

(SSIF Round 3 DfE funded project)

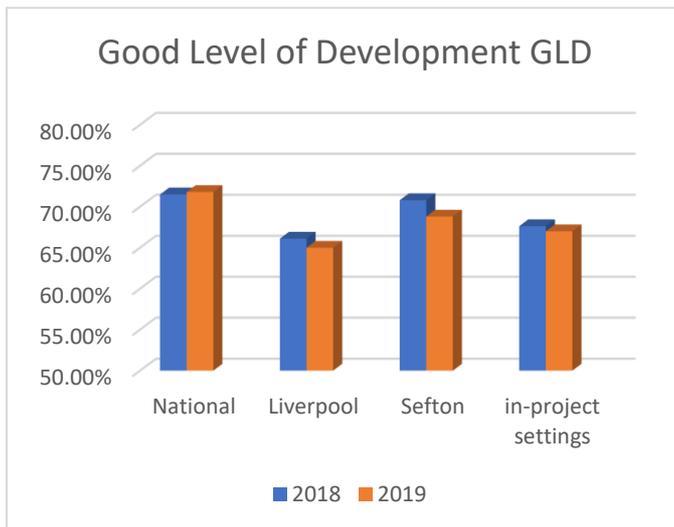
Children’s Outcomes following the

URLEY Language Leaders Programme 2018 to 2020

\*NB: Due to the COVID-9 pandemic not all schools and settings have submitted their children’s outcomes data. However, where possible, we have used the data submitted to give a broad indication of children’s language outcomes as a result of the URLEY Language Leaders Programme and compared this to local and national outcomes. 37 schools and settings have submitted their data to enable analysis. This analysis was undertaken by Andrea Vaughan – the URLEY Language Leaders Programme Manager.

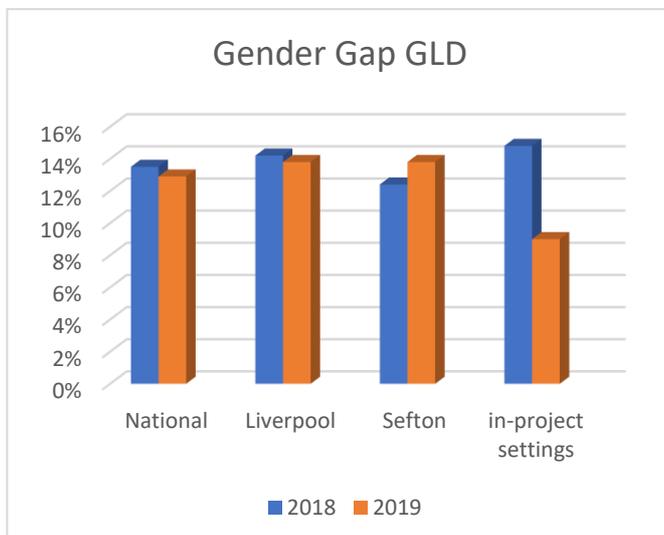
July 2020

Graph 1



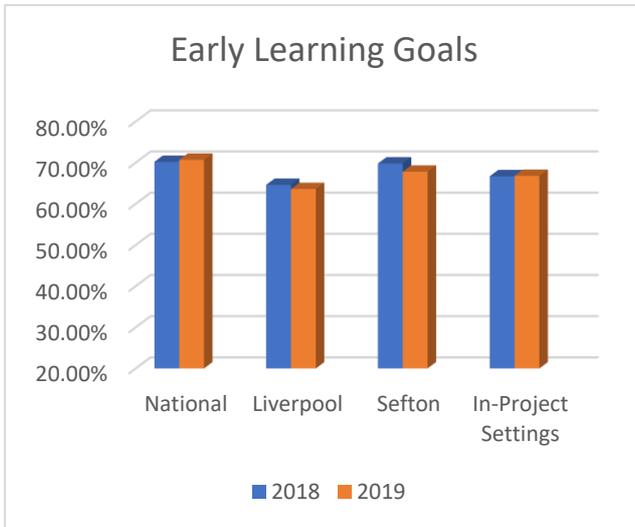
The graph shows that Nationally in 2019 71.8% of children achieved a good level of development (GLD) – up slightly by 0.3% on 2018. 65% of Liverpool children achieved GLD, a decline of 1.1% on 2018. 68.8% of Sefton children achieved GLD, a decline of 2% on 2018. 67% of In-Project school children achieved GLD. A less steep decline, compared to local, of only 0.6% on 2018. This suggests that the URLEY Project helped to mitigate gaps in learning for children.

Graph 2



Of the schools that submitted their gender gap data, 50% reported closing the gender gap for achieving GLD. Some of the schools where the gap did not narrow there are individual school factors that are relevant. Nevertheless, the gender gap (girls minus boys) has reduced significantly for in-project schools. Girls continue to do better than boys overall but boys are improving at a faster rate. In-project schools report a drop in the percentage of girls achieving GLD – 69% in 2018 to 65% in 2019. Conversely, in-project settings report an increase in the percentage of boys achieving GLD – 54.21% in 2018 to 56.57% in 2019. Even though girls GLD reduced there was a real narrowing of the gap for boys.

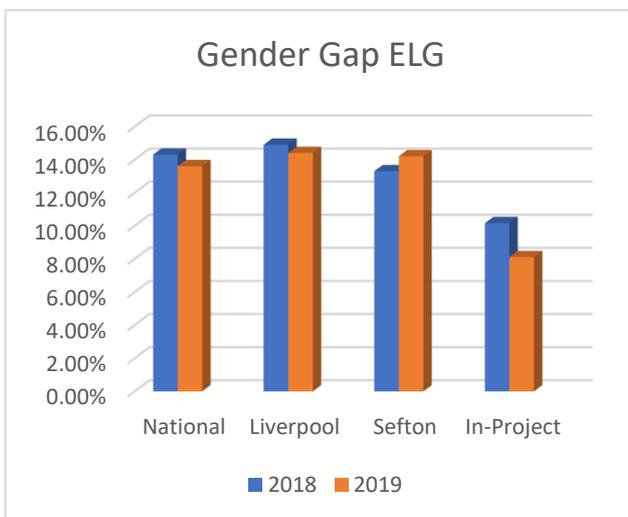
Graph 3



67.8% of children in 2019 from In-Project schools achieved at least the expected level across all the early learning goals (ELGs), maintaining 2018 levels (67.7%) despite decreases in the proportion of children achieving expected levels seen in both Liverpool and Sefton.

50% of participating schools in the submitted data set have demonstrated a gain of 5% or more, with the highest ELG gain in one school being 9%.

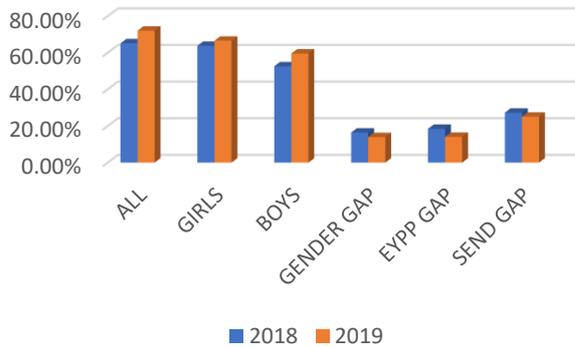
Graph 4



54% of schools that submitted their data reported that they had closed the gender gap in ELG.

In-project school data shows that the gender gap in 2019 had reduced by 2.05%. This reduction is better than national and local closing the gap data, particularly in Sefton where the gap for ELG has risen.

In-project nursery age C&L at least expected

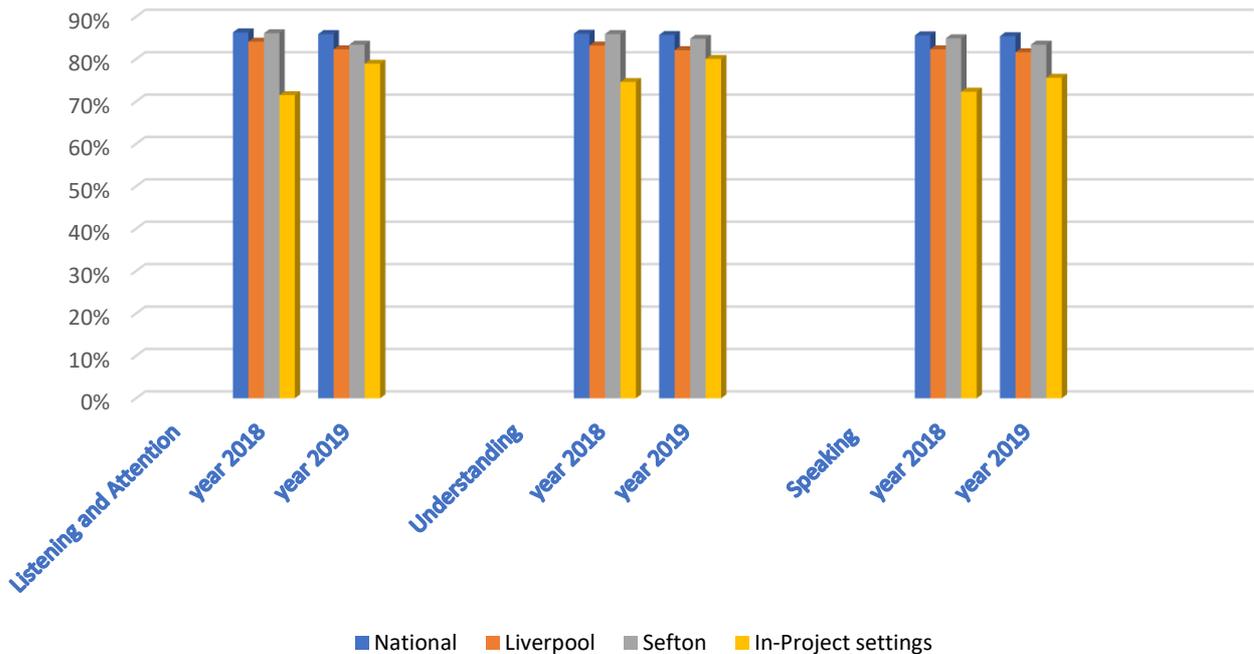


Graph 5.

Overall, nursery aged children achieved better outcomes in communication and language. An increase of 6.87% of all nursery children achieving at least expected in C&L. An increase of 2.81% girls achieved at least expected. 6.97% more boys achieved at least expected than in 2018. The gender gap narrowed by 2.54%. The gap between disadvantaged children and not has also narrowed by 4.38% The gap between SEND and not has narrowed by 2.19%.

Graph 6

Communication and Language outcomes comparison 2018 to 2019



Graph 6 shows 2018 and 2019 outcomes for all three strands of communication and language (Listening and Attention, Understanding, Speaking) for in-project schools as compared with national and local trends.

The graph shows children from In-Project schools made gains in listening and attention, understanding and, speaking.

- **72%** of in-project schools and settings reported that children made gains in listening and attention
- **67.5%** of in-project schools and settings reported that children made gains in understanding.
- **54%** of in-project schools and settings reported that children made gains in speaking.

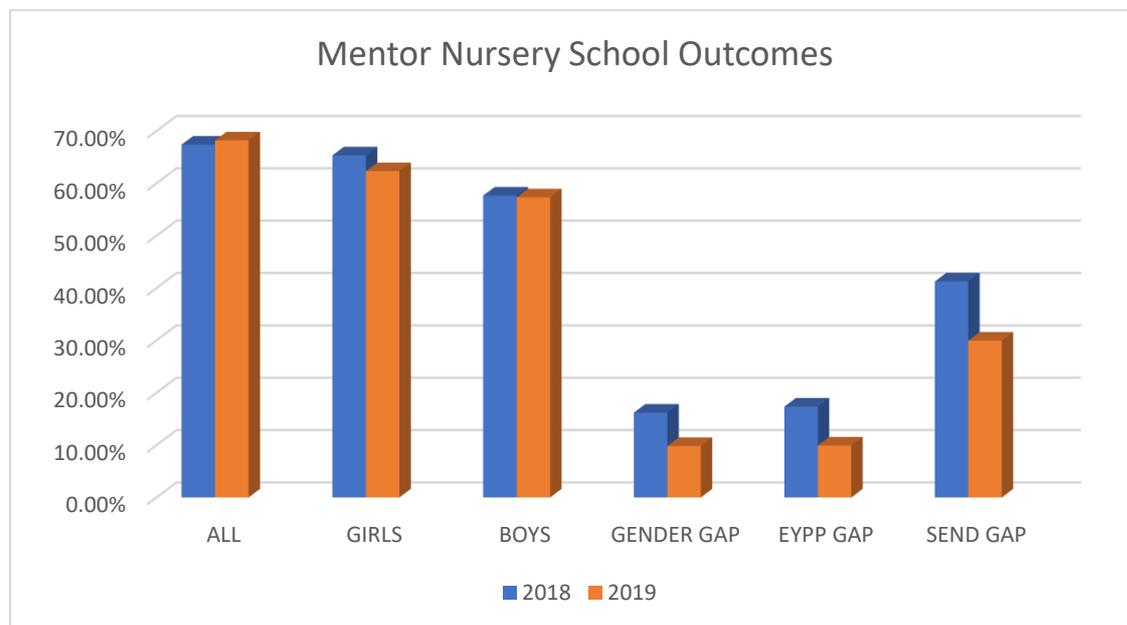
When calculating the average for C&L as a whole, we can see that in-project schools and settings show an increase of **5.5%**. The biggest increase is seen in listening and attention of **7.4%**. Understanding increased by **5.53%**, and speaking outcomes reveal an increase of **3.3%**. The question may be that although the project aims were to make improvements in children’s oral language skills, did the URLEY project progress other skills (ie listening and attention) that needed improving? There is no mistake that improving children’s listening and attention skills has a direct impact on later ability to use oral skills, particularly for those who are new to English and those with language delays.

It is interesting to note here that National, Liverpool and Sefton children’s outcomes in communication and language reveal a drop from 2018 to 2019 in each strand of C&L.

Given the increase in each strand of C&L for in-project schools and settings, there is strong indication that the URLEY project directly impacted positively on children’s language outcomes.

Nursery School Mentor children’s outcomes:

Figure 6



The graph shows children’s outcomes for C&L in the Nursery Schools.

- 68.2% of children achieved at least expected in C&L, an increase of 0.8% on 2018.
- The gender gap decreased by 6.37%. Part of this explanation can be seen by a 3% reduction of girls achieving C&L. Even so, there is still a real improvement in boys’ achievements.
- The gap between disadvantaged children and non-disadvantaged children narrowed by 7.3%
- The gap between children with special educational needs and/or disabilities also narrowed by 11.65%

This graph demonstrates the positive outcomes for nursery children in nursery schools participating in the project. With all gaps diminishing in participating nursery schools and outcomes for all



children improving, indicating the project has impacted on the pedagogical strategies used by teachers and staff and therefore improved outcomes.

In one nursery school, leaders reported that disadvantaged children achieved better than non-disadvantaged due to their ability to speak English. The majority of other children were new to English. However, because of the project strategies (for example Descriptive Commentary) that were put into place by participants, children who were new to English had improved their listening and attention skills because they had to concentrate more on hearing English. Another nursery school analysed their data to reveal a drop in results found that this was due to children in the 2018 cohort was made up of a high percentage of children with previous nursery experience in their own 2-3 year old provision. Because of this previous experience, these children went on to settle quickly and made the best progress.

All nursery school mentors reported their ability to successfully embed the URLEY approach in their own settings and then went on to mentor allocated in-project schools and settings during the programme. Nursery School Mentors went on to guide and coach all participating schools and nursery settings to successfully implement the URLEY approach.

## Conclusion

We cannot predict what the overall outcomes would have been if COVID-19 closures did not happen and all schools and settings had submitted their data. However, there are some early indications that positive outcomes are occurring and that some of the data is bringing to light the start of the very difficult task of diminishing the difference between the most disadvantaged children in our school and nursery communities. The gender gap, disadvantaged gap and SEND gap are showing signs of closing during the life of the project.

Project participants are able to give clear rationales for the evidence-based teaching strategies and interventions that they are using with children and what the research says about this. This is also having an impact helping early years practitioners to seriously consider stopping doing what is not working and therefore reducing some aspects of workload. This much-needed approach that the URLEY project brought about has provoked change in early years practice, more accurate speech and language assessments, better collaboration between schools and the private and voluntary sector and a shared professional dialogue between professionals in the early years.

## ANNEX B

### **Evaluating the Language Leaders Project – use of data and bespoke forms of assessment for monitoring outcomes and tracking progress**

Evaluation was woven throughout the Language Leaders project, driven by our ethos of ongoing reflection, evaluation, analysis and improvement. The work was led by Dr. Sandra Mathers at the University of Oxford and aimed to identify:

- What changed and what did not (for staff, practice children);
- *How* change happened (i.e. what were the mechanism of change?);
- Which aspects supported change and which did not;
- The 'active ingredients' needed for change to take place.

The evaluation was explicitly designed to minimise the data collection burden on participating schools and settings. Tracking was embedded within the project and CPD, with many assessment tools (e.g. the termly Professional Growth Records and the Environment Rating Scales assessments) used for the dual purposes of supporting reflection/improvement and providing data for evaluation/monitoring.



Data collection methods included:

1. An online survey conducted at the start and end of the project to assess:
  - change in professional self-efficacy, using an adapted version of Bandura’s Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale
  - change in pedagogical knowledge, using an innovative and bespoke measure designed and validated by Dr. Mathers;
2. Evaluation forms completed at the end of training workshops;
3. A bespoke Professional Growth Record, designed to support practitioner reflection at key points and to provide data for evaluation purposes;
4. Observations conducted at the start/end of the project using language-relevant items from three Environment Rating Scales (ECERS-3, ECERS-E, SSTEWS), which formed a ‘quality of language-supporting practice’ composite measure;
5. Three focus groups conducted at the end of the project;
6. A proforma to gather data on child outcomes (GLD) at the project start and end.

The response of schools and settings to the evaluation was very positive (e.g. a 98% response rate for the baseline survey, an 83% response rate for the final survey, 70 final evaluation forms completed). Compared with similar surveys/projects, this indicates high rates of engagement.

### **Impact of the project activities on classroom practice**

As shown in the FMR, there was a 26% relative gain in scores on the Environment Rating Scales composite measure. We can be confident in these results because the observations were conducted by trained and reliable assessors (although of course there was no control group, so we do not have a robust ‘no intervention’ comparison). The largest improvements were seen in relation to use of books/stories with children and the assessment of children’s language proficiency. It is interesting that the two training workshops focusing on use of books/stories took place towards the end of the URLEY training programme. It may be that schools and settings were ‘in the swing’ by that point, and so felt capable and confident in making significant changes to their practice in this area. However, it may also be that the programme would benefit from including this content in earlier workshops. The improvements in language assessment can reasonably be attributed to URLEY programme content and tools designed to support practice in this area. Both areas of improvement bode well for long-term impact and sustainability: shared reading with children a powerful context for language learning; and effective assessment is essential to support effective teaching and learning in any domain.

### **Impact of the project activities on outcomes for children**

Self-reported impact on children was high: 87% of respondents to the final evaluation form reported a medium/large impact on children in their class/room. Further data analysis is shown in the graphs.

### **Thoughts on the specific programmes or resources used and how these worked in a range of contexts**

The Language Leaders project was based around the URLEY programme, with some adaptations and refinements following a previous EEF-funded trial (which showed impact on practice but not on children’s language outcomes). The response to the programme was very positive. For example, of the 70 respondents who completed the final evaluation form, 93% reported a medium/large improvement in their own growth and learning, and 87% reported a medium/large impact on children in their class or room.

We also asked participants which aspects of the programme had most supported professional growth and improvement. The results are shown in Table 1, with some illustrative quotes below. All aspects were highly rated, but the two most valuable were considered to be the tools/support



provided for assessing children’s language progress and the Environment Rating Scales. Between them, these enabled practitioners to gain a good sense of children’s language skills and needs, to identify the aspects of practice which would best support those needs, and to identify whether these aspects of practice were in place or in need of improvement. Also valued were the URLEY Language Learning Principles (LLPs), which form the basis of the programme, summarising the evidence on child language learning and effective language-supporting pedagogy. The LLP logos were felt to be particularly helpful in encapsulating the principles and providing an accessible reminder (many settings printed off the LLP posters and displayed them in their classes/rooms).

**Table 1. Aspects of the URLEY programme which most supported professional learning and/or improvements to practice – ratings on a 5-point scale (1=not at all, 5=very much), rank order**

The TROLL/other support for capturing children’s language progress	4.6
The Environment Rating Scales (ECERS-3, SSTEWS, ECERS-E)	4.6
The URLEY Language Learning Principles	4.5
The training workshops (overall)	4.5
Your physical pack/folder of resources	4.5
Time to share/discuss with colleagues during workshops	4.4
Time for reflection on your children/practice during workshops	4.3
Support from your coach/mentor	4.3
Other evidence-based strategies/guidance in your folder (e.g. OWL, interaction audit...)	4.3
Watching DVD clips of practice during the training sessions	4.2
The research readings and time provided to read these	4.0
The online DVD clips	3.9
Online copies of URLEY documents	3.9
<b>Illustrative quotes from the open response section of the question</b>	
“The TROLL assessment tool ...has helped me to identify the reluctant communicators in my class and plan next steps for them”	
“Support from mentor, trainers and observers has been amazing, giving us time to ask questions and visit setting - supporting us with honest feedback and workable suggestions to support practice”	
“Baseline audit from an external v knowledgeable professional. It gave us a model picture of practice, enabling us to celebrate strengths and identify areas for improvement.”	
“ECERS and SSTEWS were useful tools for reflecting on the environment and my own practise.”	
“Having time to discuss with colleagues and reflection upon the URLEY principles and how to implement and share with staff within school. Excellent hand-outs which have been implemented within my setting and shared with staff which are now in everyday practice.”	

Other features identified as important include:

- Training workshops being spread out over time, allowing for meaningful learning and improvement;
- The adaptability of the URLEY programme to individual contexts;
- The ‘gap tasks’ in between each training workshop to scaffold implementation;
- The additional structure provided – as compared with the original URLEY programme – for these gap tasks. Rather than allowing schools and settings to choose, core tasks were identified (which everyone was expected to complete) alongside a number of optional tasks which could be completed if desired;
- Use of the Implementation, Analysis and Progress Record (completed at every workshop) and the Professional Growth Record (completed termly) to structure implementation, reflection and self-monitoring throughout – as well as providing evidence for evaluation of the project as a whole
- The whole-team approach and support for this within the programme (e.g. core tasks relating to



sharing materials/ engaging the wider team in implementation). This was felt enable all staff members to take ownership, and to support implementation and sustainability.

- The use of local early years leaders as mentors for participating schools and settings, with specialist training provided to prepare them for this role. Prior to this project, the URLEY research/development team had provided all training and mentoring. Training local mentors will strongly support sustainability;
- Mentors attending training alongside schools (i.e. learning together) was felt to strongly support rapport and positive working relationships (although logistically it was not always easy to ensure the attendance of the schools/settings being supported by one mentor at the same workshop);
- The focus on reluctant communicators. Schools and settings consistently identified how helpful it had been to 'tune in' to these children more effectively, and reported the greatest impacts for these children;
- PVI settings and schools attending the same training put them on an equal footing, and promoted collaboration/development of joint professional capacity. These links need to be further encouraged/developed following the project end.

Challenges, learning and potential improvements:

- Tracking showed that the URLEY programme was put into practice, with core tasks completed by the vast majority of schools/settings, and 80% of final evaluation form respondents reporting that they had implemented the approach 'quite a lot' or 'very much'. Three quarters also reported having engaged their wider teams 'quite a lot' or 'very much'. However, 34% also reported that cascading the approach/learning was 'quite' or 'very' challenging. More support for cascading could be included, e.g. briefings/training for other early years staff.
- Although the vast majority of participants found the Environment Rating Scales observations useful and constructive, a very small number found the process threatening. Although this likely reflects the mind-set of particular schools who may be feeling vulnerable at that time, it is important to note. In this project, we chose to have the observations conducted by an external team to ensure reliability of data for evaluation purposes. Although the feedback was provided by a mentor, the presence of an external person can contribute to the perception of being 'assessed'. The balance between support and rigour is one which all projects using the ERS will need to be aware of.
- Feedback from the focus groups suggests that greater involvement of local mentors from the start of the project would have been beneficial. In relation to the above point, conducting joint ERS observations (i.e. a trained assessor alongside a local mentor) would enable accurate data to be collected but also support the provision of feedback from an observer known to the school/setting;
- The half-day afternoon workshops supported attendance in comparison to the original URLEY format of five whole days. Despite this, some found it challenging release staff for workshops, and attention was sometimes fading by 5pm.
- We invited Heads/Leaders to join a workshop session, which was very beneficial for those who attended. Additional measures to engage less proactive leaders may further support ongoing buy-in, implementation and sustainability. Briefing in schools if hard to release staff.