and libraries in some areas, and for nurseries to increase parental engagement.
- 8.19 Many professionals felt that the bags were not the main way through which parents heard about sessions, and emphasised the need for improved local advertising and marketing. Parents were most likely to say that they heard about Bookbug Sessions by word of mouth or from their health visitor, with the latter being the most important in areas of deprivation.
- 8.20 Outreach activities were regarded as the key means through which to support more vulnerable families' progress from home to library. However, outreach was not being used to its full potential, an issue in part related to funding and capacity restrictions. It was suggested that libraries have limited capacity to make strong links with families, therefore making collaboration with other agencies is central to success.

Evidence and monitoring

- 8.21 Consistency and quality depends on robust evidence about how the Bookbug Programme is being delivered and received locally. Co-ordinators were collecting statistics for Scottish Book Trust, yet few areas reported systematically evaluating local impact. There was also an expressed lack of knowledge about the needs and demands of different groups, for example: working families, those living in deprived areas, bilingual households, fathers and families with children with

additional support needs and, more generally, those not attending Bookbug Sessions.

- 8.22 While mapping needs and demand is important, Scottish Book Trust have the ongoing challenge of managing quality control and at the same time, developing the programme's impact. Data collection on needs and demand should be undertaken in collaboration with local authority partners and mindful of the finite supply of resources available.

Resources and capacity

- 8.23 Early years professionals across all sectors were highly committed to Bookbug and were working hard to deliver the service locally. However, lack of capacity and resources placed pressure on individual workers and restricted time for collaboration, innovation and reflective practice. Many professionals within health visiting services, nurseries and libraries voiced concerns that their ability to show and model Bookbug Bag contents was constrained by a lack of time and resources.
- 8.24 For frontline staff, capacity issues resulted in wider role activities being cut or restricted (for example, the ability of libraries to undertake outreach). Several staff reported doing Bookbug sessions in their own time, or preparing for sessions at home.
- 8.25 This also meant that in some areas Bookbug Co-ordinators had limited time available to dedicate to Bookbug activities, which in turn has a knock-on effect on the effectiveness of the Bookbug community (for example, information not being communicated to staff, training opportunities being missed, opportunities for partnerships).

Recommendations

Strategic commitment and collaboration

- **Advocacy work in local authorities and cultural trusts:** Scottish Book Trust should use its advocacy approach to highlight the critical role of the Bookbug Co-ordinator, and the need for local authorities and cultural trusts to ensure adequate priority is given to the role. Evidence from the evaluation should be used to highlight the impact that cuts to the Bookbug programme might have on local authorities' ability to deliver national outcomes.
- **Space for sharing practice:** Scottish Book Trust should continue to support opportunities for shared practice, both regionally and locally. Front-line practitioners should be supported to create opportunities to meet and discuss Bookbug with others working locally. Shared practice opportunities should be cross-sectoral and multi-organisational. Rural areas, or single staffed venues, should be supported to share practice.

Consistency and quality

- **Awareness and use of gifting advice:** New ways of distributing the gifting advice should be considered. This should emphasise both the importance of the timing of gifting and the quality of gifting practices.

Build on high quality **training programme**:

- **For session leaders:** emphasise that a story shared at each session, that reference is made to Bookbug Bags in the sessions, and encourage session leaders to wear their Bookbug t-shirt when leading sessions. Session leaders should also make provision for ensuring 'latecomers' are welcomed, and that those attending first time are acknowledged and encouraged to come back. Sessions should also always encourage attendees to stay after the sessions to enjoy the library, and borrow books.
- **For gifters:** the quality of the gifting experience should be emphasised; for those gifting Explorer Bags, opportunities for parental engagement in the process should be emphasised and good practice examples shared.
- **Training in early years professional education:** This is a challenge given the breadth of professional disciplines, and diversity of 'routes' into professional training (especially within the nursery sector). We recommend a mapping exercise to identify the professional routes into employment for each sector, and across Scotland. The results should be used to target training resources on priority areas.
- **Gifting to babies:** Continue research into the most appropriate and timing for gifting the Baby Bag, and explore opportunities and challenges of working with families prenatally via the new Baby Box initiative.

Widening benefits

- **Support nursery providers to integrate Bookbug into nursery setting:** Gifting the Explorer Bag is an important opportunity to reinforce the Bookbug message. Scottish Book Trust should promote the benefits that Bookbug can offer to nursery practitioners (for example, as complementary to their existing practice and aims: as integrative to the inspection process by offering an opportunity to demonstrate parental engagement). Given the challenges expressed by nurseries, it may be useful to provide them with specific support about how to use the Bookbug programme to engage with parents in the form of a good practice guide including examples of innovative practice from across Scotland.
- **Tackle negative perceptions of libraries:** There is evidence that a small minority of families do not attend libraries due to negative (and often unfounded) perceptions of their local library space.
- **First visit count:** support local libraries to make every library visit positive and welcoming. Libraries may need support to consider how they ensure that they never leave people feeling vulnerable and/or excluded on this initial visit.
- **Practice inclusivity at sessions:** Whilst the majority of session leaders already do this, some parents are more likely to feel uncomfortable or unwelcome at sessions. This issue should be emphasised at training to ensure that session leaders are aware of who might feel vulnerable and are able to provide additional support.
- **Alternative venues for Sessions:** Work with partners to explore the possibility alternative opportunities for participation in Bookbug, such as community or public spaces, virtual Bookbug Sessions or mobile Bookbug Sessions (via van or playbus services). This would have particular benefit to areas of unexplained low demand, or rural areas where access and supply is an issue.

Making the link between gifting, sessions and home

- **Promote the Bookbug as a programme:** Scottish Book Trust advocacy and communication locally should promote Bookbug as a programme and as a potential 'community of

interest'. Trainees should be reminded of their part in the wider Bookbug community, and their responsibility in promoting the programme (i.e. gifters should have information on sessions and encourage families to attend; session leaders should be aware of bag contents and timing of gifting; all should be aware of partners delivering outreach).

- **Improve local marketing:** Families can only attend Bookbug Sessions if they know about them:
 - Gifters should always have current information about the location of local classes locally.
 - Social media is an important source of information about Bookbug for to parents. Scottish Book Trust should support Bookbug Co-ordinators to develop effective and up-to-date social media strategies.
 - Encourage local areas to include more young parents and fathers in their marketing materials, and ensure this is reflected in Scottish Book Trust materials.
 - Encourage Bookbug Co-ordinators to advertise Bookbug Sessions outside of standard locations. This could include play park display boards, shopping centres and dentist surgeries.
- **Information resource for specialist workers:** It may be useful to produce an information resource for those currently 'outside' the mainstream Bookbug community (e.g. in the third sector) with ideas about how they could engage with the Bookbug programme. This could include examples of innovative practice by, for example: foster parents; prison workers; speech and language therapists; those working with fathers, gypsy traveller communities or migrant families.

Information and monitoring

- **Improving communication flow:** Scottish Book Trust should support local areas to ensure clarity about what contact and support practitioners can expect to have from the co-ordinator. Data from the mapping exercise can be used to support this process. Other simple ideas include having a sticker on each box of Bookbug Bags with the name and contact details of the Bookbug Co-ordinator.
- **Local mapping of Bookbug:** Scottish Book Trust should consider ways of further supporting local authorities to map the Bookbug Programme locally. Such a mapping exercise would support Scottish Book Trust in identifying priority areas within the context of limited resources. This could focus on area differences such as levels of deprivation and / or differences between urban and rural locales. An initial mapping exercise could include:
 - a review of Bookbug Programme – who, what, where, how;
 - a review of logistics and current gifting practices;
 - demographics of those attending Bookbug Sessions (age, gender, ASN, English as an additional language, postcode and distance travelled);
 - location and timing of other similar early years activities; and
 - Bookbug's strategic contribution in local areas.
- **Evidence non-attendance:** Scottish Book Trust should provide advice to local co-ordinators on how to consult with families not currently attending Bookbug Sessions, to understand better why some families do not attend, and identify any potential barriers.

Resources and capacity

- **Advocacy work in local authorities and cultural trusts:** The mapping exercise outlined above should be used to target advocacy at chief executives, chairs and boards of trusts

and elected members within local authorities, emphasising the clear and positive evidence from this research.

- **Additional funding opportunities:** Many of the recommendations have the potential to put extra pressure on practitioners who are already struggling with a lack of capacity. We recommend that Scottish Book Trust support local authorities to look for alternative funding sources to support their Bookbug activities.
- **Develop a culture of shared practice:** We encourage Scottish Book Trust to give consideration to whether shared practice activities (national, regional and local) are as effective as possible. Co-ordinators have ongoing training needs and it may be useful to think about whether shared practice meetings could be more focused to include topics identified by this evaluation and by Scottish Book Trust and Bookbug Co-ordinators on an ongoing basis.
- **Disseminate evidence locally:** We recommend that Scottish Book Trust considers carefully how best to disseminate these research findings to decision makers, Bookbug Co-ordinators, local practitioners and parents. In particular, when presenting this evaluation to strategic decision-makers, it should be emphasised that there is a clear evidence base for the success of the programme. We see a possibility to position Bookbug as an established, flexible and transferable model that offers demonstrable benefits in the current difficult financial context.

Further Questions

8.26 All research raises as many new questions as it answers. We suggest that the inquiry represented by this evaluation continues after the report is published and offer the following questions to prompt thinking about unresolved issues raised in the evaluation:

- There are examples of practice where the Bookbug model is extended to other groups of people, such as older people. How should Scottish Book Trust engage with these initiatives and could this approach be supported?
- More research is required to understand the needs of specific groups, especially fathers, young parents, children with additional support needs, dual language families and parents working full-time. Better understanding will assist in prioritising resources.
- In some local areas, Bookbug Sessions are run by volunteers, most of whom first engaged with Bookbug as participating parents. Given the current capacity issues among professionals and the expressed benefits to volunteers, is this an approach that should be considered further as an option?
- What role can digital technology play in supporting the development of the Bookbug programme (for instance, on-line training, apps for digital devices, on-line resources for parents, centralised monitoring database, virtual Bookbug Sessions)?
- How might Scottish Book Trust collaborate with Every Child a Library Member to better understand how Bookbug is impacting on library use (and in particular impacting no only on library membership, but active library use)?
- How can Scottish Book Trust support local authorities to engage with families in community spaces outwith libraries?
- Are there ways in which Scottish Book Trust could be promoting the Bookbug message pre-birth?

Moving forward

- 8.27 Overall, the conclusion of the evaluation is that Bookbug benefits professionals, parents, carers and children. There is also evidence of a cumulative impact upon local communities, as well as contributions being made to the relationships between professionals and families, and between professionals working in different sectors.
- 8.28 The message and approach being delivered is clearly evidenced based and is being delivered in a clear, concise way, complementary to national and local policy objectives. For most, Bookbug is viewed as a vital tool that provides a robust model for delivering knowledge, information and support to parents, carers and children. One of the key reported benefits of the programme is that it provides a clear structure for delivery which is – to use a word used by several respondents – a ‘leveler’. At the same time, the model has the necessary flexibility to allow it to be adapted to local needs and circumstances.
- 8.29 The brand and mascot work, being well respected, recognised and valued. Similarly, the training is universally praised for being of a very high quality and impactful on professional practice and behaviour.
- 8.30 Positive impacts are identified for parents and carers both at home and in public settings, although it is clear that more work is required to ensure universal access translates into universal benefits. In some areas, the mode of distribution can result in gifting not happening, and there would be benefits in reviewing the means through which participation in training is recorded and monitoring to address gaps. Email communication, both via Scottish Book Trust and local co-ordinators, is in many cases not being cascaded effectively.
- 8.31 The greatest issue is therefore not a question of whether the Bookbug programme is capable of supporting Scotland’s families to read, talk, sing and cuddle more, but rather the impact that diminishing resources will have on councils’ abilities to deliver at a local level. To some extent the social consequences of recession and welfare cuts are outwith Scottish Book Trust’s field of influence. However, as a national organisation delivering a programme universally across Scotland, opportunities for influencing political and social processes should be explored.

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Appendix A: Outcomes chain for the Bookbug Programme with Risks and assumptions

		Risks / assumptions (to get to next step)
Contribution (final outcomes)	<p>No child in Scotland will grow up without books, and there will be more Bookbug Sessions across Scotland.</p> <p>Cultural change will take place in Scotland, making it a place where songs, stories and rhyme are part of everyday life. Overall literacy in Scotland will improve, and inequalities in attainment reduce.</p> <p>Parents and carers will be confident in engaging with their children's social and emotional wellbeing and learning, and children will develop early literacy capacity for life.</p>	
What practices/ behaviours do you expect to change as a result of the activity/outputs? (intermediate outcomes)	<p>For parents:</p> <p>That all children share their Bookbug Bags with their parents.</p> <p>Parents and professionals work in partnership.</p> <p>Children and parents are motivated to engage with books and music.</p> <p>Increase in number of children becoming library members and that families enjoy visiting the libraries.</p> <p>Children enjoy sharing books, stories and rhymes with their parents.</p> <p>That books, stories and rhymes can be shared in a variety of ways, and are part of everyday family practices.</p> <p>For professionals:</p> <p>That all practitioners share the key gifting messages consistently and books and songs are used in their everyday practice.</p> <p>That reading, singing and rhymes are modelled in a variety of ways, and reading for enjoyment is promoted.</p> <p>A Bookbug community is recognised and creates a focus for improving partnership working and sharing practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents and professionals work in partnership and develop positive relationships. 	
What knowledge, skills, attitudes change as a result of	<p>For families, parents will understand importance of reading and singing in child development, and be confident and willing to try new things.</p>	<p>Assumptions</p> <p>That once people (parents, professionals, local authorities) understand Bookbug, they will be very positive.</p>

<p>using the activity/outputs? (intermediate outcomes)</p>	<p>Parents will have the knowledge and capacity to build conversations from books and share stories in a variety of ways. Families will see reading and singing are fun, but also be aware that they can be used as a basis for other learning. Parents will know songs and rhymes (and associated actions) for specific age groups. Professionals will have a strong evidence based knowledge about the role of book sharing in child development and feel confident about engaging with families, and passing this message to them. Awareness that stories can be used as a basis for games and other learning. That they have the knowledge and confidence to run quality Bookbug Sessions. Professionals are aware of the whole Bookbug programme, the links between, and how it can support their role.</p>	<p>That parents will have time to read with their children. That there will be buy-in from decision makers.</p> <p>Risks That professionals do not, or cannot, reinforce the book sharing message. If parents have a bad first experience (of reading or attending a Bookbug Session), they will not attempt again. Parents do not have time to share books with their children. Parents face practical challenges and other pressures that prevent them from sharing books with their children. Professionals attend training but do not, or cannot, implement Bookbug Staff restructuring and moving poses challenges to implementation of Bookbug.</p>
<p>How do the target groups react to the service? (Intermediate Outcomes)</p>	<p>All families in Scotland receive their Bookbug Bags and understand why. Intended reactions from families will be: this is for me, my baby/child likes it, this is a quality product, I can do this and this is fun. Parent feel valued and supported, and in turn are motivated to spend quality time with children sharing books, songs and rhymes. All professionals working with families see clear links between their role and aims of Bookbug. That Bookbug is easy to incorporate into their role, and that it is a shared goal. Practitioners see it as a tool for attachment, bonding, relationship building, family support and literacy. That practitioners see Bookbug as a high quality, evidence based and trustworthy programme. Practitioners feel involved in the programme, and that Scottish Book Trust understand their work and role.</p>	<p>Assumptions Assumptions are that parents receive bags at the intended time. Parents recognise importance of early literacy. That Bookbug gifting has an impact on outcomes. That professionals are motivated and prioritise Bookbug in their practices.</p> <p>Risks Risks are that multiple parenting interventions could confuse parents navigating high volumes of information and advice. That one-off contact with professionals gifting the bags is not enough. That professionals go to training but new skills are not supported, or developed. That professionals do not understand or prioritise the Bookbug message.</p>
<p>How far have the targeted groups been engaged at</p>	<p>All parents will receive their bags and families experiencing barriers will be reached through outreach activities.</p>	<p>Assumptions Assumptions are that messaging (produced by Scottish Book Trust and conveyed by professionals) is done well and consistently.</p>

<p>micro, meso and macro levels?</p>	<p>All staff working in early years will be engaged in Bookbug, and see it as embedded in their everyday practice (including midwives; health visitors, social workers; librarians, teachers, early years practitioners; local authorities; third sector staff and volunteers; speech and language therapists; nursery staff (local authority and private))</p>	<p>Outreach activities are focussed on relevant staff and offer appropriate tools. That the contents of Bookbug Bags are what families want.</p> <p>Risks The risks are that Bookbug messages are inconsistent and of varied quality; that outreach activities do not reach targeted groups; that parents have a negative first experience of Bookbug; that parents receive the message but decide “it’s not for them” or that that content of the bags alienate parents.</p>
<p>Activities/ Outputs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core offering includes Bookbug Sessions, delivery of bags to local authorities, libraries and health centres and ongoing outreach programme. • Regular events include Bookbug Week, the Children's Book Awards, Bookbug’s Library Challenge. • Activities for professionals include the Bookbug annual conference, annual practice-sharing events; regional meetings for Bookbug Co-ordinators and a wide programme of training for professionals. • Wider role activities include promoting Bookbug within local authorities, and supporting specific local authority activities to support families. 	<p>Assumptions Assumptions are that the logistics of the gifting process are in place, and that the programme is universal, with outreach targeting those experiencing barriers. That parents can physically get to Bookbug Sessions and that venues can cope with demand. That professionals know about the training, that they choose to attend and that it is high quality.</p> <p>Risks The risks are that families miss out on receiving bags, that outreach is not reaching all target groups and that parents cannot or do not attend Bookbug Sessions. Venues cannot cater for demand and quality of sessions is undermined. That locally professionals are not trained or supported as needed.</p>
<p>Inputs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff with expertise in early years, book sharing, song and rhymes • Local Authority Bookbug Co-ordinators • Community of Bookbug practitioners • Scottish Government, Creative Scotland and Education Scotland funding 	