

## **Call for Evidence for the Independent Review of Early Education and Childcare Qualifications (The Nutbrown Review)**

**Daycare Trust response**  
**January 2012**

### **1. In your view, what are the three most important things children need from adults who work with them in early education and childcare?**

Early education and childcare should support the physical, emotional and intellectual development of children, giving them the skills and experiences they need in order to be happy and thrive through childhood and in to adulthood.

Adults should keep them safe, offer appropriate activities and stimulation, and identify any development problems as soon as possible.

They should also seek to ensure that all children have opportunities to succeed, regardless of their background.

### **2. In your view, what are the three most important things families need from adults who work with their children?**

Daycare Trust has recently conducted research with parents asking them what they wanted from their childcare provider. What came through strongly in the research was that parents wanted practitioners who they could trust; who were friendly, warm, nurturing and attentive to their children's needs; providing comfort when they were upset.

Secondly, parents wanted staff who were able to monitor the development of their children, spotting any potential problems as they arise. Parents have told us that it is important that staff can help to ensure their children were hitting the key milestones so they were not behind once they got to school age. Moreover, they want them to be able to refer them to specialists when they do spot a problem that may need more investigation.

Thirdly, parents want practitioners who can provide structure, routine and stimulating activities for their children, to stimulate their curiosity and encourage their development in a way which is appropriate to their individual development needs and interests.

Lastly, parents are clear that they want to feel like practitioners treat them as equal partners in their child's care, which includes getting regular updates about their children's progress.

### **3. In your view, what skills and knowledge do early childhood practitioners need to gain from initial training and qualifications?**

Daycare Trust has concerns that some staff do not have basic literacy and numeracy skills. For this reason all staff should be supported to complete basic courses which support them to improve these skills. We would also like to see a specific legal requirement for staff who hold no qualifications or are qualified below Level Two, to show they are taking steps to improve their level of qualifications in both childcare and literacy and numeracy.

All staff, whatever their level of qualification should have a good awareness and understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and an ability to implement it. This must include an ability to support children aged 0-5 years but particular attention must be paid to the specific skills and understanding necessary for those taking care of the youngest children (aged under 3 years), particularly significant in light of the government's intention to support disadvantaged two year olds by extending the free entitlement.

The EPPE (Effective Provision of Pre-School Education) project, an outcome-focused study of 3,000 children found evidence which showed that workers' knowledge and skills are critical to outcomes for children. Staff skills are very important to promote high quality adult-child verbal interactions, such as 'sustained shared thinking'. This is a necessary pre-requisite for effective early years practice and requires active working together of both adult and child to resolve intellectual problems or extend narratives

Effective practice requires that staff have a high level of knowledge and understanding of the curriculum, supporting children to resolve conflicts, helping parents to support children's learning in the home, reflective practice and application of strong theoretical knowledge to practice; and supporting children to resolve conflicts.

### **4. There is a concern that looking after young children is perceived as 'easy' work, requiring no particular skills or experience. How do you think the early childhood workforce is perceived by the general public?**

In our work with parents we found that they did not view the work done by those looking after their children as 'easy work'. On the contrary, they believed that effective childcare practitioners require specific qualities and a range of skills. When asking parents what they look for when choosing a childcare setting they said they wanted staff who could encourage their children to take part in a range of activities and provide structure to their day. Parents have also said they want staff who are able to monitor the development of their children, spotting any potential problems as they arise. Many parents have told us

that it is important the setting helped to ensure their children were hitting the key milestones so they were not behind once they got to school age, which indicates parents are aware that childcare practitioners need to have a high level of expertise.

The Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents (2009) found that 55 per cent of parents chose their main formal childcare provider based on whether or not the staff were well trained. Some 43 per cent of parents also said that the standard of education their child would receive was a key factor in their decision to use a particular childcare setting. Moreover, Bryson et al (2006) study on parental views based on the findings of interviews with approximately 8,000 parents in England found that parents' concern with educational aspects per-school provision increases as children approach the age of five.

#### **5. How do you think the public's perception of this workforce could be improved?**

A lack of understanding of the role and qualifications of childcare workers impacts on recruitment and retention into the workforce. Daycare Trust believes that improving the terms and conditions of childcare workers and increasing awareness of what their role involves are crucial steps to recruiting and retaining childcare workers, and improving the perception of the sector among the public.

Moreover, if the public had a better understanding of the important role early years play in supporting children's development and contributing to better outcomes throughout their life (and therefore saving more costly interventions later) they may be more willing to support increased investment in the workforce.

#### **6. There is no generic term by which we can collectively refer to people who work with young children. Please give any suggestions you may have for such a term.**

No response

#### **7. To what extent do you feel that early education and childcare practitioners with whom you have had contact have been taught the right blend of skills, knowledge and capabilities?**

Not well. Overall, the early years workforce is an under-qualified profession. While there have been steady improvements in the levels of qualifications held by the early years workforce since 2000, 13 per cent of the overall early years workforce and 34 per cent of childminders have no qualifications. The present Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) target of 50 per cent of staff to be qualified at Level Two is lowering the overall bar, rather than raising it. We would like to see this target amended to ensure that by 2014 90 per cent of staff hold qualifications at Level Two or above and 100 per cent by 2016. We would also like to see a specific EYFS requirement for staff who hold no qualifications or are qualified below Level Two, to show they are taking steps to improve their level of qualifications in both childcare and literacy and numeracy.

Childminders are a major consumer of the EYFS in that the registration and inspection process requires that they understand and implement the EYFS. In Daycare Trust's response to the Tickell review we noted our concerns that there is little accessible training material on the EYFS targeted at providers who have lower level qualifications or none at all. A very small proportion of childminders have higher level qualifications. (The 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Providers suggested that 51 per cent of childminders had lower level qualifications and 31 per cent had no qualification at all). And unlike nursery staff, childminders often work alone and cannot rely on the support of more senior and better qualified staff to help them understand the requirements of the EYFS. For this reason we believe it is essential that the Department for Education produces accessible training material about the EYFS. Additionally, Daycare Trust has concerns that even though in the new EYFS proposals childminders will be expected to undergo initial training on the EYFS before they register, they are not required to pass this training. Daycare Trust is concerned that this shifts the onus to Ofsted, where the ability to assess how well childminders understand and are equipped to meet standards as set out under EYFS will depend on inspectors' variable expertise. We would advocate that training includes an assessment at the end, to ensure standards are met across the board.

**9. How well do you rate the general standard of delivery of qualifications and training courses?**

Poor. Daycare Trust is aware of concerns, from childcare providers and local authorities, that NVQ training is not always fit-for-purpose. In our research with a wide range of providers we have found that many are critical of the standards and quality of courses some of their staff have attended. Providers felt there was no consistency or set standards amongst the vast array of courses staff were completing. Some feel that courses provided by local colleges often required that those attending complete a lot of work, whereas a local agency could provide a similar course but require far less work and was less rigorous in its assessment of pupils.

Providers wanted to have more control over how training was being provided and how the standards were regulated so they had assurances that when staff came to them with certain qualifications they could be sure their course was rigorous enough to ensure they had the requisite skills.

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.

**10. Please give your views about learning and training done in early education and childcare settings. For example, about the type or amount of learning. If you can, please be specific about particular qualifications.**

We are concerned that local authority spending cuts have impacted on training and professional development budgets.

In addition, our research with a variety of providers also found that the quality of training done in early education and childcare settings, such as apprenticeships and courses provided by local agencies, could be variable as it depended on the quality of the setting in which it was completed. If it was a poor quality setting, for example, they felt that this would result in staff learning bad practises and would be less capable of translating the knowledge gained from their course into effective practice.

**11. How do you view the range of current qualifications available for those working in the early education and childcare sector?**

Too many.

**12 Do you feel that different training providers deliver qualifications in a way that ensures consistent outcomes for learners? Please explain any views you have.**

No. See answer to question 9.

**13 Do you feel that the early education and childcare workforce is sufficiently inclusive and diverse? (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age). Please explain any views you have.**

No. Clearly, men are significantly under-represented in the sector, comprising only 2% of the workforce. Over the last decade, Daycare Trust has completed a number of reports on this subject and worked with the previous government and CWDC to make recommendations to attract more men to the workforce. Evidence suggests that parents would like to see more men working in the childcare services their children use. A CWDC survey in 2009 found that 55% of parents were in favour of male practitioners in early years settings. A MORI poll in 2003 found that 77% of the public were in favour of men working in the profession, and 84% of parents said that they were willing to place their children in a childcare setting where a male childcare worker is employed.

There are many potential benefits including a positive male role model for children, seeing men in caring and supportive roles, different outlooks and experiences coming to services, the positive impact on wider gender equality issues as well as providing a wider pool of recruits in a period when there are ambitious plans to expand the workforce. Research in this area shows that 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 concerns around child protection and a lack of promotion of childcare as a career for males. Together these create barriers to uptake among men.

We note the commitment in the coalition agreement to improve the gender balance in the workforce and are currently working with Asquith Nurseries and others to tackle this ongoing problem. We would be delighted to talk to the government about how the sector can help meet this coalition agreement objective.

**14. Do you think current training and qualifications promote inclusivity and diversity? Please explain any views you have, and give any ideas you have for how inclusivity and diversity might be improved.**

No. Daycare Trust feels that in some early years settings, staff lack the qualifications to meet the needs of disabled children or those with severe special educational needs. The shortage of appropriate early childhood education and care is often a consequence of structural and staffing factors in existing provision. While staff in maintained nurseries and in nursery and reception classes in primary schools have a high level of awareness about the special educational needs and disability frameworks, there is a much lower level of awareness in private and voluntary sector early years provision of the statutory frameworks, and special educational needs and disability issues more broadly. While Support and Aspiration addresses the training needs of teachers in relation to disability and special educational needs, it does not address training needs in the early years workforce. This group has a different profile to teachers and college lecturers, with far fewer staff having degree-level qualifications. Different approaches to training the early years workforce are needed than proposed in Support and Aspiration.

As the main statutory guidance for early years provision which should inform all teaching for practitioners, the EYFS should include clearer guidance on meeting the needs of children with disabilities and special educational needs. Daycare Trust feels that the present EYFS statutory guidance and support material lacks enough guidance on this issue. For example, neither the EYFS statutory guidance, nor the good practice material, makes it clear how the needs of children with special educational needs should be met through the six areas of learning in the EYFS. Linkages back to statutory guidance on special educational needs and disability needs to be much more explicit within the EYFS.

We also recommend that the Department for Education in the capacity as successor to the Children's Workforce Development Council works with academics and awarding bodies to review the content of childcare courses from the perspective of meeting the needs of children with disabilities and special educational needs, including the needs of older children with disabilities. We also recommend that Government uses statutory guidance to oblige all early years providers to have attended in-service training on meeting the needs of children with disabilities and special education needs.

**15. Do you feel that the current range of training and qualifications sufficiently meets the needs of those currently in the workforce as well as new entrants? Please explain any views you have, and give any ideas you have to improve this.**

No. As stated above, Daycare Trust has concerns that some staff lack basic literacy and numeracy and recommend that all staff working in the sector are supported to gain these qualifications, as well as working towards qualifications in childcare.

In addition, Daycare Trust believes it is essential that funding is provided to help train and develop volunteers. Given volunteers are such a crucial part of the children and young people's workforce, we need to help them feel valued and part of the whole workforce. Many workers start as volunteers and then become paid staff as they gain experience. They too need access to training and qualifications, in particular the relevant Level 2 and 3 qualifications.

**16. How well do you think that the existing framework of qualifications supports career progression within, across and beyond early education and childcare?**

Adequately. We would like to see the greater involvement in Level 1, 2 and 3 course development of early years academics and senior practitioners in centres of early excellence. Links between academia, senior practitioners and awarding bodies need to be stronger.

**17. Would you like to see qualifications equipping people to move more easily between early education and childcare and other parts of the children's workforce, e.g. from health to day care, and vice versa?**

Yes, this seems sensible.

**18. Do you think clear career pathways and progression routes exist?**

No. Daycare Trust believes that the lack of a framework linking skills development with career progression is one of the main causes of a poorly qualified workforce. We would like to see a strategy creating a single qualification framework in order to attract and retain more qualified people to the sector, strengthen inter-agency and multi-disciplinary working and promote better leadership. We would like to see a strategy to bring together in a single framework early years, schools, social care youth services and health. We believe that this is a good first step towards creating a more consistent and holistic children's workforce.

**19. Are these well enough understood by those outside or considering a career in the profession?**

No.

**20. Do you think that there are sufficient opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD), (both accredited and non-accredited)?**

No. 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. Daycare Trust also feels that spending cuts have negatively impacted on the ability of settings to offer CPD opportunities.

**21. Please give any specific concerns/barriers to accessing CPD, or ideas for improving CPD.**

Daycare Trust believes that the most immediate problem with upskilling the childcare workforce is the significant investment that would be required to raise pay and conditions in the childcare sector to a level commensurate with other skilled and graduate professions. Currently the childcare workforce is among the lowest paid across all sectors, with many workers on minimum wage or marginally above. Low pay is a significant barrier to individuals investing time and money into continuing professional development which is unlikely to be rewarded with significant improvements in pay. Moreover, local authorities which were previously in a position to support settings to fund training courses for their staff are facing significant funding cuts and many have reported having to cut back on funding for this training. The Graduate Leader Fund, which did provide funding to support settings in recruiting and paying for highly skilled staff has been incorporated into the Early Intervention Grant. For this reason, it is essential that local authorities recognise the importance of highly skilled staff significantly contributing to the quality of provision which can help to ameliorate the effects of social disadvantage and can provide children with a better start to school. Therefore, investing in training staff in this sector is an effective means of achieving targets concerning social exclusion and breaking cycles of disadvantage<sup>i</sup>.

**22. Do you think that there are any particular problems with the quality assurance process for qualifications and training?**

We note that there are a number of different bodies responsible for the regulation of qualifications for the children's workforce. Ofqual is responsible for ensuring standards and integrity in examinations in England, although Ofqual a very limited role in regulating the content of the courses. Ofsted also has a role in inspecting courses that lead to the award of qualified teacher status – regulating both the content of these courses and the integrity of the examination system. Formerly the CWDC awarded Early Years Professional Status and had a role in liaising between awarding bodies and employers. External examiners in universities also have an important role to play in regulating examinations in these institutions.

Daycare Trust believes that there is significant variation in the content of some childcare courses and not all staff gaining qualifications have a comprehensive understanding of all childcare issues. We are concerned that this is very little real review of the **content** of childcare qualifications awarded at Levels 1, 2 and 3. This limited review will be



further weakened with the abolition of the CWDC. We recommend that one non-departmental government body – most logically Ofsted – be given the role of reviewing the content of childcare courses at Levels 1, 2 and 3.

**23. How do you think this process could be improved (e.g. strengthening the role of awarding bodies)?**

See answer to question 22.

**24. During the Tickell Review of the Early Years Foundation Stage many people raised the Nursery Nurse Examining Board (NNEB) qualification, which is no longer available to new learners, as a qualification for practitioners that defined standards and conferred status. Which aspects of it do you think have relevance now and how might we learn from it?**

Research with providers has found that many rated this qualification highly for several reasons. Providers felt that because it was two years, full-time and selective about its recruitment, it meant that only those who were committed and passionate about working in the sector made it through. Providers felt that it had high standards and that those which did not meet them were unable to complete the course.

**25. The Government is committed to promoting a minimum Level 3 qualification for those working in the sector - how do you think this might be achieved?**

Daycare Trust supports this commitment for all those working in the sector to have or be working towards a level 3 qualification. It is important, though, that a clear focus is kept on addressing issues that may arise as the new structure for training the early years workforce is constructed. For instance current routes into the workforce allow people to easily enter at a later age. Typically this includes parents with school-aged children who are looking to return to the employment market and to whom the working hours of many settings are attractive as they allow them to collect their own children from school. Such potential employees may not have the requisite qualifications initially – and may find it more difficult to afford the necessary time and money to gain them, given they are likely to have a young family. Nevertheless, people from this demographic group represent a valuable source of potential employees who might bring additional skills from previous roles to the sector.

**26. Do you think that the aspiration for all settings to be led by a graduate level leader is right?**

Yes. Daycare Trust also agrees with the aspiration for all settings to be led by a graduate level leader and would also go further and advocate a largely graduate profession. The value of highly qualified staff is backed up by research. The EPPE study found that children progressed more, both in terms of learning (particularly in pre-reading) and improved social behavioural outcomes, when they had more hours with staff qualified to at least Level 5 (with qualified teachers being best for social

behavioural outcomes). Effects noted included reductions in anti-social/worried behaviours and improvements in cooperation. Conversely, low qualification levels led to poorer outcomes for peer sociability and co-operation. The level of staff qualifications is likely to be an indicator of centre quality (and will therefore improve child outcomes) and staff with higher qualifications will have better knowledge of children's development and interact appropriately.

Currently, the proportion of staff with a Level 6 qualification in early years or similar is very low in all settings, and will need to be substantially improved if the workforce is to meet the present government's target of having a graduate leader in every full daycare setting by 2015.

It is also important to remember, though, that quality does not just rest on graduate leaders – many of whom will practically spend little actual time with children – but on upskilling the workforce as a whole, a stance that is supported by research such as EPPE and the Millennium Cohort Study. To that extent Daycare Trust would support a minimum level of qualification for staff in the early years.

**27. If the questions we have asked have not given you opportunity to make all your views known, please use this space to add any further comments you would like to draw to the attention of Professor Nutbrown.**

Daycare Trust believes that the most immediate problem with upskilling the childcare workforce is the significant investment that would be required to raise pay and conditions in the childcare sector to a level commensurate with other skilled and graduate professions. Currently the childcare workforce is among the lowest paid across all sectors, with many workers on minimum wage or marginally above. Considering staffing costs already make up around 80% of a standard nursery's outgoings and given childcare costs are generally agreed to be very high by parents, providers and government alike, it is likely that this would have to be paid for at least in part by additional state funding. The last government has recognised this by instituting the Graduate Leader Fund to support settings in recruiting and paying for highly skilled staff. This replaced the Transformation Fund which had a similar purpose, but did not attract providers because of its short term nature.

Daycare Trust believes that the UK needs to be more ambitious in its aspirations for the childcare workforce. New Zealand, for example, starting from a similar position to the UK, has set more ambitious targets.

A professional workforce must aim to hire professional calibre staff. We believe that it is time for a career as an early childhood practitioner to be considered as a realistic and desirable career option – not a route that young women with few academic qualifications are pushed into, regardless of whether they are suited to a role in the sector. Despite the improvement in available qualifications; routes into training; and aspirations for a graduate-led workforce, working in early years education and care is

still often seen as a career path for those who have ‘failed’ in other areas. In part this is likely to relate to the poor pay and limited opportunities for career progression.

The CWDC’s response to the Children’s Workforce Strategy (2006) concluded that as a general rule there was not necessarily a direct link between levels of pay and reward, and recruitment and retention across the children’s workforce. However it also stated that in some early years occupations it did find lower pay to be a significant factor in the high turnover of staff. This is important – as it can have an effect on the quality of care. Melhuish, summarising research on quality, concludes that:

“Staff retention is important. Every time a familiar caregiver leaves children suffer a loss. Where this happens over and over the possibilities for establishing sustained relationships and complex communication necessary for maximising developmental potential are greatly reduced.”

It is bewildering for a young child – maybe just a few months old – to experience a continual change in their caregiver, and it may have adverse effects on their development.

Qualifications, pay and status are all intrinsically linked. One will not improve without the other. Therefore it is essential that the pay of all staff working in the sector is improved and staff should be seen as equal to professionals working in other children’s services, and paid accordingly.

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<sup>i</sup> Sylva, K., Melhuis, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report A Longitudinal Study Funded by the DfES 1997-2004