



# CHILDCARE NOT JUST A JOB, A VOCATION

A research report from the  
Professional Association  
For Childcare and Early Years

March 2013

# Executive Summary

The Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY), a standard-setting professional association for everyone in childcare and early years, has undertaken a research study to explore what childminders, nannies and nursery workers see as the benefits and challenges of their childcare profession. The study highlights six key findings –

## 1. Long-term commitment to childcare profession

The majority of childminders, nannies and nursery workers who responded to the survey had held at least one previous role in childcare. The vast majority stated they intend to stay in childcare for five years or more.

## 2. Investing time and money in their own development

Commitment to the profession was not only expressed by longevity but also by respondents' dedication to improving their practice and extending their skills. The majority of respondents had attained a full and relevant Level 3 qualification, with many committed to further training including foundation and full degrees.

## 3. Lack of recognition

Many respondents raised concerns that their work was not valued sufficiently highly either by the children's sector or by society at large. Lack of professional recognition was a significant concern for the majority of nannies and nursery workers. Previous research has evidence this as a major concern for childminders<sup>1</sup>.

## 4. Career pathways

Almost a half of respondents share a similar career pathway, starting their career in a nursery or pre-school before moving on to another role in childcare. Those who do leave the profession, often go on to work in other children's professions for example as teaching assistants or to train as primary school teachers.<sup>2</sup>

## 5. Low pay

The main challenge facing everyone working in childcare is low earnings which has a significant impact on the retention of many childcare professionals in the workforce. Whilst the majority of respondents stated they planned to remain in childcare for the next five years, retention data shows that the challenge of low pay means in reality many of these committed professionals will leave the profession.<sup>3</sup>

## 6. Sharing qualities that cannot be taught

Alongside a commitment to develop as professionals, the majority of respondents shared another strong connection. As well as an obvious shared passion for working with children, many respondents recognised that qualifications and training alone were not enough and that the role demanded high levels of emotional intelligence, calmness and patience. Qualities respondents felt could not be taught.

As a result of this study, the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years will be working with its members to ensure the following high-level recommendations are implemented, so childcare professionals are better supported and recognised for the vital work they do.

**1. Government**, both nationally and locally, should focus its already significant investment in childcare on frontline providers, so that they have the resources needed to invest in their own quality improvement.

**2. Government** should recognise the role regulation plays in driving up quality. It should, as is currently being proposed in England, require all those entering the profession to hold at least a full and relevant Level 3 qualification. In doing so, it should recognise the different pathways individuals entering the profession take and ensure barriers to entering the profession are minimised. It should require regulators to place a greater emphasis on the training and development that individual childcare professionals undertake, as part of their inspection process.

<sup>1</sup> NCMA (2012) Annual Membership Survey, Cognisant Research

<sup>2</sup> Carroll, M. Et al. (2008) Recruitment and retention in front-line services: the case of childcare *Career Human Resource Management Journal* 19

<sup>3</sup> Rolfe, H. Et al. (2005) Recruitment and Retention of childcare, Early Years and Play Workers: Research Study *Children and Society*, 19

<sup>4</sup> Pascal C. and Bertram A.D (2002) Assessing Young Children's Learning:

What Counts? In Fisher J. (Ed) *Building Foundations for Learning*, Paul Chapman: London.

Mather, S. Et al. (2011) *Evaluation of the graduate leader fund final report. Department for Education. Research Report DFE-RR144*

**3. Government** should ensure adequate funding for childcare, by providing parents with greater support with childcare costs and ensuring the funding providers receive to deliver the free entitlement covers the cost of doing so.

**4. Parents** need to ask more about the qualifications and experience of the people caring for their children. **PACEY** believes parents should value the qualifications and training of individuals working in settings as much as they currently rely on the Ofsted grading or CSSIW inspection result of each setting, to judge quality.

**5. Childcare professionals** should be proud of their professionalism and dedication to childcare and promote it more to parents, to other children's professionals and to decision makers in local and national government.

**6.** Finally **PACEY** believes **society** more generally needs to better understand and value the work of everyone in childcare and early years.

## Introduction

This Spring NCMA has repositioned itself as the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) - a standard-setting professional association for everyone in childcare and early years. As part of our commitment to increase recognition of all childcare professionals, we have undertaken a new research project. This set out to investigate what childminders, nannies and nursery workers see as the benefits and challenges of their childcare careers. In particular, it sought to better understand:

- what motivates someone to start a career in childcare,
- the career pathway of childcare professionals, how they enter the profession, progress and where they see themselves in the future,
- what inspires childcare professionals in their role,
- what challenges they have to overcome to develop their professionalism,
- what more could be done to support childcare professionals to stay in the profession.

The study involved a mixed methodological approach, using both online surveys and in-depth semi structured interviews with nursery workers, nannies and childminders.

## Background

The childcare sector plays a crucial role in modern society; it helps address child poverty by supporting parents to balance work and caring for their children; it helps support child development and contributes to improved social mobility. There is a wealth of evidence that **demonstrates the positive contribution that high quality childcare makes** to giving children the best start in life and that well qualified childcare professionals are best placed to deliver high quality care and early learning<sup>4</sup>.

So it is important to fully understand how and why individuals choose a career in childcare, what motivates them to stay in the profession and what more could be done to support them to continuously develop as professionals. All of this will help wider society to better value the important contribution childcare professionals make.

## Long-term commitment to childcare profession

Childcare is not just a job, it is a vocation. The belief that people start a career in childcare because they did not do well at school is challenged by this study. An overwhelming theme from the research is individuals' purposeful decision to work with children and to do so for the long term. The majority of childminders, nannies and nursery workers who responded to the survey had held at least one previous role in childcare. The vast majority stated they intend to stay in childcare for five years or more.

The majority of childminder respondents (57%) have been working as a childminder for more than five years and 65% intended to stay in childcare for the next five years or more. Findings for nannies were similar; even though they had been in their current role for a shorter period of time (around one to three years), an overwhelming 93 % had worked in another childcare role previously. Again their future career expectations were most likely to be working in childcare in the next five years, with 84% stating this intention. The nursery workers who responded shared this view. Although they tended to be at an earlier stage of their careers, their ambition and commitment to remain in the sector was clear – with 80% reporting that they would remain in childcare for the next five years.

<sup>5</sup> UNISON (2006) *Qualifications, Pay and Quality In the Childcare Sector*, Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion. July 2006

<sup>6</sup> Carroll, M. Et al. (2008) Recruitment and retention in front-line services: the case of childcare Career *Human Resource Management Journal* 19

Jane, 35, from Birmingham.

A childminder who was previously a nursery assistant

*"I have always worked with children; I wouldn't want to do anything else. They are my life! My own children have grown up, but I still wanted to work with children and help them to learn through play. In my eyes it is the most important job of all, being trusted with another parent's child."*

## Investing time and money in their own development

The commitment to the profession was not only expressed by career longevity but also by respondents' dedication to improving their practice and extending their skills. Again, the majority of respondents had attained a full and relevant Level 3 qualification, with many committed to further training, including foundation and full degrees.

Turning to training and qualifications – 54 % of the nannies who responded currently hold a Level 3 childcare qualification, with 26% stating they hold a higher qualification. Nannies' commitment to improve is encapsulated by the finding that, of those nannies who intend to stay in childcare, 68% intend to gain at least a Level 3 childcare qualification. Some plan to study for foundation degrees (13%); some for a full degree in childcare and early years (18%) and some for a masters (9%). This is particularly inspiring, given that there is no regulatory requirement for nannies; no minimal qualification expectations and very little support available to them for training.

The qualification level for nursery workers who responded was even higher. In part this is to be expected given that Ofsted regulations requires all nursery workers to hold at least a relevant Level 2 qualification in England and, in Wales, CSSIW regulation states at least 50% should do so. The nursery workers who responded all stated that they had gained a Level 3 qualification or higher. A commitment to improve was clear, with 43% intending to complete a degree in childcare in the next five years.

The majority of childminders who responded entered the profession with a Level 1 introductory course in childcare. However, 70% who responded now held at least a relevant Level 3 qualification. Similar to nannies, this is without any regulatory requirement and with limited support or access to training. A clear commitment to professional development is demonstrated, with 56% of childminders intending to gain a foundation degree, a degree or masters in childcare or related in the next five years.

There is clearly a shared ambition to invest more time in gaining relevant qualifications to further improve their practice. Whilst the commitment to develop professionally comes from the individual childminder, nanny or nursery worker, the additional qualification requirements placed on nurseries have driven greater investment in training and development support for many nursery workers. The following case study demonstrates this.

## Case Study 1

Kate, 23, from Southampton.

A nanny who was previously a nursery assistant.

*When Kate left school she was unsure what career path to take. Kate explains: "I did not enjoy school, did not secure good grades and knew I didn't want to continue in education until I was 18." To earn some money initially, Kate worked in an administration role for recruitment agents. Even though her manager was keen for her to progress, she knew that working in an office wasn't for her. Just as she did with school, Kate dreaded going into work in the morning*

*"I had always loved looking after children," she continues, "often babysitting for family and my parents' friends." But Kate had never considered a career in childcare. "When I first mentioned the idea to my parents they persuaded me it was low paid with little career progression."*

*Nevertheless the idea stayed with Kate and when a friend told her about a vacancy for a nursery assistant, Kate applied and got the position. The difference to working in an office*

made her want to stay. Kate explains: "Although it was much more demanding than I had imagined, the reward and the contrast of working in an office made it all worthwhile. The money wasn't great but at that point I was just 18 and living at home, so it wasn't really an issue."

The nursery was really supportive and encouraged Kate to take her Level 3 qualification, which was funded by the local authority. Kate was given time to study and help with the content of the course. A year after completing the diploma, Kate became pregnant. When she returned to work after maternity leave, Kate decided she would prefer to become a childminder or a nanny, so that she would be able to work and care for her own child at the same time.

*"I got a job as a nanny for parents who were happy for me to take my child to work. Being a nanny is demanding but incredibly fulfilling. I would like to progress by completing a degree in childcare but as a nanny I feel less supported to be able to do so." Kate's future plan is to take time out of work to study when her own children are older. "I do want to remain working with children," says Kate, "but I am now considering becoming a paediatric nurse."*

One aspect of professional development said by many respondents to be a major issue was a lack of careers advice and clear, established pathways between different areas of the workforce. Over half of nursery workers and nannies stated that this was a main concern for them.

## Sharing qualities that cannot be taught

Alongside a commitment to develop as professionals, the majority of respondents shared another strong connection. As well as a passion for working with children, many respondents recognised that qualifications and training alone were not enough and that the role demanded high levels of emotional intelligence, calmness and patience, qualities respondents felt could not be taught.

Lucy, 29, from Southampton.

*A nursery worker who was previously a childminding assistant*

*"There are skills that you either have or you don't. You have to be very intuitive when working with young children. You also have to be incredibly patient and be able to multi-task."*

Respondents from various settings recognised that childcare was a demanding career which required a high level of emotional intelligence to support the children they looked after. Not only self-awareness (the ability to know one's own emotions, strengths, weaknesses, drives, values and goals), but to recognise their impact on the children you are caring for; the ability to use gut feelings to guide decisions; social skills to manage the relationships you have with children, their parents and others, relevant to a child's development. Alongside these, the other recognised competencies of emotional intelligence (the ability to self-regulate your emotions and adapt to changing circumstances), empathy and self-motivation.

## Case Study 2

Ann, from Dartford in Kent.

*A childminder who has previously worked in a variety of settings*

Ann was named Childminder of the Year in 2012, for her dedication to inclusive childminding. Ann has worked in childcare for more than 20 years, managing nurseries, working in an after school club and at a school for children with special needs before becoming a registered childminder. She prides herself on her inclusive setting and gets to know each child well. For example one child on the autistic spectrum loves stones, so Ann collected resources such as alphabet stones and crystals.

Ann recognised that caring for disabled children has an effect on other children in her setting. "All the children become more caring. We talk about a particular child's needs and I buy books and other resources to help them understand". Ann's kindness and careful consideration were praised by parents who nominated her for the award. One parent commented: "Bobby is very mischievous, cheeky and definitely a handful," says Shani. "But Ann has never been fazed by him. She has fabulous patience and is always trying to find ways to further his development. I feel very privileged to know Ann – such a caring, trustworthy, loving, knowledgeable, reliable, helpful and adaptable childminder." Even though Ann has worked in a school for special needs, she

says, “it wasn’t until I became a childminder that I appreciated how difficult life is for a family with a disabled child.” Ann is committed to continuing in the profession.

## Career Pathways

There are a wide variety of roles in childcare and this study shows that many professionals gain experience in a number of different settings. A key finding is how similar many of the respondents’ career pathways are; from starting in a nursery or a pre-school to going on to work in a more flexible and independent role, such as a nanny or a childminder. Almost half of all respondents started their career in a nursery or pre-school. This equated to:

- 49% of nannies
- 39 % of childminders
- 65% of current nursery workers

As Kate’s case study highlights, a transition to another role in childcare is usually made in light of changing circumstances, most commonly the need to balance work and family life. The majority of childminders began their careers in nurseries because they loved to look after children. However 53% of childminders stated that their main motivation for starting a career in childminding was to be able to work and care for their own children too.

Unsurprisingly the majority of respondents made clear that their main motivation for a career in childcare was the joy of working with children. An intrinsic commitment to, and reward from, caring for children was stated by most respondents. When presented with a list of possible reasons why they started their current role in childcare, both nannies and nursery workers stated that their love of working with children was the main reason, with 77% and 59% respectively. This was also something that came through strongly in the interviews.

### Carol, 34, from Exeter.

*A senior nursery worker, previously a nanny.*

*“I think you’ll find that with most people you talk to in the early years, pay really isn’t the motivation to progress. It is making a difference to children’s lives, which is where the main satisfaction comes from. That is what keeps you going even though you are being paid terribly.”*

For childminders the love of working with children is dominant too, but childminding allows them to combine this with the freedom of being self-employed. A large majority of childminder respondents (68%) stated they began their career in childcare because they loved working with children, but then progressed to childminding as a way to combine doing what they love with the control and flexibility that running your own business can offer.

### Joy, 53, from Kent.

*A childminder.*

*‘I originally started childminding because I have my own children but now (17 years later) I do the role because I get job satisfaction in seeing children learn, grow and develop. Plus the income allows me to do this.’*

A love of working with children clearly stimulates satisfaction in a childcare career. A common theme in many of the interviews was that a childcare career was desirable because of an intuitive commitment to care for and help children develop. The pleasure of caring for children was powerful and seen to offset a number of concerns. This is best encapsulated by the following case study:

## Case Study 3

### Hannah, 34, from London.

*A childminder, previously a primary school teacher.*

Hannah started her career in childcare as a primary school teacher in a reception class. “Whilst it had always been my ambition to work with children there were many things I didn’t like about teaching,” says Hannah. “For example, teaching is quite inflexible and lacks spontaneity in terms of having to plan outings weeks in advance. There were also office politics which made doing what I loved – caring for children – less enjoyable.” Hannah also felt that the children’s continuity of care suffered, when every year they moved to a new year group. The large numbers she cared for also meant that Hannah wasn’t able to give the children the individual care she wanted to.

“So I decided that childminding might be for me,” says Hannah, “and nine years later I am still running my own childminding business.” Hannah enjoys the control she has in planning activities

and outings for the children. “I love that I can develop strong relationships with the children in my care and see them grow and flourish“. One of the children Hannah cares for has been with her since the age of six months, he is now over two and she emphasised that she is one of the most stable things in his life. “Although there are concerns, such as the uncertainty of running my own business,” says Hannah, “the relationships and joy I have from caring for the children makes it worthwhile.”

## Low Pay

Without doubt the main challenge facing everyone working in childcare is low pay. This does have a significant impact on the retention of many childcare professionals in the workforce. For example survey data from the Labour Force Survey shows that average earnings for nursery nurses, childminders and play group leaders are lower than earnings for comparable positions in the health, social work and education fields<sup>5</sup>. In a number of studies this aspect of childcare is identified as one of the main reasons why staff recruitment and retention in the childcare sector is a particular challenge<sup>6</sup>. Those who do leave the profession, often go on to work in other children’s professions for example as teaching assistants and primary school teachers<sup>2</sup>.

## Lucy, 29, from Southampton.

*Nursery worker, previously worked as a childminding assistant*

*“The worse thing about a career in childcare: The pay. You have an enormous amount of responsibility yet are paid very little. You are being paid next to nothing to look after the most precious thing in someone’s life – their child.”*

This challenge is again highlighted by findings from the survey and from qualitative feedback in interviews. For example when asked what their top five concerns about the role were, ‘low pay’ was identified as the top concern by a staggering 83% of nursery workers. Other data has shown that 57% of childminders earn less than £15,000 per annum<sup>1</sup>. This concern was also frequently reflected in interviews:

## Jane, 23, from.

*A nursery worker.*

*“Pay is a massive issue – everyone always complains about it. If you think, a cleaner gets paid more than someone who looks after your child...it’s just not fair.”*

## Julia, 41, Liverpool.

*A childminder, previously a nursery worker*

*‘I hope to stay in childcare but low earnings may force me to leave.’*

In the past low pay for childcare professionals has been tolerated but increasing recognition of the impact high quality care has on improved outcomes for children is slowly changing attitudes. Government recognition – most recently in More Great Childcare<sup>7</sup>– that there should be more graduates in settings and, through increased qualification requirements, standards should increase further, is positive. But what is absent from this debate is how the individuals working in childcare will receive increased reward for this increased professionalism. This is critical or the loss of highly skilled and dedicated childcare professionals into other professions will continue. Those who do leave the profession, often go on to work in other higher paying and higher status sectors, such as healthcare and education<sup>8</sup> or go on to work in less demanding roles, such as retail, which offer similar or higher wages<sup>9</sup>.

Essentially, a combination of high commitment and persistent undervaluation of childcare work will make these professionals vulnerable to competing sources of employment. Even for nannies, who tend to be better paid, this is an issue. Whilst the nannies who responded to the study did see childcare as a long terms career, they had usually only worked as nannies for a short period of time. Over three quarters had been a nanny for less than three years. So, whilst pay may not be a concern for nannies at the moment, it is likely that at some point in their childcare career they will come across this challenge.

## Lack of recognition

Alongside the issue of poor reward, many respondents raised concerns that that their work was not valued sufficiently highly by the children’s sector nor by society at large. Lack of professional recognition was the main concern for 75% of nanny respondents and 62 % of nursery workers. Previous research has evidence this as a major concern for childminders<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Rolfe, H. Et al. (2005) Recruitment and Retention of childcare, Early Years and Play Workers: Research Study *Children and Society*, 19

<sup>7</sup> Department for Education (2013) More Great Childcare, HMSO: London

<sup>8</sup> Simon, A., Owen, C., Moss, P., Cameron, C. (2003). *Mapping the care workforce: Supporting joined-up thinking: Secondary analysis of the Labour Force Survey for childcare and social care work*, Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London.

<sup>9</sup> Cameron, C. and Moss, P. (2002) National Report UK: surveying demand, supply and use of care in *Care work in Europe: Current understandings and future directions*. Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London

It is interesting to note that this concern is particularly high for nannies, given the lack of nanny regulation. Frustration over this is conveyed by the fact that 73% stated that they think there should be a compulsory national register for nannies to demonstrate to parents their professionalism and suitability to care for children:

Karen, 27, Manchester.

A nanny, previously a nursery worker.

*"I believe that being a nanny should be seen as a profession and in order for this to happen a nanny should gain relevant professional qualifications and register with the relevant authorities. This demonstrates professionalism."*

As highlighted earlier in this report, childcare professionals are committed to their careers, therefore not receiving the professional recognition they deserve is a major concern to the majority of them. This means that whilst these professionals are in a job which yields high level of satisfaction on some levels, the fact that they lack the support and guidance that they need to develop as professionals, are poorly paid and believe they receive little recognition for their work will, over time, have a negative impact on their willingness to stay in the profession.

Because the intrinsic rewards of a childcare role are high, but status and extrinsic rewards are low, it has been suggested that reasons for turnover in childcare occupations may differ from those elsewhere<sup>10</sup>. The theory of 'compensating differentials'<sup>11</sup> states that if a job has negative features, for example low pay, employers will need wages to compensate for this; and if a job has positive features, for example long summer vacation, employers will accept lower wages than they might otherwise. The childcare sector is a prime example of the second case, with contact with children the key positive feature. So, in conclusion, although this study shows a high level of commitment in terms of the desire to stay within childcare, it is important to note that these

finding have not been evidenced in other research<sup>12</sup>. It is worth noting that, whilst the study respondents may at present fully intend to remain in childcare, previous research indicates this intention will not remain if low pay and poor recognition continue in the long term. So, the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years is making a number of high level recommendations to help address the issues raised in this study.

## Recommendations:

The retention and recruitment of childcare professionals and the support they receive to continuously develop their skills and knowledge is critical for children and families. Recent research from the Daycare Trust (2013) shows that nearly two-thirds (60 per cent) of local authorities in England do not have sufficient childcare for working parents, despite the very clear obligations of the Childcare Act 2006<sup>13</sup>. More than this, there is clear evidence that children thrive best in settings where they enjoy a consistent one to one relationship with their care giver. This is why all registered settings ensure each child in their care has a named key worker. The sector's challenge of recruiting and retaining individuals in the sector for the long-term is one shared by families and communities who want to ensure the quality of care children receive is high.

So, what should be done to support more childcare professionals to stay in the profession and to develop their skills and knowledge further? PACEY is making six high-level recommendations that it believes will help retain more childcare professionals in the workforce and ensure they are better recognised for the important role they deliver to children, families and communities.

**1. Government**, both nationally and locally, should focus its already significant investment in childcare on frontline providers, so that they have the resources needed to invest in their own quality improvement. For example, government could make clear that only high-quality providers can deliver its funded statutory services such as the free entitlement. This would

<sup>10</sup> Cameron (1997) cited in Rolfe, H. Et al. (2005) Recruitment and Retention of childcare, Early Years and Play Workers: Research Study *Children and Society*, 19

<sup>11</sup> Rosen, 1979; Roback, 1982, cited in Rolfe, H. Et al. (2005) Recruitment and Retention of childcare, Early Years and Play Workers: Research Study *Children and Society*, 19

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Cameron, C. and Moss, P. (2002) National Report UK: surveying demand, supply and use of care in *Care work in Europe: Current understandings and future directions*. Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London

Carroll, M. Et al. (2008) Recruitment and retention in front-line services: the case of childcare *Career Human Resource Management Journal* 19

<sup>13</sup> The Daycare Trust and Family and Parenting Institute (2013) *Childcare Cost Survey 2013*, London: Daycare Trust

<sup>14</sup> Rolfe, H. Et al. (2005) Recruitment and Retention of childcare, Early Years and Play Workers: Research Study *Children and Society*, 19

have the dual impact of not only ensuring children receive high quality care but also motivating more registered providers to invest in the training and development of their staff, so they are able to meet the standards required to deliver the free entitlement.

2. Alongside this, **Government** should recognise the role regulation plays in driving up quality. It should, as is currently being proposed in England, require all those entering the profession to hold at least a full and relevant Level 3 qualification. In doing so, it should recognise the different pathways individuals entering the profession take and ensure barriers to entering the profession are minimised. For example, childminders often join the profession and train at the same time, so any requirement should reflect this route into the profession. Government should embrace all childcare professionals within regulation, by requiring nannies to register and be inspected in the same way that childminding and nursery settings currently are. Government should require regulators to place a greater emphasis on the training and development that individual childcare professionals undertake, as part of their inspection process. This would motivate more settings to invest in their training and development programmes and would do more to inform parents that high quality care is most often delivered by well qualified childcare professionals. We know from this study and from previous research that childcare professionals feel undervalued. Some research suggests that one of the solutions for retaining childcare staff is to invest in their training in order to raise practitioners' self esteem.<sup>14</sup>

### Best practice childminding case study

*Hampshire County Council works with PACEY to provide a full support service to all its registered childminders. It supports individuals interested in becoming childminders to study an introductory course, 'Understanding how to set up a home based childcare service' (CYPOP5). Delivered through local colleges, this course is the first unit of a full and relevant Level 3 qualification. Alongside this Hampshire provides PACEY's paediatric first aid course, safeguarding e-learning and funding for all levels of the full Level 3 qualification. Hampshire offers a structured approach to training and support that ensures all its registered childminders have a standard level of support.*

3. Finally **Government** should ensure adequate funding for childcare by both providing parents with greater support with childcare costs and by ensuring the funding providers receive to deliver the free entitlement covers their costs for doing so. This in turn should mean more settings have the funds they need to reward their childcare professionals fairly for the vital job they do.

### Best practice nursery case study

*Toad Hall nursery chain owns 15 nurseries offering 109 places. All members of staff are supported through regular supervision sessions beginning with a three week induction. As part of the induction regular reviews are held which enables both the staff member and the employer to reflect on areas of learning development and to set goals for the probationary period. It is also a time for the staff member to fully understand what is expected of them and for the supervisor/manager to understand from them what they want to achieve. At the end of probation review meeting both employer and employee assess progress and agree a personal development plan. From this new goals will be set and areas to improve will be identified. The manager will advise the staff member of how to improve and analyse what extra training is needed to help. Staff regularly attend CPD training sessions as the nursery chain has a strong commitment to and significant investment in training both in house and external.*

*The nursery has its own grading system, whereby practitioners are graded from 'developing' to 'exceeding' which would be awarded in staff's yearly appraisal. After a year of work if the practitioner receives either an 'excelling' or 'exceeding' they will be entitled to a bonus, based on a percentage of the annual turnover. The nursery manager felt that this was an effective incentive and made staff feel like part of a team by sharing in the organisation's rewards. There is also a clear pay progression structure which gives all employees a clear vision of what they could achieve. Alongside this, managers are very committed to giving staff the responsibility they deserved, an important way to show professional recognition and appreciation. Even though there were not always opportunities for staff to progress to a more senior role, creative ways are used to give staff extra responsibility.*

4. **Parents** need to ask more about the qualifications and experience of the people caring for their children. PACEY believes parents should value the qualifications and training of

individuals working in settings as much as they currently rely on the Ofsted grading or CSSIW inspection result of each setting to judge quality. In doing so parents would help motivate more settings to both recruit well qualified staff and to support existing staff to develop their professionalism. This consumer demand would lead to increased investment in professional development and, in turn, higher quality care for children. To coincide with this report, PACEY has launched a childcare checklist for parents which includes the key questions they should ask any setting they are considering for their child  
[www.pacey.org.uk/parents](http://www.pacey.org.uk/parents)

**5. Childcare professionals** should be proud of their professionalism and dedication to childcare and promote it more to parents, to other children's professionals and to decision makers in local and national government. They are their own greatest ambassadors and can play a critical role in changing society's attitudes towards their profession. PACEY is there to support them, by providing information, advice and expertise on how to develop their professionalism and by increasing recognition of the high standards of care and learning childcare professionals are committed to delivering. The launch of the association is the perfect time to start that conversation with the parents in your setting.

**6. Finally PACEY believes **society** more generally** needs to better understand and value the work of everyone in childcare and early years. PACEY and its 35,000 members are demonstrating their commitment to high standards of care and learning and, through research, expert resources, publicity and campaigning will be working to ensure society at better recognises the vital role all childcare professionals play.

## Notes

The survey that provided data for this study was conducted between 04 Feb and 11 Mar 2013. Over 1600 childcare professionals responded. 1500 childminders, 130 nannies and 37 nursery workers.

Semi structured interviews were then conducted with 7 childcare professionals who have remained anonymous in this report.

We are grateful to all of them for sharing their experiences.

PACEY would also like to thank Nannytax, Nursery World, Toadhall Nursery and Hampshire County Council for their support with the study:

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## About PACEY

PACEY is the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years. A standard-setting organisation, we promote best practice and support childcare professionals to deliver high standards of care and learning.

Since 1977 we have provided high quality support to our members and have worked with government, local authorities and others to raise standards.

Together with our members - childminders, nannies and nursery workers - we are working to become the professional association for everyone in childcare and early years and ensure our members are recognised for the vital role they play in helping children get the best start in life.

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