

What do EIF ratings mean?

This note explains the ratings from the EIF report *Foundations for Life: What Works to support parent child interaction in the early years*. The ratings should only be used with reference to this guidance or to Chapter 2 on methods in the full report. This note explains the ratings used for the Foundation for Life report only.

The full report provides ratings of strength of evidence and resource cost for 75 programmes that aim to improve parent-child interaction in the service of improved child development in terms of attachment, behaviour and cognitive development.

The specific implications of the findings for commissioners of programmes are set out in the Guide for Commissioners available on the EIF website. This explains the range of issues commissioners should consider when investing in early intervention and that evidence about what has worked in the past is not a sufficient for commissioning.

1. The EIF ‘strength of evidence’ rating

The first rating we provide about a programme is an assessment of the evaluation evidence about that programme. Our assessment summarises the strength of the evidence to suggest the programme has been shown to benefit child outcomes important for reducing demand for late intervention. This EIF evidence assessment is based on the programme’s strongest evidence. The high level meaning of the different ratings is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The EIF cost strength of evidence ratings

Features of the evidence/rationale	Classification within the forthcoming report	Shorthand
The programme has evidence from at least two high-quality evaluations (RCT/QED) demonstrating a consistently positive impact across populations and environments. This includes RCT/QED evidence of a long-term child outcome lasting a year or longer.	Evidence-based (Replicated)	4
At least one rigorously conducted RCT/QED demonstrating a statistically significant positive impact on at least one child outcome.	Evidence-based (Single)	3
Evidence from a pilot study demonstrating a statistically significant positive impact on at least one child outcome through the use of a sufficiently large and representative sample (>20 participants, representing at least 60%) and independently validated measures. Not yet able to demonstrate unbiased evidence of impact	Preliminary	2
No direct evidence about the scale of impact of the programme at a “preliminary” level.	No evidence yet at Level 2	NL2
Evidence from at least one high-quality evaluation (Level 3 RCT/QED) indicating no benefits for children or parents.	Found not to be effective in at least one rigorously conducted study	NE

In principle, a rating of “Harmful” is also possible, but no such programmes were identified in this review.

This Rating Schema distinguishes 5 levels of strength of evidence of impact. This is not a rating of the scale of impact but of the degree to which causality can be attributed to a programme model for improving a relevant child outcome, together with an indication of whether benefits for children resulted:

- Level 4 recognises programmes with evidence of a long-term positive impact through multiple high-quality evaluations.
- Level 3 recognises programmes with evidence of a short-term positive impact from at least one high-quality evaluation.
- Level 2 recognises programmes with preliminary evidence of improving a child outcome, but where an assumption of causal impact cannot be drawn.

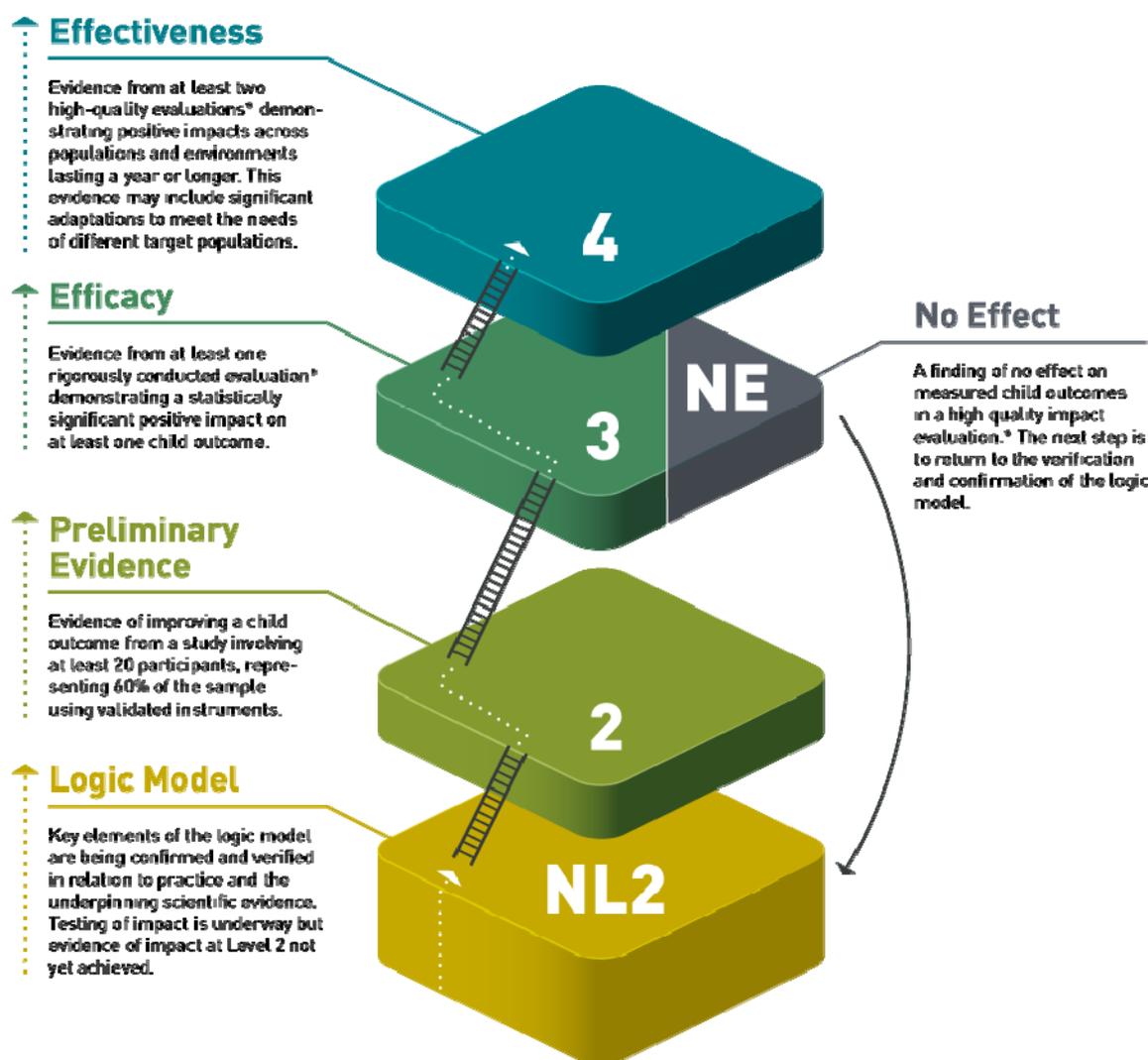
The term ‘evidence based’ is frequently applied to programmes with Level-3 evidence or higher, because this is the point at which there is sufficient confidence that a causal relationship can be assumed. The term ‘preliminary’ is applied to programmes at Level 2 to indicate that causal assumptions are not yet possible.

NL2 distinguishes programmes whose most robust evaluation evidence does not meet the Level-2 threshold for a child outcome. Essentially this category is for programmes that do not yet have direct evidence about the scale of impact of the programme at a “preliminary” level.

The category of NE – ‘Found not to be effective in at least one rigorously conducted study’ - is reserved for programmes where there is evidence from a high-quality evaluation of the programme not providing significant benefits for children. This rating should not be interpreted to mean that the programme will never work, but it does suggest that there are key aspects of the programme’s logic model which require re-specification and re-evaluation.

A more dynamic framing of these standards, recognising the importance of evidence development is shown in Figure 1 (over). This shows elements of the typical stages of development of evidence of effectiveness of a programme. It highlights that the rating of NE can be an important step in the development of an effective programme. It doesn’t necessarily mean that the programme will never work, but it will need to adapt and improve its model, learning from the evaluation. The best evidenced programmes have normally had null findings along the way to demonstrating proof of concept. Some developers with such evidence have terminated their programme, others are working out how to adapt and improve their model to respond to the evidence.

Figure 1. A dynamic model of the development of evidence



*High quality evaluations do not need to be randomised control trials if a relevant and robust counter-factual can be provided in other ways.

3. The EIF input cost rating

We have developed a system to assess the relative input costs of early intervention programmes. Based on information providers have supplied about the components and requirements of their programme, we have ranked programmes based on how resource intensive they are per child supported. This is not the same as the market price of an intervention, which will be negotiated and agreed commercially between providers and commissioners. Instead, we have rated programmes on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates the least resource-intensive programmes and 5 the most resource intensive based on EIF estimates.

Each level is associated with an *indicative* unit cost range. These are **not** actual unit costs, but instead an indicative range based on the estimation methods set out in the full "*Foundation for Life*" report. It shows the estimated relative cost of all of the inputs required to run and set up the programme. It is not the additional cost of commissioning if elements of the resources required are already being funded. For example a home visiting programme that draws on health visitors employed by a local authority will appear as an element of the costs of the home visiting programme. In practice that cost may not be additional to the commissioner but is part of the full resource cost and so is included here.

Table 2. The EIF cost estimate ratings

Description of programme and its cost	Cost rating
<p>This programme is high cost to set up and deliver compared to other interventions reviewed by EIF.</p> <p>Programmes of this sort have an indicative unit cost range of £2,000 or higher.</p>	5
<p>This programme is medium-high cost to set up and deliver compared to other interventions reviewed by EIF.</p> <p>Programmes of this sort have an indicative unit cost range of £1,000 to £2,000.</p>	4
<p>This programme is medium cost to set up and deliver compared to other interventions reviewed by EIF.</p> <p>Programmes of this sort have an indicative unit cost range of £500 to £999.</p>	3
<p>This programme is medium-low to set up and deliver compared to other interventions reviewed by EIF.</p> <p>Programmes of this sort have an indicative unit cost range of £100 to £499.</p>	2
<p>This programme is low cost to set up and deliver compared to other interventions reviewed by EIF.</p> <p>Programmes of this sort have an indicative unit cost range of £100 or lower.</p>	1