

2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy

Consultation response from Daycare Trust

Daycare Trust is the national childcare charity, campaigning for quality affordable childcare for all and raising the voices of children, parents and carers.

Our response will focus on the childcare workforce, and in particular the early years workforce, as that is where our expertise lies. Our comments here will reflect both the changes outlined in the Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy, and those announced through the Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare document.

In addition to the questions below, we have also included the key findings and recommendations from our recent report, *Raising the Bar*, which looks at the Early Childhood Education and Care workforce.

1. Do you support our vision for the children and young people's workforce in 2020?

Yes. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce have often been considered as the 'poor relations' of the children's workforce, having a much lower status and recognition than school staff, for example, but the early years are crucial for children's development and the early years workforce should equally be seen as crucial.

Qualifications, pay and status are all intrinsically linked. One will not improve without the other. Therefore it is essential that the pay of ECEC staff is improved. We recognise the work being done to address the pay and retention of graduates through the Graduate Leader Fund, but this must also be addressed for lower-level staff, who make up the majority of staff in early years settings. ECEC staff should be seen as equal to professionals working in other children's services, and paid accordingly.

Indeed, as mentioned in our workforce report 'Raising the Bar', as far back as 2004 the Minister for Children, Margaret Hodge, stated:

"I'm absolutely determined that we're not going to allow childcare to expand with another low-paid workforce. Our children deserve much better."

And the 2005 Children's Workforce Strategy consultation paper recognised the need:
"to ensure that providers across the sector have incentives to employ professional staff, including the means to pay the higher salaries that such workers command."

2. Do you agree with the priorities we have set out for addressing issues that affect the whole workforce? How can you help to achieve them?

Leadership and management – We welcome the role of the Early Years Professional in leading the curriculum in early years settings, but there is also a need for leadership and management with regard to the business, particularly in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sectors. Good leaders and managers will be able to instil an ethos of quality, manage change and ensure sustainability.

Recruitment issues – In 2001 the Government set a target for 6% of the childcare workforce to be male by 2004 and yet according to figures from the DCSF, the proportion of male childcare workers has remained more or less stagnant for the last ten years (currently 2% of the early years workforce is male). Research in this area shows that there is a two-layered deterrent for men, whereby shared social assumptions about gender roles in relation to caring for children are reinforced through the perception of childcare as a low-paid (average wages are barely a pound above the minimum wage), low-skilled job, dominated by women. These gender assumptions also lead to corollary issues around child protection and a lack of promotion of childcare as a career for males. Together these create barriers to uptake among men.

Qualifications, training and progression – As mentioned elsewhere in our consultation response, research on early years settings consistently points to the maintained sector as being of highest quality. This is likely to be partly because of higher levels of pay and qualifications, but is likely to also reflect the greater investment in staff in terms of continuing professional development (CPD). CPD helps to make staff feel valued and on-going training and support (rather than ad-hoc training sessions) will result in more in-depth knowledge. Reflective practice is also important, so that practitioners are able to continuously improve their practice and identify areas that they can work on.

It is also essential to ensure that training is of high quality. Daycare Trust is aware of concerns, from childcare providers and local authorities, that NVQ training is not always fit-for-purpose. This must be addressed urgently. We recommend that there be further support and quality control for NVQ training and assessors so that the training meets quality standards. We also recommend that there should be an opportunity for partnerships to be established between early years settings, so that staff in all settings have an opportunity to learn from exemplary practice.

3. Do you find the tables in Annexes B and C setting out what integrated working means for different people in the workforce helpful?

4. What does the strategy – including the vision – mean for how you do your job now, and what your profession will need to look like by 2020? What does it mean for how you will work with other people in the workforce?

There is still a great deal of confusion about the role of Early Years Professionals, as Early Years Professional Status is not attached to a pay scale. There also needs to be clarification on the relationship between EYPS and QTS. As mentioned above, in addition to Early Years Professionals, there is also a need for improved leadership and management in the PVI sector.

5. Will the strategy help you address the challenges facing you now and in the future? What else do Government and its national partners need to take into account in the further plans we develop?

The key challenge in the childcare and early years sector is how to ensure high quality childcare that leads to high quality outcomes for children. The main factor in this is the workforce. Although qualifications and training of the workforce are not the only factor in quality, this will have an impact on all aspects of a setting: highly qualified and motivated staff will know about staff development and so will do their best to relate well to children; they will recognise the importance of healthy food, stimulating toys and a good environment; they will have quality interactions with adults and children alike; they will be willing to learn and contribute to a high quality ethos in the setting.

As suggested in the Next Steps Childcare Strategy document, Daycare Trust believes that there needs to be a Level 3 requirement for ECEC staff, so that all staff working directly with children are recognised as professionals and have a good knowledge and understanding of child development. While the target to have a graduate leading all full daycare settings is laudable, it will not, on its own transform the quality of settings, particularly if that person has to oversee the business side of the provision as well as the educational aspects. Daycare Trust recommends, as outlined below, that all ECEC staff should have a Level 3 qualification by 2015.

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Annex: Key findings and recommendations from Raising the Bar

In November 2008, Daycare Trust published a policy paper, 'Raising the Bar', looking at the future of the early childhood education and care workforce. The recommendations from the report are as follows:

Key Findings

- Pay and conditions in the ECEC sector are extremely low in comparison with other similar positions in children's sector.
- Raising pay and conditions for staff has a key role in improving skills, and thus quality, within the ECEC sector. If this is not addressed it may jeopardise other initiatives to improve qualifications of staff and raise quality in settings.
- The EYFS has expanded the role of ECEC workers by merging the concepts of education and care. There is now little justification for those in ECEC services to endure such dramatically poorer pay and conditions than teachers.
- ECEC work must be seen as a viable career option in order to recruit the most talented and committed staff, not those who are perceived to have 'failed' in other areas.
- Government has made substantial progress in improving qualification levels of staff in the ECEC sector, and also in extending the range of routes to achieving qualifications.
- It is important that the various routes to entering work in the ECEC sector are kept open to ensure the best chance of obtaining quality staff.
- It seems unlikely that pay and conditions for ECEC staff working in the PVI sector can be raised without Government intervention.

Recommendations

- Government should establish a high-level social partnership group involving Government, employers and trade unions and give it a clear remit to look at the detrimental impact of the poor pay and conditions that affect a high proportion of the ECEC workforce. This would assess the longer-term impact this will have on quality improvement targets, and make recommendations for steps to bring about a significant improvement in the pay and conditions of all ECEC workers over time.
- Government should set new standards for pay and conditions to improve in line with the aspirations to improve qualification levels.
- More information should be collected about working conditions and benefits for staff working in ECEC settings, especially in the PVI sector. This could potentially be included in future *Early Years and Childcare Providers Surveys*.
- More needs to be done to ensure that the status – including pay and conditions – of Early Years Professionals is commensurate with those of Early Years Teachers. This should encompass a national evaluation of the EYP role and a pay benchmark set in line with other relevant professionals.

- Measures should be put in place to enable all staff to have the opportunity to acquire a relevant qualification equivalent to NVQ Level 3 by 2015.
- Half of all childminders should hold a relevant qualification equivalent to NVQ Level 3 by 2011.
- ECEC providers should be required to provide details of staff pay and conditions as part of Ofsted Inspections to ensure they are complying with minimum wage regulations.
- Government should withdraw the pressure for local authorities always to focus on commissioning and consequently be a provider of 'last resort' for childcare services.