



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
PRINCIPAL EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

## Research Brief

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### **PARENT AND CARER FEEDBACK ON THEIR EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS (2012)**

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The report was based on feedback from 775 parents and was provided by sixteen EP services. Not only does this represent one of the largest studies of parental views but it also provides EP services with a bench mark of satisfaction ratings against which to compare their feedback.

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

##### *Satisfaction levels*

In line with other studies (DfEE, 2000; Cuckle and Bamford, 2000; Scottish Executive, 2002; DfES, 2006) parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the service they received (approximately 95% were either '*satisfied*' or '*very satisfied*'). This was in line with other studies which quote satisfaction levels (e.g. Cuckle and Bamford, 2000; DfES, 2006). Parents also rated particular aspects of the service they had received (Table 1). There was variation here but again these ratings indicated a high level of satisfaction.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted looking at the impact of characteristics of the child's sex, age, and type of contact on the ratings given. No effect was found in respect to the sex of the child. However where an effect of intervention was found, the ratings for consultation and/or non-statutory contact recorded the lowest means. Similarly where there was an effect of age, the mean rating tended to decline with the age of the child and was lowest for secondary aged pupils. Both of these points had been noted by Cuckle and Bamford (2000).

##### *Criticisms*

Several criticisms were made. Some parents thought that the EP had outlined what they considered should be done but there was no commitment from the school as to what they were prepared to implement. This issue also resurfaced in requests for follow-up meetings. Some parents were not confident that the school would implement the ideas suggested and thought a review would place pressure on the school to comply.

Some parents also wished their child had had EP involvement sooner. This has also been a theme in the literature (Dowling and Leibowitz, 1994; Cuckle and Bamford, 2000; DfEE, 2000; Squires et al., 2007). How easy it would be for services to address is a moot point. Many parents (in this survey) acknowledged that EPs are a scarce resource, which is over-stretched. It was

also common for parents to view the school as responsible for the delay (also in Squires et al. , 2007). However, it needs to be recognised that this represents the parental perspective. While it may be valid, it could be that the situation concerning the child was not sufficiently serious to warrant an earlier request for involvement. However, this also raises questions about services looking to provide more open access to parents (also in DfEE, 2000).

The most significant theme was not a criticism but a statement by parents that they wanted more. This is also consistent with other studies (Dowling and Leibowitz, 1994; DfEE, 2000; Scottish Executive, 2002; DfES, 2006). The main suggestions included more on-going contact in the form of follow-up meetings, more time for discussion (both points also in DfEE, 2000) and more time assessing their child. In relation to assessment, parents wanted the EP to see their child in other contexts or over time, with the view to being more fully informed. Whether this would necessarily improve the quality of advice is debatable. Given that resources are finite the problem in trying to provide *more* is that EPs would need to spend less time elsewhere.

#### *Positive feedback*

The statements rated highest related to parents being able to share their concerns and that their views were valued and taken into account by the EP. Parents expressed relief at being able to share their concerns with someone whose opinion they respected. [*...finally someone has listened to what we have been saying for years*]. EPs were also perceived to be approachable and put parents at their ease, as well as good listeners who quickly grasped the point being conveyed. There was consequently a good two-way exchange of information, in which the parental contribution was valued and respected (also in Dowling and Leibowitz, 1994). EPs were also able to build trust and a rapport with their son or daughter, which had enabled the son or daughter to express their feelings, often for the first time.

- *I appreciated her warmth and down to earthiness. She made us feel at ease at this nerve-wracking and stressful time...*
- *She's the only person my daughter has trusted to tell about how she feels.*

A related point was the professional knowledge EPs possess. It was not merely someone with good listening skills but someone who was knowledgeable, well informed and experienced about the issues that concerned them. [*The EP was the first (and only) person to sit down and explain everything that was going on - procedures, people etc. Before her involvement I was completely lost*].

The most common theme was that the EP had provided parents with strategies to support their child or a plan of action which would enable the situation to move on (also in Squires et al., 2007). Parents indicated that contact with the EP had provided them with a better insight into their child's difficulties (also in Dowling & Leibowitz, 1994, and Cuckle & Bamford, 2000). [*Finding out about strategies to be used at home helped us interact more with*

*our son; The EP gave us different ideas and changed the way we looked at things].*

The EP was also regarded as impartial and it was accepted that they would voice their views without being unduly swayed by the school or preschool setting. However this does not counter concerns expressed elsewhere about EP independence from Local Authority influence (Dowling & Liebowitz, 1994; Scottish Executive, 2002). [*An unbiased external opinion of my child*].

#### *Feedback on the questionnaire*

Most parents indicated they were happy with the questionnaire as currently composed. However, the most common point was that insufficient time had elapsed before seeking feedback on impact.

#### **Conclusion**

This feedback indicated a high level of parental satisfaction with the input received from an EP. A request for improvement suggestions identified some concerns although the ratings of related propositions remained high. Throughout the report a lack of confidence in the school to address their child's needs was a recurring theme and the EP was perceived to be a strong ally in responding to these issues. Some of the criticisms of the service strayed outside of factors over which Services have any direct control. This was particularly the case in requesting involvement for children sooner and schools making commitments to implement the advice offered. The request for more input also presents problems in the current economic climate but the need to provide appropriate follow-up of casework seems an essential aspect of service delivery. Parents generally welcomed the fact that EPs had good listening skills, used their professional knowledge to form an accurate picture of the problem, provided them with a better insight of what was happening and could offer well considered strategies to support their child.

#### **REFERENCES**

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**TABLE 1:** Parental ratings of statements provided as percentages (to nearest whole number).

	Disagree	Neither A nor D	Agree	N/A
1. I knew why the Educational Psychologist was going to be involved.	3%	3%	94%	1%
2. The Educational Psychologist seemed to value my views and take them into account.	3%	4%	92%	2%
3. I was able to share my views and any concerns.	3%	2%	93%	1%
4. I consider the Educational Psychologist provided independent advice.	4%	5%	90%	1%
5. I was fully involved in the discussion about my child's needs and what was going to happen to address them.	6%	5%	87%	2%
6. Sufficient time was provided during this contact to discuss my child's needs.	8%	5%	86%	1%
7. The Educational Psychologist seemed knowledgeable and assisted in finding ways to help.	5%	7%	88%	1%
8. All of my questions and concerns were addressed.	7%	10%	82%	2%
9. The involvement provided a better insight into the situation.	5%	11%	81%	2%
10. Actions agreed were relevant, useful and able to be done.	6%	10%	80%	3%
11. At the end of the Educational Psychologist's involvement it was made clear who would be doing what.	8%	13%	76%	6%
12. Things improved as a result of the Educational Psychologist's involvement.	8%	26%	47%	19%
13. The Educational Psychologist did everything they had agreed to do.	4%	12%	75%	9%
14. I would have liked the Educational Psychologist to have been involved sooner.	10%	20%	60%	10%
15. I am confident that my child's needs will be met more effectively as a result of this involvement.	6%	16%	75%	3%