



A Workforce in Crisis: Saving Our Early Years



January 2021



About the Early Years Workforce Commission



The Early Years Workforce Commission's steering group is made up of representatives from key organisations including CACHE, the leading awarding organisation for early years and childcare qualifications; leading provider of independent research and intelligence for the early years sector CEEDA; membership bodies Early Education, The Early Years Alliance, PACEY, TACTYC and NDNA, nursery group, the London Early Years Foundation; research organisation, the Education Policy Institute, education charity the Sutton Trust and Voice, the union for education professionals.

The overarching goals of the Early Years Workforce Commission are to:

- Promote wider recognition of the importance of the early years sector and its staff
- Identify ways the sector can offer more rewarding and attractive career opportunities, which reflect the intrinsic role the sector plays in supporting the economy and national workforce
- Establish ways to boost recruitment and safeguard job retention within the sector
- Support the sector to identify, and recover from, the impacts of COVID-19

This Report sets out to share findings from a recent early years workforce survey which was open from 25th August 2020 until 25th September 2020. The questions of the survey have been included at the end of this Report. The survey was published alongside a Call for Evidence which invited organisations, individuals and businesses from the Early Years sector to respond in order to establish what must be done at this crucial time to ensure the sustainability of the sector. The overarching aim of both the survey and Call for Evidence was to inform an effective and inclusive workforce strategy for the early years sector.

The Early Years Workforce Commission undertook this research in order to gain an up to date picture of the challenges facing the workforce, particularly in light of what has been an unprecedented year, and to identify recommendations.

The data is presented across key themes and finally, significantly identifying clear recommendations. These recommendations make clear links with the key themes and data to support the development of an early years workforce strategy that is informed by the sector.

A clear and coherent strategy that engages early years professionals is required to support and sustain current levels of quality and invest in future professional standards of education and care across the workforce.



Contents



About the Early Years Workforce Commission	2
Contents	3
Executive Summary	4
Key challenges facing the early years workforce explored	6
Our Research: Key Themes	10
Recommendations	21
Funding, equity, and clarity	21
Changing perceptions of the early years career path	21
Changing the Narrative	22
Training	22
Fair pay, recruitment and retention	23
References	24
Appendix	26



Executive Summary



The government appears to have made some progress with regard to early years education and care for babies and young children in England, but this has been limited, inconsistent and insufficient. Without a clear and cohesive strategy of investment in the early years workforce, the sector will continue to miss out on the many opportunities to 'Level Up' early years education for babies, children and families. Inaction will allow negative consequences for the future of society.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of early years education and has accelerated the need for urgent investment in order to achieve a high quality and sustainable early years workforce for all children. Our evidence has clearly demonstrated the challenging obstacles that organisations and individuals across the sector have had to face in light of COVID-19. Now is the time to support the sector, and those who work within it, in order to build upon the current high levels of quality, increase the availability of provision and future-proof this vital sector.

Amongst the many concerns highlighted from those across the sector, the most significant were:

- Existing funding challenges pose a risk to the sustainability of a quality workforce
- Children and families living in disadvantaged and deprived areas face greater impact resulting a widening attainment gap compared to peers who do not
- Intervention, expert advice and support for children and their families has been weakened, interrupted or not available. This includes children with existing special educational needs and disability.

Therefore, the Early Years Workforce Commission calls for the following changes to ensure the sector can deliver consistent, high quality provision across the country and positively evolve the narrative surrounding the early years sector. Only by doing so can we enable the whole country to build back better and support all young people during a critical stage of their lives.

Funding, equity, and clarity

- In order to safeguard jobs and support disadvantaged areas, the Government should provide additional resources for settings which are needed to ensure sufficiency of provision but which are not viable on the basis of current funding rates. Whether funds are deployed to settings with higher fee income ratios, or by application via local authorities on sustainability risk, any criteria would need to acknowledge the extreme challenges many providers are facing.

Changing perceptions of the early years career path

- An awareness campaign should focus on the critical importance of early childhood education on a child's development and life chances and portray the crucial role early years professionals play in supporting this. It should emphasise that this is a skilled role, equivalent to teaching in other phases of education.



Executive Summary



Changing the Narrative

- There must be a shift away from the ‘childcare’ terminology so frequently used to ‘early childhood education’, in order to position the sector as a phase within the education journey rather than only a means of enabling parents to work.

Training

- There should be an urgent exploration and extension of accessible and flexibly offered CPD, with online and face to face options, coupled with more high-quality workplace placements and action research projects, with mentoring support across the sector.

Fair pay, recruitment and retention

- Early Years staff must be recognised and rewarded with a level of pay that reflects their essential role, and which allows them to focus their time and energy into just one job, rather than two or more to make ends meet, as so many who work in the early years have reported having to do.

These recommendations aim to address the most significant challenges in the early years workforce, to support staff, and ultimately ensure a clear and cohesive strategy of investment in the sector. Taken together, these measures will ensure the continuation of high-quality early education for babies and children across the country.

It is crucial that the Government take a joined-up and holistic approach to future strategies for the sector. Piecemeal reform has consistently failed, leaving the sector with an uneven landscape in which there are varying degrees of pay, staff support and quality of provision.

This report’s recommendations are closely interlinked, and provide a response which is greater than the sum of its parts. Only by supporting the sector in a strategic, joined-up way can we sustain a high-quality service, which is crucial for the future of the UK’s economy and the outcomes of young people.



Key challenges facing the early years workforce explored



1. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 the early years sector was already facing the pressures of low recruitment levels of skilled practitioners, poor retention rates, and financial barriers to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and training.
2. The stark picture of underfunding across the early years sector means low incomes for the workforce, who are faced with the harsh reality of trying to make ends meet day to day. In England, the average wage across the early years workforce is just £7.42 an hour, this compares to £12.57 for the total population (Social Mobility Commission, 2020).
3. Low wages also create a reliance on in-work benefits such as Universal Credit and/or food bank use. Data suggests that 44.5% of practitioners rely on some form of in-work government benefit and that soon, practitioners will be earning less than someone working in retail (Education Policy Institute, 2019). 11% of full-time early years staff work more than 42 hours per week, compared with 3% of retail workers and 6% of the female workforce (Education Policy Institute, 2019).
4. More concerning than this, 13% of the workforce earn less than £5.00 an hour and many childcare workers take on second jobs to make ends meet (Education Policy Institute, 2019).
5. Low pay then creates and exacerbates other issues which directly impact young children. Ultimately, recruitment and retention are one of the biggest challenges the early years sector faces, with one in six workers (15%) leaving their jobs within a year (Education Policy Institute, 2019). Many within the workforce do not earn a high enough wage for the skilled job they do, nor does their salary incentivise development to enhance their skills further.
6. The vital role early years staff play should be recognised by wider society, which still does not value this key sector, which will be critical to economic recovery as we emerge from the pandemic.
7. Both the 2017 Early Years Workforce Strategy, and the Early Years Foundation Stage strategic framework published earlier this year, failed to take into consideration previous government commissioned reports which unpacked the key issues facing the sector, and does not outline a long-term plan to upskill and invest in the early years workforce and address some of the most urgent challenges the sector is facing.
8. One key policy, to grow the graduate workforce in disadvantaged areas, was dropped. This was to be a cornerstone of the strategy, which promised to drive recruitment, retention and increase training levels, and if seen through, would have played into the current government priority of levelling up in some of the most disadvantaged parts of our society.
9. Recent research, carried out by The National Day Nursery Association and highlighted in a recent report by Sutton Trust, shows a decline in the proportion of staff qualified to Level 3. The National Day Nursery Association found that the number of Level 3 qualified staff has fallen from 66% in 2017-18 to 52% in 2018-19, the number of early years graduates and Early Years Teachers (EYT) has fallen from 13% to 5%, and that the number of unqualified staff has risen from 10% to 26% in the same period (Sutton Trust, 2020).
10. The range of staff in childcare settings is more heavily weighted with staff holding only Level 1 and 2 qualifications, and this is seen especially in provision for younger children. Highly qualified staff have a positive impact on the overall quality of provision for pre-school children, studies have shown (NatCen Social Research, 2017). The Lifetime Skills Guarantee provides a welcome opportunity to reverse this trend, and we call on government to ensure there is a long-term policy to enable all early years staff to gain a Level 3 qualification, and for this to be the benchmark qualification for the sector, as suggested by many sector experts.



Key challenges facing the early years workforce explored

11. Education and training levels remain a real challenge across the sector and the workforce of highly qualified veteran staff is ageing, with fewer employees, of all ages, upskilling. In 2018, around 90,000 childcare workers were 55 years old or above, meaning a significant number will be exiting the workforce in the next 10 years, if not sooner (Sutton Trust, 2019). If we are to see progress made in this area, much needs to be done to address training and CPD for younger staff and ensure that we see a sustained increase in the skill levels of those already in and going into the workforce.
12. Further research highlighted that fewer than half of private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings employ an EYT or equivalent, with cost being recognised as the main barrier, while all maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in schools must employ a qualified teacher (Cattoretti, et.al, 2019). However, pressure on funding may push increasing numbers of schools to circumvent this requirement and run governor-led PVI provision on site, as a quarter of schools already have to subsidise their nursery provision from other budgets (Cattoretti, et.al, 2019).
13. Registrations on EYT courses have plummeted to an alarmingly low rate, from 2,300 in 2013-14 to under 400 in 2019-20 (Cattoretti, et.al, 2019).
14. Ultimately, a dearth of high-quality early years teaching will continue to exacerbate the levels of inequality across the country and result in widening of the gap for children's school readiness levels.
15. Beyond this, the sector is experiencing increased challenges around apprenticeships. In a report from Ceeda (2019) they outlined the barriers for recruiting apprentices. These are:
 - a. Lack of funds
 - b. Lack of time to support assessment and on the job training
 - c. The need for compliance with the job training requirements.
16. The downward trend in the number of early years apprenticeships due to increasing barriers to access must be addressed. As part of the government's response to COVID-19, we know there is a real focus on apprenticeships and training for those who have become unemployed. By encouraging more of England's workforce to undertake Level 3 apprenticeship qualifications in Early Years and Childcare, this would be beneficial to address this issue and benefit the early years sector. In order to do this, there would need to be reduced barriers to entry, such as targets on kickstart programmes and increased levy access.
17. The Early Years Workforce Strategy, published on 3rd March 2017, included a commitment by the Department for Education to develop career pathways for the Early Year workforce: "We want to support the workforce to develop, both professionally and personally, and want staff to understand how to achieve their career goals."

Key challenges facing the early years workforce explored

18. We know the DfE has worked with sector organisations in a collective approach to inform an interactive career map. The career map introduces those interested in beginning a career in early education and childcare through engaging case studies that explore diverse roles across the sector. The map signposts the roles within the early years workforce and beyond, making this a useful tool for those just beginning their journey as well as a valuable professional development resource for those already employed in the sector. It identifies the varied routes through academic study and vocational learning through on the job training; equally valued and enabling of progression.
19. In order to make best use of this tool, more should be done to actively promote careers advice for those in the sector and those looking for a rewarding career path. Schools must be encouraged to undertake strong careers advice programmes which promote a career in early years, and use this career path map to highlight how individuals can progress in the early years workforce and enjoy a rewarding career.
20. There is also a need to consider issues of equality and inclusion within the early years workforce – a recent report suggesting that 96% of the workforce is female (Education Policy Institute, 2019). An EPI report in 2019 did recognise that the sector is seeing an increasing number of men making up part of the workforce, and these are men aged between 15 and 34 years (Sutton Trust, 2020). There should more done to capitalise on this and drive training and retention of men and BAME groups at Level 3 entering the sector, to increase diversity, and ensure staff across the workforce reflect their communities, are appropriately skilled, and have a route to development and promotion.
21. The significant reduction in funded CPD following austerity measures has led to a lack of funds for staff progression to more advanced training and their consequent retention in a setting. Barriers to CPD include accessibility, affordability/subsidy, time, and local opportunities (Sutton Trust, 2020).
22. Employers say they lack the funds to provide training for their workforce. A 2019 survey found only 8% of early years providers planned to spend more money on training and 55% planned to spend less (Education Policy Institute, 2019).
23. In order to address these challenges, to upskill the workforce and ensure staff are continuing to develop and progress, large private groups that access funding from Government should be encouraged and incentivised to train and develop a certain number of staff each year, to ensure there is satisfactory increase in skills across the sector.

Key challenges facing the early years workforce explored



24. There is evidence of an inability to afford, recruit and retain higher qualified staff, especially in the PVI sector, which has a direct impact on the quality of provision. To address the achievement gap, there should be additional funding for settings working in disadvantaged communities, based on an increased level of disadvantage funding through the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF) and the Early Years Pupil Premium to match levels in the schools sector. Additional needs funding is 17.6% of the schools' formula, but equivalent supplements are a maximum of 10% in EYNFF and 6% as a current sector average. Early Years Pupil Premium is £302 per child compared to £1345 for pupil premium in primary schools.
25. Since the newer SEND Code of Practice came into being, the role of the SENCO has changed drastically, and the lack of suitably qualified staff has continued to impact children with SEND in many settings. Better training in this field of work is essential across all settings to ensure that young children showing signs of additional needs are both recognised and addressed at the earliest possible stage.
26. Figures from the Department for Education (2019) reveal that 54% more children with special educational needs (SEN) are attending private nurseries in England.
27. Since reforms to statements and Education Health Care (EHC) plans were brought in in 2015, the number of children given these has increased by 11% from 11,250 to 12,516. But 30% more children with SEN are now accessing support in private, voluntary and independent (PVI) nurseries (Department for Education, 2019).
28. We welcome the Department for Education's introduction of new SEND qualifications at Level 2 and Level 3, but much more needs to be done to ensure every child with SEND is being supported by suitably qualified staff. This requires ongoing CPD as well as much wider uptake of the Level 2 and 3 qualifications. The wider funding crisis, coupled with the specific funding challenges for SEND, severely restrict the ability of providers to upskill their staff in this area.



Our Research:

Key Themes



Building on its contributions to The Sutton Trust report (2020), the Commission submitted a response to this year's Comprehensive Spending Review, which outlined initial recommendations for the Government.

The Commission now considers these recommendations, whilst taking into account the key challenges which have been highlighted in our survey and Call for Evidence.

1. A Vision for the Workforce

- *There remains a need for a clear vision for the early years and childcare workforce and a restatement of the crucial importance of achieving a well-qualified, high status and better rewarded profession to achieve a world class early years' service.*
- *The goal for establishing a highly professional and qualified early years and childcare workforce with a coherent career progression pathway and training structure from entry level, through to Level 3 and then to more advanced graduate and postgraduate qualifications, should be reinstated.*
- *It should also aim to enhance staff leadership skills and confidence for both organisational and pedagogical leadership roles, providing sufficient enhancement to pay and conditions of employment to make career progression worthwhile.*

Building on these recommendations from the Sutton Trust's 'Revisiting the Nutbrown Review Report' and in light of the impact of COVID-19, the Early Years Workforce Commission's research found the following:

Respondents suggest that improving initial career advice as well as the progression pathways would be one practical step towards retaining staff and developing them into pedagogical leaders. This advice should set out consistent requirements of the amount and type of training required to progress within a setting or between settings. Statutory employment of Early Years Practitioners and/or Early Years Teachers in the PVI sector would support sustainability and promote career aspirations.

There should be increased national exposure for the work Early Years Professionals do (38% respondents). A national awareness campaign focused on the vital importance of the early years should be implemented. This should incorporate strong PR, effective careers advice, clear progression routes and effective, consistent CPD.

Respondents called for a reduction in the pay discrepancies between childminders, group-based settings and school-based settings, achieving more parity in pay between early years and primary teaching. They suggest this change will make early years more attractive and counteract a perception of the early years as a 'springboard' for teaching in primary education. Respondents also said that without a commitment to further government financial support the sector may not recover from the impact of the pandemic, which in turn will impact on the availability of provision, widen inequalities and hinder parental employment and training opportunities. 59% of respondents would welcome government recognition of the professional role held by staff working across this sector, whilst 33% called for fairer funding to be allocated.

The challenges facing this sector have been present and well established for some time, and the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting lockdowns and declining economy have hit an already vulnerable sector, and created a perfect storm which threatens the quality, viability and sustainability of early years provision in England. At the centre of these challenges sit the providers and the workforce who truly bear the brunt and continue to work in low paid, undervalued and stressful roles, which are becoming increasingly precarious as settings' economic viability comes into question.



Our Research:

Key Themes



Combined with the overarching issues which face the sector, another has become increasingly more prevalent in recent years. Children who already experience disadvantage in their local communities and challenges with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are increasingly being left behind, and skilled practitioners are needed in early years settings to combat this and provide high-quality care to every child. The Sutton Trust, (2020), suggests that COVID-19 has had a direct impact on children's social and emotional development and wellbeing, with many parents reporting a particularly negative impact on their child, including over half of those who had been unable to return to their provider by June.

Services in place to support children and families have been seriously impacted and this is happening during a time when a lot of families need it most. Investment to enable services to be effective for children and families is an absolute priority if these children are to access the education and care they deserve. The Early Intervention Foundation, together with the charity Action for Children, (2020), state that "the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable children and families is likely to be profound".

An impact brief by the Sutton Trust highlights some of the effects COVID-19 has had on settings, and particularly the impact it is having on those settings in the most deprived areas:

- a. Providers in the most deprived areas were more than twice as likely to have needed a business rates holiday compared to the least deprived (35% compared to 16%).
- b. They were also almost twice as likely to have availed of small business grant funding (18% v 10%).
- c. As a result, a third of settings (34%) in the most deprived areas reported they were unlikely to still be operating next year, compared to 24% of those in the least deprived areas.
- d. 69% of settings anticipated operating at a loss over the last six months of 2020.
- e. 42% of settings in the most deprived areas reported that they may need to make redundancies as a consequence, and 31% of settings as a whole.

Settings shared with local councils that they are concerned about the threat of redundancy as they are not able afford to pay full salaries following the impacts of re-opening with limited numbers. They hope to be able to re-recruit later, though all are aware that the sector already suffers from difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. Councils are concerned that this will have an impact on local sufficiency in the longer term, and felt central Government must consider the specific needs of the early years sector in its financial planning for recovery. Two thirds (67%) of providers in the PVI sector reported being temporarily closed during lockdown, including 79% of pre-schools, 59% of nurseries and 41% of childminders (Department for Education, 2019). In comparison to this, just 30% of state-maintained nurseries closed during the national lockdown.





Early education and childcare play a vital role in children's early development and family wellbeing. In 2019, 68% of two-year olds and 95% of four-year olds benefitted from funded early education. However, with the start of lockdown this changed radically. Of those who had formal arrangements, just 7% of children continued to attend throughout the lockdown period (Department for Education, 2019).

2. Access to Benchmark Qualifications

- *Barriers to accessing entry level (Level 1-3) qualifications, including apprenticeships, should be identified and addressed urgently to encourage new recruits into the sector, e.g. funding, time commitments and workplace requirements.*
- *The aspiration to make Level 3 a benchmark qualification for the sector should be revived and incentives to achieve it should be offered.*
- *In addition, the benefits of establishing an Early Years specialist QTS route, combining current QTS and EYT routes, and providing conversion courses for existing EYP/EYT graduates should be revisited, along with access to the Early Career Framework.*
- *Importantly, equality issues in access need to be addressed through, for example, increasing the number of men in early education and childcare and ensuring BAME representation at all levels in the profession.*

Building on these recommendations from the Sutton Trust's Revisiting the Nutbrown Review Report, in light of the impact of COVID-19, the Early Years Workforce Commission's research found the following:

High quality early education can make an enormous difference to children's lives, including helping to reduce the 'disadvantage gap' in children's education. This has not been mirrored by investment into the sector in the UK or recognition of the value early education offers. The international evidence base shows a picture of UK under-investment in early years. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2019) analysis shows that UK expenditure on early education and care for children aged 0 to 2 years is amongst the lowest of all 16 countries for which measures are available, at 0.1% of GDP. This compares with 0.3% in Germany and 1% in Norway. UK expenditure on pre-primary education from 3 years to the start of primary school is 0.4% of GDP, compared to the EU23¹ average of 0.7%. This lack of investment has tangible impacts on pay and qualification levels in the sector.

Councils have told us that the way they envisage an increase in the quality of early years practitioners includes "higher wages" (82%), "improved professional development" (79%) and "better career progression" (71%). Respondents stressed that improved professional development would support their employees to continue providing excellent teaching to young children and obtain the qualifications that would attract higher wages (62%).

¹ The EU23 is calculated as the unweighted mean of the data values of the 23 countries that are members of both the European Union and the OECG for which data are available or can be estimated.



Our Research:

Key Themes

13



One respondent reports that a total of 76% of councils said they were “very concerned” (23%) or “fairly concerned” (52%) about the quality of Level 3 practitioners working in early years settings.

For those who contributed to the Commission’s research, it is of great concern that there appears to be significant disparity between areas in England where there are higher proportions of more highly trained staff. Respondents highlighted the proportion of two-year-olds in settings with better-qualified staff has increased in areas such as the South East and South West. There has also been a clear decrease in the percentage of children benefitting from the presence of better-qualified staff in the London area, with a significant drop for two-year-olds. This is likely to enhance the disadvantage gap already apparent across England.

Data received tells us that to drive up standards in the early years workforce, improved professional development and better career progression are required and valued greatly by staff. Indeed, 43% of respondents undertook online CPD courses whilst on furlough. Improved professional development would support the many highly experienced but unqualified practitioners currently providing excellent teaching to young children to obtain the qualifications that would attract higher wages.

Suggested avenues for funding include a centrally commissioned Transition Fund, and support via local authorities/LEPs with funds for business support and marketing addressed. The Quality Premium (under the Transformation Fund) was deemed to be crucial in allowing various Early Years settings to remunerate Early Years Professionals at an appropriate level, therefore, a return to this would be welcome.

Recent data from the Early Years and Childcare Providers Survey (DfE 2020) on ethnicity within the early years workforce shows that not enough is known about whether the workforce at all levels reflects the children and families it serves. We urge government to address this to ensure that the workforce is recruiting from all sections of the community.

3. Access to CPD

- CPD, which follows on from initial training, needs to be a requirement for all staff throughout their careers and be properly funded and the current barriers to access addressed, in a similar way to the CPD and training of teachers in primary and secondary schools.
- There should be an urgent exploration and extension of more accessible and flexibly offered CPD, with online and face to face options, coupled with more high-quality workplace placements and action projects, with mentoring support across the sector.
- Mechanisms for providing better financial support to cover costs for training and CPD, linked to career progression, would improve the status and attractiveness of Early Childhood Education and Care as a career (identified by 13 per cent of respondents).



Our Research:

Key Themes



Building on these recommendations from the Sutton Trust's Revisiting the Nutbrown Review Report, in light of the impact of COVID-19, the Early Years Workforce Commission's research found the following:

In relation to learning and development, 44% of respondents felt their learning and development has been negatively impacted during the pandemic, 32% thought it has stayed the same and 24% said it has improved. The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on a significant portion of the early years workforce, and will have limited employees who, as highlighted, struggle to access CPD and training.

During COVID

- 43% of respondents undertook online courses
- 20% of respondents did not undertake CPD
- 14% of respondents undertook research on early years practice
- 6% of respondents undertook certified qualifications
- 6% of respondents undertook volunteering
- 3% of respondents undertook research on career opportunities/options

Whilst the government's recent commitment to upskill adult learners is noted here, and the opportunity to positively impact the workforce has significant potential. Learning and development is highly valued by the sector with 84% of respondents reporting that they are encouraged to undertake regular continuing professional development all recognised the value of CPD, but were also aware of acute accessibility challenges.

Following the first national lockdown due to COVID-19, 21% of respondents felt that access to internal and external training opportunities were needed, and 51% of respondents would prefer online training courses. The wellbeing needs of staff were also identified with 40% of respondents welcoming more meetings with colleagues and communication being clearly valued. 12% requested more one-to-one supervision and a total of 52% prioritised training around wellbeing initiatives.

Respondents identified the importance of valuing staff needs and interests for CPD (12%), 20% stressed the need for making time to undertake CPD and 15% make a connection between CPD and financial reward or incentive as part of career advancement.





4. Graduate Leadership

- Incentives for graduate leaders to be employed in all early years settings should be reinstated, but especially for those working with less advantaged children and those with SEND.
- A targeted re-introduction of a Leadership Quality Fund should be considered so that higher qualified staff can work as pedagogical leaders in early years provision serving less advantaged communities, with enhanced pay and status, and there should be a place for the role of pedagogical leader in every setting.
- Changes to EYFS requirements, incentivising funding schemes and offering training for setting managers as part of a requirement for pedagogical leadership in every setting, is required to highlight the critical role of qualifications and CPD for all who work with young children and raise standards across the sector.

Building on these recommendations from the Sutton Trust's Revisiting the Nutbrown Review Report, in light of the impact of COVID-19, the Early Years Workforce Commission's research found the following:

The pandemic has increased the need for well-qualified pedagogical leadership in settings due to increased levels of disadvantage and complexity of supporting children and families who have been affected.

The Social Mobility Commission presented their Stability of the Early Years Workforce in England Report in August 2020. This report stresses a high-quality early years workforce as crucial for improving social mobility, and rather than reflect on a stable workforce are increasingly concerned of its instability.

Nutbrown (2012) positions effective pedagogical leadership as essential to improve the quality of early years practice and reported that 87% of parents acknowledge the significance of well qualified staff, whilst stating that 27% of parents would be prepared to pay more.

Nutbrown (2012) called for progression opportunities to be provided through accessible continuing professional development to ensure that the skills and pedagogy remain current and responsive to globally influenced evidence-based practice in order to best meet the needs of children and their families, beyond initial training and qualification achievement. There are perhaps lessons to learn from the introduction of the Graduate Leader Fund policy, (Ten Year Strategy for Childcare, introduced under New Labour (2007-2011)). This policy incentivised the sector as a whole and supported upskilling sustainably, delivering an increase at every level and, significantly, a 76% rise of graduates in the workforce, from 16,500 workers to 29,100 workers. In addition to this increase the number of early years workers with a master's degree or equivalent also increased by 13%, from 5,200 workers to 5,900 workers (Education Policy Institute, 2020).





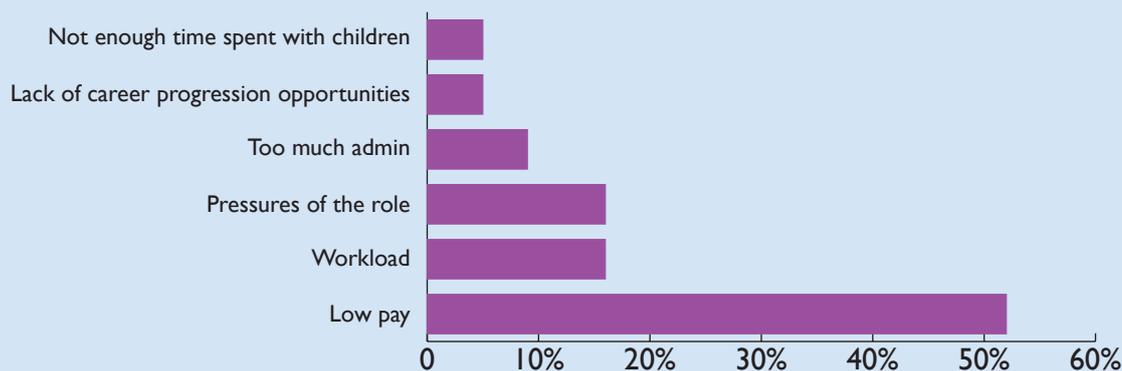
5. Pay and Conditions of Employment

- The enormous disparities in pay, conditions of employment and status across the sector must be addressed.
- Financial and career reward will be needed to incentivise staff to progress their professional training at all levels and where appropriate to undertake advanced qualifications and CPD, and then remain in post to enhance the quality of early learning and development.
- This should include progression into wider sectoral leadership roles in local authorities, training providers and universities.

Building on these recommendations from the Sutton Trust’s Revisiting the Nutbrown Review Report, in light of the impact of COVID-19, the Early Years Workforce Commission’s research found the following:

More than 50% of respondents to our survey said low pay was the main factor resulting in people leaving the sector – far higher than any other issue.

When asked what factor leads to people leaving the sector most, respondents said:



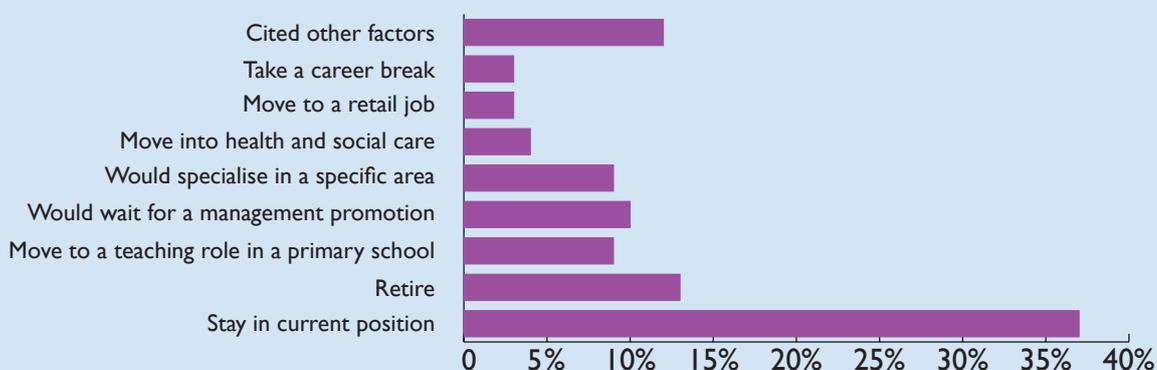
Our Research:

Key Themes



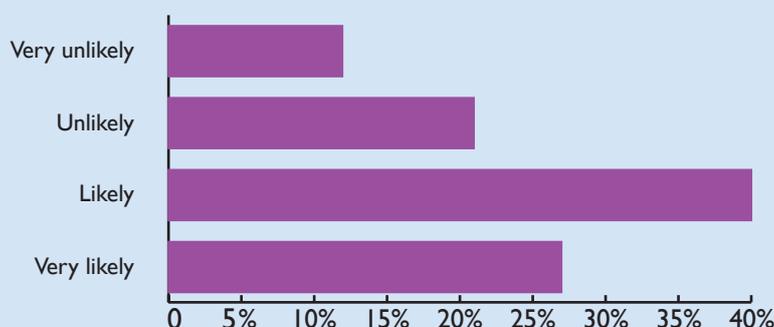
To make their job more rewarding and enjoyable, 68% of respondents felt they needed increased pay, with 55% wanting more recognition of good work from their employers. 32% felt that they needed more time with children, 28% valued high ratio of staff to children for quality. This was reflected when respondents were asked about their next steps, when only 37% said they would stay in their current position.

When asked about their next steps:



As set out in the analysis of key challenges section, we know the sector is experiencing a staffing crisis, and in part this is caused by issues of retention of staff at a variety of levels. This challenge is reflected in our results, which highlight that 33% of respondents were unlikely or very unlikely to stay in the sector after they leave their current role.

When asked whether respondents would stay in their sector past their current job:



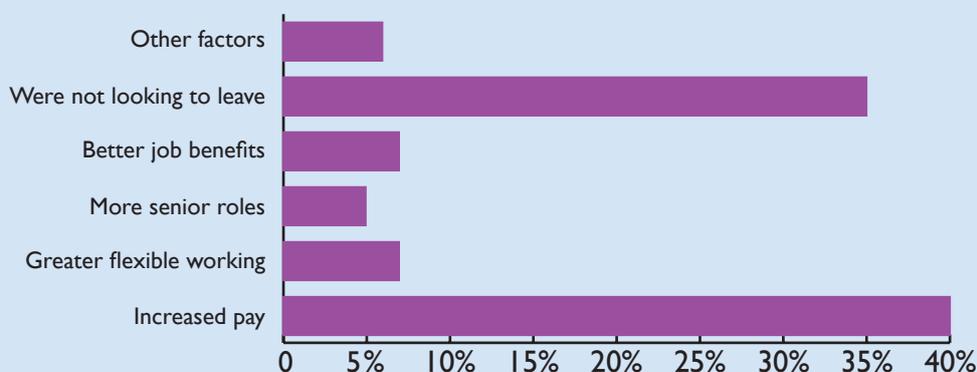
Our Research:

Key Themes



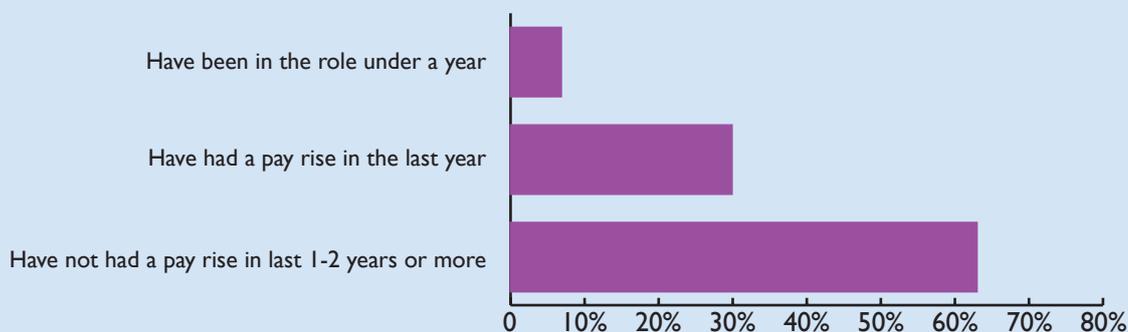
Again, increased pay was referenced as a motivating factor for respondents to stay in their roles. Notably, better job benefits, more senior roles and greater flexible working were all referenced as popular tools for staff retention.

If they were looking to leave the sector what would make respondents stay:



Our survey also highlighted that 64% of respondents have not had a pay rise in the last one to two years or more.

Respondents were asked when they last received a pay rise:



Our Research:

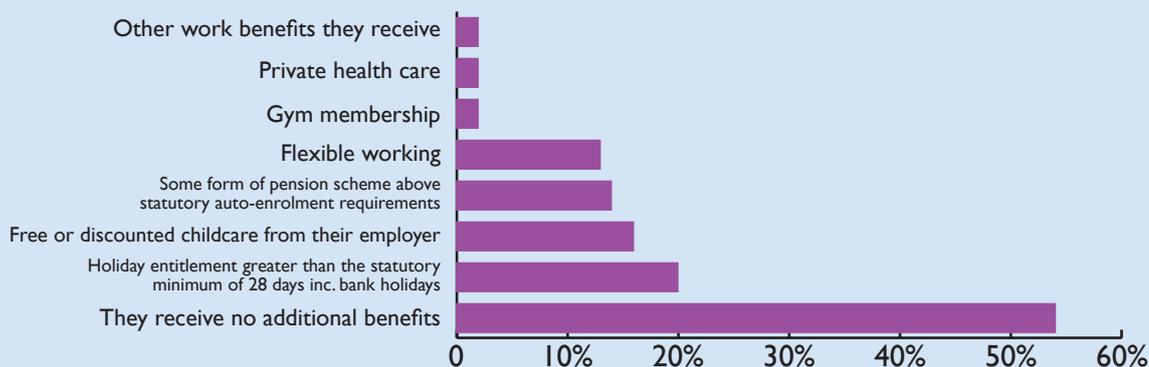
Key Themes



Finally, when asked to select what additional benefits respondents receive through their employer, 54% reported that they do not receive any. Other options, which between 10% – 20% reported receiving included:

- receive holiday entitlement greater than the statutory minimum of 28 days inc. bank holidays
- free or discounted childcare from their employer
- some form of pension scheme above statutory auto-enrolment requirements
- benefit from flexible working

Respondents were asked to specify what additional benefits they receive through their employer:



Respondents suggest that the disparities on pay, conditions of employment and status in light of COVID-19 can only be addressed if the Government recognises that its current funding of early education places does not cover the full cost of delivery. The suggestion that increasing government investment in funded entitlements, as well as future proofing it so that expected new costs such as increases to the living wage are considered, is the only way to support registered providers to invest in their workforce. Only then can progress be made on professionalising the early years workforce and ensuring the sustainability of the mixed economy sector. A national pay scale should be introduced, and funding should be conditional on minimum pay levels and sufficient staff qualifications.

The Social Mobility Commission state that in England, the average wage across the early years workforce is £7.42 an hour. This compares to £11.37 for the female workforce and £12.57 for the total population. 13% of the workforce earn less than £5.00 an hour and many childcare workers take on second jobs



Our Research:

Key Themes



to make ends meet 11% of full-time early years staff work more than 42 hours per week, compared with 3% of retail workers and 6% of the female workforce.

Whilst working towards increased earnings for the workforce, special attention should be paid to reducing the pay discrepancies between childminders, group-based settings and school-based settings. This is essential to making the entire sector more attractive, and achieving more parity in pay between early years and with primary teaching. This will serve to promote the sector as a whole, and to counteract perceptions of the early years as a 'springboard' for teaching in primary education.

COVID-19 has of course affected recruitment, with 44% of respondents identifying that they have not started to recruit again and, reporting of redundancies during COVID-19, only 23% of respondents felt their job was safe. Early Years Workforce Commission Survey Data shows the impact of COVID-19 on recruitment, stating that whilst 16% did not stop recruiting, 28% have begun recruiting again and 44% have not resumed recruitment.

The Low Pay Commission report (2020) stated "We heard that social care and childcare remain underfunded, with low-paid workers within those sectors ultimately bearing the consequences. Covid-19 has only accentuated the long-standing issues in those low-paying sectors where the Government is the main source of funding." The Commission noted this as an area where government funding was vital to addressing the issue of low pay.



Recommendations



Funding, equity, and clarity

The COVID-19 outbreak has pulled into sharp focus that a realistic funding offer is the platform which will support the sector to pay its workers properly and provide sustainable, high-quality care and early education.

Investment must recognise the value of quality early years education for children and their families and is essential in addressing the widening attainment gap for children in deprived and disadvantaged communities.

In order to safeguard jobs, and support disadvantaged areas, the Government should provide additional resources for settings which are needed to ensure sufficiency of provision but which are not viable on the basis of current funding rates. Whether funds are deployed to settings with higher fee income ratios or by application via local authorities on sustainability risk, any criteria would need to acknowledge the extreme challenges many providers are facing.

To support this, free entitlement funding/tax free childcare would need either a significant uplift, or complete overhaul, to ensure effective use of public funds to address the issues of low pay and underfunding.

The government must act to protect the early years sector, and its workforce, to ensure it is able to continue providing a vital service to society, which allows the nation's workforce to attend work, while also ensuring their children are accessing nurturing, educational and high-quality early years provision which will improve children's future life chances.

Changing perceptions of the early years career path

An awareness campaign should focus on the critical importance of early childhood education on a child's development and life chances, and portray the crucial role early years professionals play in supporting this. Refreshing public perception of the sector should also be supplemented by in-depth information and guidance around what early years work involves, and careers advice services need to play a vital role in this. Students considering career paths at schools age should be given clear steps for progression through the early years workforce, which start at the earliest possible opportunity.

Clear progression routes, and opportunities across the sector, at all levels, should be mapped, and achieved through the new T Level qualification in Education and Childcare. There is an opportunity to raise the profile through career toolkits and employer-tutor collaboration, to raise aspirations and to lay down structural change.

The early years sector should be supported to recruit those retraining through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee to retrain and upskill, and to ensure all practitioners without a Level 3 qualification are aware of the funding available to study at this level to support their career progression .



Recommendations

Changing the Narrative

The language and terminology in the sector needs revisiting. Free entitlement funding has evolved from 'nursery vouchers' (1996), 'nursery education grant' (1999) to 'free childcare' (2017) seeing a move from education to childcare. For many, this is not helpful.

By framing the work as education and as part of a birth to five continuum, early educators might be perceived as such rather than the 'childcare for parental employment' discourse which devalues the professional role of staff.

There must be a shift away from the 'childcare' terminology so frequently used to 'early childhood education', in order to position the sector as a phase within the education journey rather than only a means to enabling parents to work.

Given that settings are obliged to follow the learning and development requirements of the EYFS, reframing the workforce by recognising the role they play in a child's early education would contribute to raising the status. The language and terminology in the sector needs revisiting. The government should ensure training and qualifications including associated documentation enable this. The Government should also give parity of esteem in its approach when dealing with primary school's and early education and ensure it do not let the early year sector fall behind.

A change in terminology is a start, but not enough. Expectations about the qualification levels of staff and their pay and conditions also need to be brought more in line with other phases of the education sector. A change in terminology, coupled by additional financial and developmental incentives for those both considering work in the early years sector and those already in post, will create a virtuous cycle which reflects the crucial importance of the sector and positively change public perceptions.

Training

Continuing Professional Development (CPD), which follows on from initial training, needs to be a requirement for all staff throughout their careers and be properly funded. Our survey showed that staff highly value CPD but face many barriers to accessing it.

Better opportunities for learning and development were identified as necessary for the sector. **There should be an urgent exploration and extension of more accessible and flexibly offered CPD, with online and face to face options, coupled with more high-quality workplace placements and action projects, with mentoring support across the sector.** This requirement should consider the impact on smaller providers and sufficient support should be put in place to ensure they are able to deliver this. If we are to see progress made in this area, more needs to be done to address training and CPD for younger staff and ensure there is a sustained increase in the skill levels of those already in and going into the workforce.

Recommendations

Fair pay, recruitment and retention

There is little doubt, as this Report states in its opening line, that some progress has been made to acknowledge the importance of a child's early years. However, this is not matched by the level of investment in the sector, as indicated by the endemic problem of low pay of childcare staff.

Early Years staff must be recognised and rewarded with a level of pay that reflects their essential role, and which allows them to focus their time and energy into just one role, rather than two or more as so many who work in the early years have reported having to do.

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Appendix



The evidence referred to here is derived from a survey open to staff working in the sector and a Call for Evidence for the Early Years Workforce, which was open from 25th August 2020 until 25th September 2020. The findings received from the call for evidence is based around the following questions:

Questions used as part of the Call for Evidence:

1. What are the main issues that you have experienced in the context of your work, as a result of COVID-19 and what needs to be done to resolve them?
2. How does COVID-19 affect the demand for and sustainability of the sector? What should be done to safeguard jobs throughout the early years sector?
3. How has COVID-19 impacted your attitude to your future within the sector? What needs to be done to retain staff who may feel disillusioned by their options and opportunities?
4. What needs to be done to promote wider recognition of the importance of the early years sector and its people?
5. In what ways can the sector offer more rewarding and attractive career opportunities, which reflect the intrinsic role the sector plays in supporting the economy and national workforce?

Questions used as part of the Survey:

1. What type of early years setting do you work in?
2. What best describes your current job role?
3. How many years have you worked in the sector?
4. Please select your postcode area
5. Please enter your full postcode
6. Has the setting or business you work for restarted recruitment of early years staff again following the widespread closure of settings due to COVID-19?
7. How likely is the possibility of redundancy for you following the outbreak of COVID-19?
8. What support, if any, do you feel is most important to thrive in your role, considering the impact of COVID-19?
9. What can be done to make your job (more) rewarding and enjoyable?
10. Which motivating factors do you think most frequently result in people leaving the sector?
11. What do you think the next step in your career will be?
12. How likely is it you will stay in the sector past your current job role?



Appendix



13. If you are looking to leave the sector, what change would make you more likely to stay?
14. When did you last receive a pay rise in your current job role?
15. What is your current rate of pay per hour?
16. What additional benefits, if any, do you receive as part of your role?
17. In the past 3 years, have you had to rely on food banks, or similar, at any point?
18. Do you feel your salary is satisfactory in comparison to the responsibilities you have in your job? If not, please explain why.
19. In your experience, are you encouraged to undertake CPD?
20. How regularly would you say you undertake some form of CPD?
21. How do you think your learning and development has been affected in recent months by the Covid-19 crisis?
22. Please pick which one option would be most important to you in order to encourage CPD in the workplace
23. Have you been placed on furlough at any time during the Covid-19 crisis?
24. Did your access to CPD change during COVID-19?
25. Did you undertake any training or CPD whilst on furlough?
26. How do you feel you have been supported by the business you work for throughout the COVID-19 pandemic?
27. Which of the below should be prioritised to ensure the early years workforce is highly valued and respected?

