

**REVIEW OF EARLY  
EDUCATION AND  
CHILDCARE  
QUALIFICATIONS:  
INTERIM REPORT**

**MARCH 2012**

**Nutbrown Review**

## FOREWORD



In this interim report, I aim to set out the key messages I have heard about the current picture of early education and childcare qualifications. I have listened carefully to people's concerns and ideas and am very grateful to all of those who have written to me or contributed via my Call for Evidence, meetings, workshops, and other events.

It is very clear to me that we cannot achieve excellent early years provision without an effective qualifications structure. High quality and trusted workforce qualifications are important in several ways. They tell employers what skills and knowledge they can expect an applicant for a job to have. For individuals, they can provide motivation to develop their learning and capabilities and a badge of achievement which can signal enhanced professionalism and status.

People choose to work with young children and their families for many varied reasons, and come into the profession through different routes. For many, studying for a qualification may provide their first experience of working with young children. For those already in the sector, studying for a qualification can open new doors, expand horizons and offer new career opportunities.

Getting qualifications right will help to ensure that women and men enter the profession with the skills and experiences they need to do the best work with young children and their families. Well taught courses and learning routes that lead to reliable qualifications can help early years practitioners to improve their skills, knowledge and understanding, constantly developing in their

roles. This can only benefit young children, both in terms of their day to day experiences in the Early Years Foundation Stage and their future learning and development.

So far, I have considered qualifications issues under three broad themes:

**Content and tuition** – what are people studying, is this what is needed, and what needs to change?

**Quality** – do we have the right systems and processes in place to ensure the quality of teaching and learning for those on award bearing early education and childcare courses?

**Recruitment, retention and progression** – how are people recruited on to courses and into jobs? How does the qualifications system impact on the perceived status of those who educate and care for young children and work with their families? How do we ensure that principles of diversity and inclusion are realised in practices of staff recruitment, retention and career progression?

This interim report sets out what I have heard so far under these themes. It outlines what I consider to be main issues of concern, and suggests some ways in which they might be addressed. Of course, this is not the end of the process, nor am I yet ready to make firm recommendations for the future. I am instead looking to investigate these issues further over the coming months. I will continue to engage with the sector, to welcome comment, to develop new ideas, and to test out possibilities, as I work on my final report due this summer.



Professor Cathy Nutbrown  
Independent reviewer

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Further information can be found at [www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview](http://www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview), including a list of respondents to the Call for Evidence, and those I have engaged with during the consultation phase of the Review.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“Purpose: To build a stronger foundation years experience for all children by creating a high qualified early learning workforce of skilled, knowledgeable professional practitioners who are child and family centred as well as confident and ready to work with families. The review will seek to do this by considering how best to strengthen qualifications and career pathways, for young people new to the early education and childcare sector and those already employed there. This supports the recommendations set in Dame Clare Tickell’s review of the Early Years Foundation Stage which highlighted the importance of having qualifications that are of a high standard and meet the needs of all learners.”**

### **Nutbrown Review Terms of Reference**

Young children deserve to be educated and cared for by those with the right abilities and dedication to give them the best. The quality of children’s early years experiences has a powerful effect on their learning and development, well into later schooling. The skills, knowledge, and understanding of the staff working with children are critical factors in that quality. Good qualifications, taught well, ensure that those training to enter the early years workforce, and those already working with babies and young children, can be supported to develop the right blend of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. When these are combined with the commitment and passion evident across the sector we can expect to see better outcomes for children, in the early years phase and in their later life as well.

Excellent practice exists across the early years sector, in all types of settings, and amongst people with very different levels of qualifications. Real progress has been made in improving the skills and understanding of the early years workforce, not least since the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in 2008.

At the same time, the sector cannot afford to stand still. There are new developments in the understanding of child development, neuroscience, attachment theory, and changing family roles. And

there are new challenges and opportunities, including Government plans for a revised EYFS, with a progress check for two-year-olds, and building on free education for three- and four-year-olds, the new and expanded offer of free places for disadvantaged two-year-olds. Those working in the sector will welcome this strong commitment to the early years. But for it to succeed, we need a workforce fully equipped to rise to these new challenges, and provide flexible and appropriately tailored experiences for babies and young children.

Thousands of people and organisations have provided evidence and perspectives to this Review, via a Call for Evidence, at consultation events, meetings, and via online surveys and other interactions. As well as helping to set out the context and background, information has been provided around three key themes: content and tuition; quality; and recruitment, retention and progression.

Based on this work, I have identified a number of issues, and some possible ways of addressing them, which I intend to explore further in the remaining months of my Review.

## **Context and background**

The early years qualifications picture is over-complicated, with significant doubts over whether the content of courses covers the skills and knowledge that people need to work in the sector. There are literally hundreds of early years education and childcare qualifications, many of which are no longer taught but are nonetheless held by tens of thousands of people in the workforce. The variation in the content of qualifications is significant, and presents real problems to students trying to understand what to study, and employers considering potential applicants for jobs.

The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) assesses many of these qualifications to determine which can be considered 'full and relevant', and therefore can count towards the minimum ratio of qualified staff in any group setting. This simplifies the picture somewhat, but not enough to create an easily understandable suite of qualifications. In fact, despite the best efforts of the CWDC, it is still not possible to get consistent figures on the total number of early years qualifications available.

## Content and tuition

The qualifications currently available do not always equip students to be effective practitioners in the early years sector. To be clear, this is not to suggest that the workforce itself is not effective, but the content of qualifications is not all that it could be.

Significant concerns have been raised about the lack of time taken to study for some qualifications. In particular, there appears to be a belief that current level 2 and level 3 qualifications do not include sufficient time to study the underpinning theory for working with children, that they do not demand that learners experience a variety of settings before qualifying, that they are too broad (looking at the 0-19 age range, rather than, say, 0-7 years), and that they lack sufficient detail on child development and observation. Foundation Degrees and other higher education qualifications are generally held to be more robust. These concerns are reflected in unfavourable comparisons with the Nursery Nurse Diploma (provided by the National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB)), discontinued in the mid-1990s.

Concerns have also been expressed about whether qualifications equip those who hold them to work with children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and also whether current qualifications sufficiently address issues of diversity and inclusion, and equip those qualifying to work with parents as well as children.

## Quality

Teaching quality, or learner support in the case of work-based learning, varies widely and, whilst there are examples of excellence, there are also substantial concerns about the quality of preparation for some learners. Expectations of learners in terms of literacy and numeracy are unduly low.

High quality teaching exists across the sector, often led by inspiring and innovative tutors. But there is also significant variation in the quality of provision, which means that learners can find it hard to know where best to study, and employers may only trust learning centres with which they have direct experience.

The variation is driven in part by the different approaches learning centres take to tutor interaction with students. Some students are left with little tutor support whilst in settings, meaning that the burden of training can fall too heavily on setting managers. There is a real risk that poor quality settings are not able to provide the direction that learners need and, if not challenged by a skilful and knowledgeable tutor, the learner can pick up poor practice. Tutors themselves have expressed frustration at a lack of time and funding to allow them to engage more fully with their students in settings.

Some people believe that the funding pressures facing many learning centres, alongside the importance of being seen as high performing, persuade some tutors to push students on to and through courses, despite concerns about their ability to be effective when in the workplace.

Work-based learning routes have been highlighted by some as more likely to be potentially flawed, due to the sometimes limited interaction between tutor, learner, and setting manager. It is possible – although how common is unclear – that a learner might start unqualified in a poor quality setting, and stay in that setting – never seeing any other practice – as they complete level 2 and level 3 qualifications, with minimal contact time with a tutor. At the end of this process, that learner is considered qualified to lead a group setting.

Most consider it important that those working in the early years have good levels of literacy and numeracy, to enable them to engage effectively with parents and to support the learning and development of babies and young children. Yet, there are few learning routes that demand these in order to begin, or complete, a course.

### **Recruitment, retention and progression**

Despite the strong evidence on the importance of early education in children's development, work in early education and childcare is widely seen as low status, low paid, and low skilled. Recruitment on to qualification routes often reflects these perceptions.

The 'hair or care' stereotype still exists for many considering a course in the early years; yet many other sectors have raised their expectations in relation to enrolment. It must be a cause for concern that early years courses are often the easiest to enrol on and the courses that the students with the poorest academic records are sometimes steered towards.

When employers come to recruit staff, they face a bewildering array of qualifications, some of which they do not trust (either because they are unsure that the content is suitable, or because they lack confidence that it has been taught to the right standard). Most employers have raised the concern that they spend more time training new staff for basic tasks, supporting them beyond what would be expected as part of an induction process.

There is a tremendous diversity of provision in the sector, which includes childminders in home settings and teachers in schools. This diversity is good in that it responds to the wide range of needs and wishes that parents have, and the specific needs of young children. It also creates a problem in terms of progression routes. It can be unclear whether the different bits of the sector link together and how individuals should best organise their career development.

The evidence, backed up by views expressed during the Review so far, is very clear on the importance of staff with higher level skills. The sector seems to support the idea of strong leadership at all levels, but in particular recognises the impact that those with teaching qualifications can deliver. This is supported by research evidence linking qualified teacher leadership with better outcomes for young children.

The Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) is acknowledged to equip people to make a positive difference to babies and young children. But there are also concerns as to whether all those with EYPS are being effectively deployed, that often they move away from working with the youngest children, and some seek employment opportunities outside of settings or even the early years sector. Issues of parity with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) have also been raised, both in terms of rigour of status, and in terms of job opportunities and responsibilities. Alongside this, positive comments have been made about the impact those with

QTS can have, along with a call by some to introduce some form of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) route for working in the early years, building on the successes of EYPS, to sit alongside or replace it.

The status of the profession is intrinsically linked to the qualifications market. The demands we place on those on award bearing routes leading to work in the sector reflect the aspirations we have of them. Raising the bar on entry requirements, and demanding high levels of qualification, can help to demonstrate a commitment to a high status profession. Introducing more teachers into early years settings – with specialist early years training – will also likely contribute to better outcomes for children and a higher status profession. Another mechanism that some people have suggested could drive up standards is some form of licensing arrangement, ensuring that only those who meet high standards – and who can demonstrate regular continuing professional development – are ‘licensed’ to work with children. Different models have been suggested, including a range of mandatory or voluntary approaches, led by Government or the sector itself.

### Next steps

On the basis of the Call for Evidence, the consultation events, and the analysis contained in this report, I have identified a number of specific issues for further consideration (**figure 1**).

In the second phase of my Review, I intend to focus on these issues, with a view to publishing my final advice to Ministers in the summer.

*Figure 1 – Key areas for further consideration*

**How do we ensure that the complex historical, current, and future qualifications picture does not act as a barrier to those who want to train and learn?**

**What should be the expectations for the content and age-range for early years qualifications, and the preparation demanded to achieve them?**

**Should we seek to raise the minimum level of qualification required of the workforce, and if so, to what and by when?**

**What is the best way to ensure that tutors have up-to-date knowledge and skills and are qualified to the right level?**

**How can we ensure that settings are supported to play an effective role in the training of their staff and students on placement?**

**What levels of literacy and numeracy should we expect of the early years workforce, and how can we secure these?**

**How can we best establish clear progression routes for all members of the sector (including black and minority ethnic groups), and support less well qualified members of the workforce to progress?**

**Is there a strong case for introducing an early years initial teacher education route, and how might the practical obstacles be addressed?**

**Is there a case for a licensing system and, if so, what model might be best?**

## 1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Good education and care in the early years can have a positive impact on babies and young children, as they grow and develop. Qualifications are one way to help ensure that those working in the early years have the necessary skills, knowledge, and understanding.

70 per cent of the workforce holds a level 3 qualification or higher, however, they are not necessarily evenly spread across settings. At the same time, the number of qualifications has increased significantly creating a qualifications market that some have suggested is over-populated and confused.

In order to understand how the qualifications system might need to change, it is important to understand the context in which we are working, the nature of work with young children, and how we got to the current position on qualifications as it stands today.

It is also important to acknowledge the improvements that have occurred and to be clear about what agreement currently exists across the sector.

### Early Years Education and Care

1.1. Good early years education and care can have a profoundly positive impact on babies and young children, reaching into their later childhood and adulthood. I have met and worked in different ways with many different people during my years as a teacher of young children and in my other work – with parents, teachers, other early childhood educators, students, and researchers. All of these people, despite variations in approach and belief, have held a core commitment to support the learning and development of young children.

1.2. We have a strong historical background of advancing the boundaries of early years education in this country. Our knowledge of young children's cognitive development has been extended by the early work of theorists such as Piaget and

Vygotsky. Our understanding of children's early learning has been extended by pioneers including Susan Isaacs and other 'Great Educators' who, in different ways, set out to illustrate the characteristics of children's thinking. The legacy of observations by those who have worked with young children shows how, when enquiring minds are fostered, some quite incredible learning takes place.

1.3. More recently we have come to understand the importance of healthy brain development in the earliest months and years of life, and of ensuring that babies and young children's early experiences support their developing minds and bodies and foster emotional security. We know too that babies and young children are born with the capacity to learn, challenging long-held views that babies are 'boring'. Communication with babies during their early months of life is essential in helping them to establish their social relationships as they tune into language.

1.4. The Government has acknowledged the importance of the early years by pursuing policy initiatives designed to strengthen and expand provision. One of the most ambitious is the creation of the two-year-old entitlement. The Government announced additional funding, rising to £760m in 2014-15, to extend the current entitlement of 15 hours free early education a week for three- and four-year-olds to around 40 per cent of two-year-olds. It is estimated that this will reach around 260,000 two-year-olds.

1.5. The Government has also responded to Dame Clare Tickell's 2011 Review of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The Government intends to publish shortly a revised EYFS framework, in time for the new EYFS to be operational from September 2012. In particular, this will introduce a progress check for two-year-olds and highlight the importance of practitioners working effectively in partnership with parents.

1.6. Explicit in Government reforms is an acknowledgement of the key role the workforce plays in delivering a good early years experience of babies and young children. The State regulates minimum levels of qualifications that most staff need to possess, and has supported the introduction of the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) to drive improvements in quality.

1.7. I am aware, too, of the wider context within which the early years workforce operates, including links with early years health and social care services. Early childhood education and care has to be an equal partner if we are to provide the most meaningful experience and get the best outcomes for all children. This in particular includes those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) who are more likely to benefit from a multi-disciplinary approach to support.

1.8. Across the early years sector, there are many issues of difference and diversity. The wide variety of languages, cultures, beliefs and heritages mean that no family is the same and all children are different. All are unique, all have needs, and all have strengths. The early years context is one where inclusive practices are essential and so this carries implications for the education and training of the workforce and the qualifications available to them.

1.9. So, those working in the early years must respond to some important challenges. It seems clear to me that they need to have specialist knowledge of child development and learning theories, of working with parents, of understanding different needs of babies and children, of recognising the benefits of different approaches, of working with a range of professionals, and of responding to changing Government policies and developments in other sectors.

1.10. There are many examples of good practice in the sector. But, as I will make clear, there is a significant challenge for the sector, to enhance workforce skills and knowledge, if we are to exploit to the full the investment and priority that the sector has rightly received.

1.11. Early years qualifications are a key part of building upon what presently exists, and responding to this challenge. They provide the opportunity to equip the current and future workforce with the skills, knowledge, and understanding to be effective, and to provide the best experiences for babies and young children.

### **The development of the qualifications market**

1.12. The expansion of provision in the last two decades has resulted in a substantial increase in the number of people in the early years workforce, working across a broad range of settings

and provision. This growth is encouraging and means that the workforce is, overall, more qualified than is required. But I am not convinced that what is required is adequate and there can be no cause for complacency because, as I will show, there are significant anxieties about the quality and content of qualifications training. More people with qualifications does not necessarily mean that we have a better qualified workforce. There are also concerns about the clarity of what qualifications are available, shown in part by the prolific growth in the number of qualifications.

### A qualifications legacy

The United Kingdom has a long and proud tradition of striving for excellence in childcare and education. From pioneering developments in ‘infant’ schools in the late 1700s and early 1800s and the work of Charlotte Mason in the late 1800s, to the development of early childhood education training by Rachael and Margaret McMillan and Susan Isaacs in the early decades of the 1900s, we are positioned with a legacy of understanding the needs of young children and those who work with them.

Since the 1960s the Preschool Learning Alliance (formerly the Preschool Playgroup Association) has developed and run courses, in the first instance for mothers who volunteered to help run community groups where their children could play, learn and socialise. This provided a route into a career in working with young children for many women, and a small number of men. The growth of Nursery Schools (stimulated by the work of Margaret and Rachael McMillan) as part of the education system from the 1930s onwards, saw nursery teachers and nursery nurses working together with children aged three to five years old.

So, though often viewed as a modern phenomenon – reflecting changing working patterns and family structures – the development of qualifications for early education and care stretches back centuries, with the creation in 1945 of the National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) heralding over half a century of specialist training for those who wanted to work with very young children.

**1.13.** To ensure a sense of order, the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) has the duty to maintain a list of qualifications that can be considered ‘full and relevant’ (see **figure 2**). Only ‘full and relevant’ qualifications can be included in the ratios for the purposes of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage. This framework states that group

settings must be led by someone who holds a full and relevant level 3 qualification, and at least half of the remaining staff must hold a full and relevant level 2 qualification.

**Figure 2 – ‘full and relevant’ criteria**

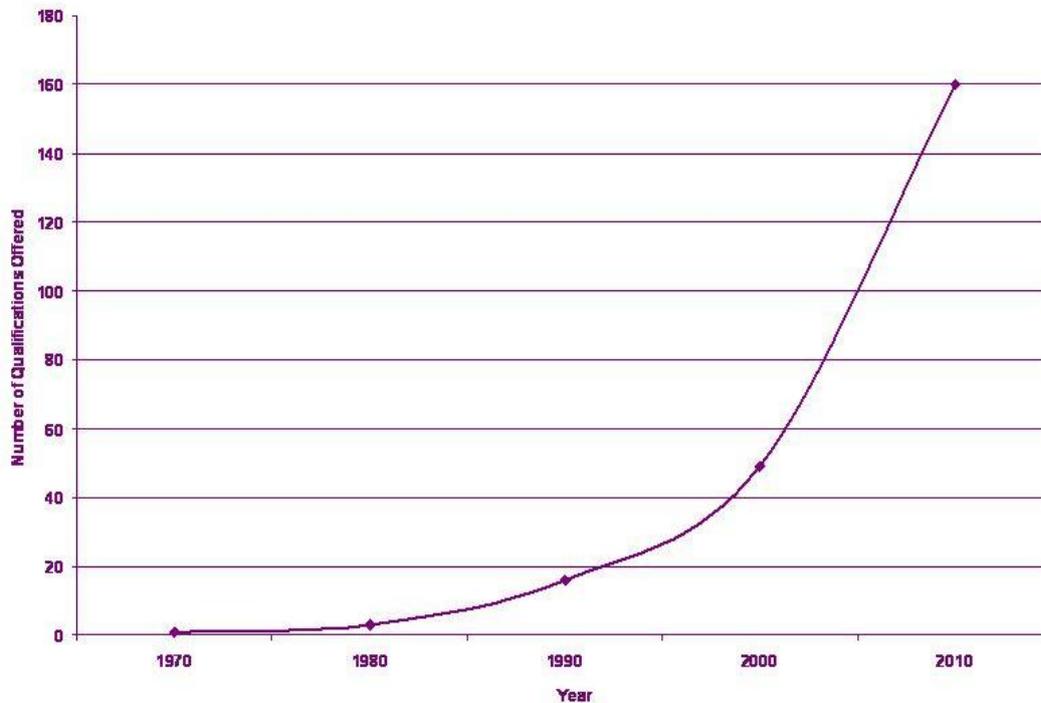
In order to be considered ‘full and relevant’, a qualification must:	
1	Demonstrate depth and level of learning appropriate to specified outcomes of full early years, childcare or playwork qualifications
2	Demonstrate it has valid, reliable assessment and awarding procedures
3	Include an element of assessed performance evidence
4	Facilitate and enable people to work in any registered setting in England
5	Include early years specific content
6	Cover full age range birth to 5 years
7	Include all areas of the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children’s Workforce

Information taken from <https://secure.cwdcouncil.org.uk/eyppqd/short-criteria>

1.14. Despite these attempts, there is nonetheless a complex and at times confusing qualifications picture. In fact, it is proving difficult to be precise about the number of qualifications currently available.

1.15. For example, to understand the historical growth in qualifications I asked CWDC to contact awarding organisations to map the number of early years qualifications developed since 1970. I am grateful for the information provided by awarding organisations, which shows information on 160 qualifications, showing a sharp growth, particularly in the last decade (**figure 3**).

**Figure 3 – Example of growth in early education and childcare qualifications 1970-2010, based on data provided by awarding organisations**



1.16. This is not, however, the full picture. CWDC has provided me with a list that shows there are at least 445 different qualifications to consider, including higher education qualifications, 223 of which are regarded as ‘full and relevant’ (though some others, together with accredited additional learning, could enable a practitioner’s package of accredited learning to be viewed as ‘full and relevant’).

1.17. Whilst this figure clearly demonstrates the large number of qualifications available, it too fails to provide the full picture, as many qualifications are not at levels 2 and 3, and many are no longer available to enrol on. It is therefore important to be clear about which qualifications are currently taught. **Figure 4** sets out this information, showing that there are actually a comparatively small number of currently available qualifications at levels 2 and 3 on the ‘full and relevant’ list.

**Figure 4 – Numbers of ‘full and relevant’ Qualifications**



**1.18.** This means two things: that the current qualifications market should be less confusing than it might appear at first glance; and that there will always be a need to map the historical information to ensure that those who hold qualifications now no longer taught can have their skills recognised.

**1.19.** I am aware, of course, that the growth of early years qualifications has not occurred in a vacuum. It is part of a broader process of qualifications development affecting other employment sectors as well. I am also very aware that funding pressures – on awarding bodies, sector skills councils, employers, training providers, and students – play a part in influencing what can be taught and how it is delivered; thus the quality of qualifications can vary in this context.

## Qualifications that are equal but different?

1.20. Given the different and competing sets of figures, it is not surprising that so many people have expressed their confusion to me over what different qualifications cover. This is a problem because it undermines the main purpose of a qualification – to act as a proxy for the skills and expertise that a qualification holder has. I am especially concerned that potential learners might not know which qualifications are ‘full and relevant’, and so are enrolling on – and paying for – courses that are unsuitable and will not make them eligible for employment.

1.21. Some employers have told me that they no longer trust many qualifications, even if they are of the required level and ‘full and relevant’. They admit to being confused, and express concern about how they know what a qualification should equip an early years practitioner to do when in the workplace.

1.22. CWDC has created standards for a new level 2 Certificate and level 3 Diploma that would supersede existing qualifications. CWDC had aimed to move to a ‘cut-off’ point, after which the Certificate and Diploma would be the only qualifications to be taught that would be considered ‘full and relevant’ for new learners (making all others ‘legacy’ qualifications). This was to be from January 2012, a date that has since been put on hold so that the findings of my review can be taken into account.

1.23. The CWDC approach represents a laudable effort to create a more accessible and understandable approach that gives employers confidence in the content of qualifications and increases workforce professionalism. At the same time, although there is agreement on the need for common standards, some have suggested to me the single qualification approach is too prescriptive, that it fails to reflect different early education practices and philosophies (for example, Montessori and Steiner qualifications) and the richness of early childhood education and care provision to which we have become accustomed in England.

*“Montessori teachers make a significant contribution to the early years sector in England and internationally, as demonstrated by the 88% of Montessori settings who have achieved outstanding or good in their Ofsted inspections since the introduction of the EYFS in 2008.”*

Sugi Manickam, Little Montessorians Pre-School

1.24. To some extent the sector is faced with a tension between creating a consistent approach – which inevitably involves some standardisation – and avoiding a simplistic, ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach that might fail to respond to important differences in student experience and setting philosophy, and risks the closure of certain types of provision.

1.25. The Certificate and Diploma are new awards, launched in September 2010, and I note the CWDC’s concern that it is too early to make definitive judgements about the suitability of these qualifications. However, some significant concerns about the Certificate and Diploma have been raised in my consultation workshops, especially the intention to make them the only ‘full and relevant’ qualifications available for a future workforce.

### Clear areas of agreement

1.26. What nobody questions is the importance of ensuring that the early years workforce has the right skills, knowledge, understanding and personal qualities to prepare them for work with young children and their families. There is clear agreement that change is much needed, recognising the new challenges the sector faces. There are of course differences of opinion on what needs to change in our qualifications system. That is inevitable; if the answers were straightforward, there would be no need for my Review. Despite these differences, it seems to me that there are areas on which there is broad agreement in the sector, which are worth setting out (**figure 5**).

*Figure 5 – Areas of broad agreement across the sector*

<b>Qualifications need to be of a consistently high quality to give employers confidence</b>
<b>Qualifications need to reflect the EYFS, and make early years staff confident to work within it</b>
<b>An understanding of child development – particularly for the earliest age group (0-7) – is essential</b>
<b>We have different expectations of what people should know at different levels of education. Level 2 will be more generic, whereas level 3 and above should provide specialist knowledge and expertise</b>
<b>The sector craves a more professional status and ethos, reflecting the best practice that is already evident</b>
<b>There is no single ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to qualifications</b>
<b>The Early Years Professional Status has improved practice, but there are still issues around parity with Qualified Teacher Status</b>
<b>Learning is lifelong – and the qualification journey should not end with the first qualification. Opportunities for progression are important, as are ongoing professional development experiences for all early years workers, so that career development and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) are expectations of all members of the workforce</b>

1.27. Through the events I have held so far, and more generally, I am acutely aware of the deep commitment those who make up the young children’s workforce hold towards the children and families they work with. I am struck by the willingness to support parents in doing the best they can for their children, and I am sensitive to the many ways in which those who work with young children often ‘go the extra mile’ to ensure their experiences in early childhood and care settings are positive and worthwhile. I am aware too, that many feel they do not receive due recognition for the work they do and the commitment they show. I shall continue to look at issues of status as my Review moves forward.

### **Context and background – for further consideration**

**How do we ensure that the complex historical, current, and future qualifications picture does not act as a barrier to those who want to train and learn?**

## 2 CONTENT AND TUITION

I have considered whether what is being taught meets the needs of employers and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Crucially, I have asked employers, early years staff, lecturers, awarding bodies, and other organisations, what the essential content of any early years qualification should be.

There is clear support for qualifications that allow sufficient time for students to learn more about child development and learning theories, so they are able to interact sensitively and effectively with babies and children. There is also support for ensuring that learners are able to gain experience from a variety of settings before they qualify.

Some concerns have been expressed about the age-range focus of current qualifications being too broad, and questions about the level of understanding of SEND and inclusivity issues.

I have also drawn on work which has sought children's views of the people who work with them.

The NNEB Diploma is still seen by many as the 'gold standard'.

### What to teach

2.1. There are too many early years qualifications to do a full comparison of all the variations in content. Although this presents a problem, the CWDC Certificate and Diploma provide some consistency in content to analyse. But before getting into the detail of what is currently available, it is worth considering what people think should be included in qualifications.

2.2. In my Call for Evidence, 83 per cent of respondents highlighted child development and the way children learn as the key element in any early years qualification. This is an overwhelming endorsement of the importance of equipping the

workforce with the skills and knowledge to support children as individuals and cater for their specific needs.

**2.3.** Communication skills were seen as critical by 39 per cent of respondents, to help staff engage effectively with parents, as well as with babies and young children. Other skills to gather significant support were: a thorough knowledge of the EYFS and other legislation (29 per cent); child protection and safeguarding (27 per cent); stimulation and learning development skills (26 per cent); engaging parents in their child's early learning (22 per cent); and observation skills (21 per cent).

**2.4.** Taken together, these endorse the message I have heard throughout my consultation events: the content of early years qualifications should focus on babies and young children, providing those working in the early years with the skills and knowledge to observe, understand, and respond sensitively to individual needs. Children have their own views about the people who work with them, some of which were expressed in my Call for Evidence.

A recent Department for Education study revealed that many children had relationships with several adults in the setting and some had special relationship with their key person<sup>1</sup>. Children were clear about the adult roles and hierarchies in settings and adults were seen as a source of both authority and appreciation. In my own work<sup>2</sup>, most children saw the adults who worked with them as special, giving reasons such as: "because she's kind... she does cooking.... she's magic.... she gives the best cuddles... she's funny... I like her... she teaches us things....she plays football... he does drilling..."

This is backed up by evidence provided by Early Years Equality, who have told me that, when asked about the adults who work with them, children said things like: 'tell us we can do it', 'not being mean', 'take us out', 'helping us say please and thank you', 'give us chances', 'make us proud', 'help us care for others', 'help us not to be scared', 'bringing new things in, like books, music, ways to dance and draw'.

<sup>1</sup> Children's experiences of the Early Years Foundation Stage, Research Report DFE-RR071, published by the Department for Education, December 2010

<sup>2</sup> Children's views of their early years settings: summary of findings, Prof Cathy Nutbrown, University of Sheffield, September 2010

2.5. The voices of young children serve as an important reminder of the vital part that the adults who work with them play in young children's lives and learning.

2.6. Consistently people have expressed to me the importance of working in partnership with parents to have the maximum impact, something I recognise from my own research. Where early years practitioners share their knowledge with parents, parents are better positioned to support their children at home, thus enhancing their development and learning opportunities outside of the setting. We need to ensure that the early childhood workforce is equipped and confident to share knowledge and understanding with parents.

2.7. It is also important to consider the breadth and depth of content within a qualification, to understand, for example, how much child development knowledge is optimal. Although I did not ask the question specifically in my Call for Evidence, I have been struck by the number of times people at consultation events have expressed concerns at the time people take to achieve a qualification, questioning whether level 3 courses that can be completed in a year are really able to give sufficient time to develop a proper understanding of child development for someone able to lead a setting.

2.8. Many people I have spoken to extol the benefits to be gained by experiencing a variety of settings, and understanding different perspectives and approaches, before qualifying. This seems self-evidently good to me, subject to constraints of time and funding.

2.9. I am also convinced by those who have made the case for ensuring a good understanding of diversity and inclusivity, so that all children – from all backgrounds – and their families, have a positive experience in their early years settings. Linked to this, my Call for Evidence highlighted that 60 per cent of respondents felt that the workforce itself is not sufficiently inclusive and diverse, with obvious issues around the lack of men working in the sector, and concerns over under-representation of black and minority ethnic groups in managerial and leadership positions.

2.10. Also in the context of inclusion and diversity, I am sure that an understanding of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) must form part of the content of qualifications. This does

not mean that every qualification at every level needs an in-depth understanding of different types of support needed, but rather that people have a sufficient working knowledge to be able to identify issues and refer accordingly, include children effectively, and work across teams in settings and other early years networks (e.g. childminder networks, health visitors, parents, educational psychologists).

### **Do current qualifications teach what is required?**

**2.11.** There appear to be mixed views in the sector about whether the qualifications currently available have the right content. In my Call for Evidence, around three-quarters of respondents felt that other members of the early years workforce they worked with have been taught the right blend of skills, knowledge, and capabilities adequately or better. This is heartening, although it is not clear what qualifications these people have taken, when they took them, or indeed if they have developed these skills in other ways.

**2.12.** More commonly throughout my consultation events, concerns have been expressed about those qualifications currently available, including the CWDC Certificate and the Diploma. This includes a key concern over the amount of time devoted to child development, especially for babies and young children, given that the Certificate and Diploma cover the 0-19 age range. The qualification has been developed in this way in order to allow it to span the whole of the children's workforce, which most people I have spoken to feel is too broad. Whilst it is important to understand the wider childhood years, this should not, I suggest, be at the expense of a focus on early years content. For context, CWDC has provided information that suggests that around two-thirds of the children's workforce within their remit work in the early years.

*“Child development and promoting positive behaviour do not seem to be the drivers for those joining the early years workforce. It is far better to introduce these concepts at the very beginning of studying for an early years qualification and then build on these areas. More often, students are unaware of these areas and as a result, this has a negative impact on their work with young children.”*

Sue Williams, Telford & Wrekin Council

**2.13.** It will come as little surprise that many people have raised the level 3 NNEB Certificate in Nursery Nursing as an example of the ‘gold standard’. This reflects comments given during Dame Clare Tickell’s Review of the EYFS. People have pointed out the benefits of a specific focus on young children and babies, the importance of gaining a variety of practical supervised and assessed experience in a range of settings, the additional time spent focusing on child development, observing children and reflecting on those observations, and the high status attached to the qualification.

**2.14.** These comments are supported by my Call for Evidence – 45 per cent of those who answered the specific question about the NNEB noted its high standards and rigour, including on entry requirements (many of which were in fact set by individual colleges). Support was tempered by the clear message that any NNEB-type qualification would need to be updated to reflect the latest thinking and practices, with respondents to the Call for Evidence noting the need for more on SEND, modern attachment theory, neuroscience, work with families, social policy, diversity and inclusion, partnership/multi-agency working, and leadership.

**2.15.** I was curious to see whether these messages reflect what the NNEB Certificate actually offered. **Figure 6** compares the content of the NNEB Certificate (sometimes named Diploma) against the L3 Diploma for the Children and Young People’s Workforce to try and establish different approaches to content and tuition. I am grateful to the Council for Awards in Care, Health, and Education (CACHE), the successor awarding organisation to the NNEB, for sharing information about the NNEB Certificate, and the CWDC, for help in compiling the comparison.

**Figure 6 – A comparison of the NNEB Certificate in Nursery Nursing, and the Diploma for the Children and Young People’s Workforce.**

	<b>NNEB Certificate in Nursery Nursing (1988-90)</b> [NB, the qualification changed name between the Certificate and Diploma over time]	<b>L3 Diploma for the Children and Young People’s Workforce (Early Learning and Childcare pathway)</b>
<b>Entry Requirements</b>	Must be 16 years old (determined by NNEB)	Varies – at the discretion of the training provider, but no younger than 16
<b>L2 English and Maths?</b>	Not explicitly mentioned, but candidates expected to be able to communicate effectively	Varies depending on training route. A L3 Apprenticeship will require L2 English and Maths to complete, for example. Some training providers specify L2 English and Maths as an entry requirement, but not explicitly demanded by the qualification.
<b>Time to complete course (guided learning hours)</b>	Two years (350 days) of full-time study. 60% (1,260 guided learning hours) of which spent in college, 40% on placements	Varies. Based on completing 65 credits worth of study. Mandatory components (49 credits) should take around 300 guided learning hours). Remaining 16 credits from options.
<b>Content – areas of study</b>	<p>Focus is on 0-7 years olds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<b>Children’s growth and development:</b> the stages of development and child observations</li> <li>•<b>Physical development and keeping children healthy:</b> the promotion and maintenance of health; surveillance programmes; safety in the environment ;clothing and footwear; baby equipment; nutrition; childhood illness and ailments; first aid; care of the sick child; children with special needs</li> <li>•<b>Cognitive development and learning through play:</b> stimulation; sensory development; the development of children’s skills; speech and language development; the development of concepts; activities; the organisation and provision of materials and equipment; learning difficulties; wider experiences</li> <li>•<b>Emotional development:</b> stimulation; bonding; the adult/child relationship; family relationships; emotional expression; self awareness; loss and grief; disadvantaged children</li> <li>•<b>Social relationships:</b> role and role conflict; the family as a social institution; the family in the community; different patterns of family functioning; disadvantaged families</li> <li>•<b>The rights and responsibilities of children and the family:</b> the rights and responsibilities of individuals in society; the legislative and administrative framework; the statutory and voluntary services available to families with young children; variations in social behaviour</li> <li>•<b>The nursery Nurse in employment:</b> the meaning of professionalism; relationships between occupational groups; working with managers; the relationship between employer and employee; the role of the nursery nurse in the public sector; the role of the nursery nurse in the private sector</li> </ul> <p>Plus additional time spent on ‘complementary studies’ (e.g. communication and the creative arts, environmental studies, living in society)</p>	<p>Covers 0-19 age range:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•<b>General core units:</b> promote communication; promote equality and inclusion in health, social care, or children’s and young people settings; engage in personal development; principles for implementing duty of care (9 credits)</li> <li>•<b>Common mandatory units:</b> understanding child and young person development; promote child and young person development; understand how to safeguard the wellbeing of children and young people; support children and young people’s health and safety; develop positive relationships with children, young people, and others involved in their care; working together for the benefit of children and young people; understand how to support positive outcomes for children and young people (18 credits)</li> <li>•<b>Mandatory Early learning and childcare pathway units (focus on 0-5 year olds):</b> context and principles for early years provision; promote learning and development in the early years; promote children’s welfare and wellbeing in the early years; professional practice in work with children in the early years; support children’s speech, language and communication (22 units)</li> <li>•<b>Option units (16 credits)</b> could include: lead and manage a community pre-school; promote young children’s physical activity and movement skill; support children and young people to achieve their learning potential; support the speech, language, and communication development of children who are learning more than one language, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Content – work placements</b>	At least 140 days spent on practical placements (around 840 hours)	Awarding organisations and CWDC have issued a statement demanding at least 400 hours (around 87 days) spent in a real work environment
<b>Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Written exam (1 ¼ hour multiple choice exam, 3 hour essay)</li> <li>•Course work (including folder of 60 child observations)</li> <li>•Practical work experience</li> </ul> <p>‘Pass’ needed in all three</p>	Range of assessment approaches within and between different awarding organisations, operating in conjunction with the training provider.

2.16. It is important to stress that this comparison does not compare like with like. The NNEB acted as curriculum supervisor and awarding organisation, giving it greater control over what was taught and how. This gave the NNEB a role in considering processes as one way of achieving its intended outcomes – for example by setting minimum numbers of learning hours. The current level 3 Diploma is based on standards set by CWDC focusing on outcomes – the ‘what’ not the ‘how’. However, in my consultation to date, many have pointed that how people learn – the number of hours, the variety and types of settings – can be just as important as what is taught.

*“The current methods adopted for the delivery of CWDC early years and childcare qualifications, covering development from 0-19 years are too broad and should be more focused.”*

National Day Nurseries Association

2.17. In simple terms, the NNEB certificate demanded more than double the number of guided learning hours in a college based setting, and again more than double the number of days spent on practical placement, where detailed observations of young children were carried out under supervision. It does not necessarily follow that double the time leads to double the outcome – teaching has become more effective and efficient over time – but it is likely to have an impact on the quality of training. And it focused on the 0-7 age range, which will inevitably allow for greater specialist understanding of young children.

2.18. When asked at events, people are more comfortable with a level 2 Certificate being more generic, providing students with a broad but shallow introduction to the education sector, before they decide whether to specialise in early education and childcare. This mirrors the findings from the recent Wolf Report into vocational education.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, there is a question whether holders of a level 2 Certificate can be considered experts in the field – any

<sup>3</sup> p.107, ‘Review of Vocational Education – The Wolf Report’, Professor Alison Wolf, March 2011, published by the Department for Education DFE-00031-2011

more than you would assume that somebody with a GCSE in French should be a fluent speaker, for example.

*“We demand that students need a relevant level 2 qualification before they are able to handle animals independently on our animal care courses at Solihull College. Nobody demands the same level of qualification before you can be left alone with a baby.”*

Helen Perkins, Solihull College

*“By allowing non-qualified people to work in childcare settings we undermine the status of the qualified workforce. In nearly all professions, staff can only be employed if they are qualified. This should be the case in early education and childcare.”*

UNISON

**2.19.** I am continuing to consider Dame Clare’s recommendation that level 3 should be the minimum qualification standard for the whole workforce. The benefits of a better qualified workforce are clear – with higher levels of qualifications, we should expect to see improvements in practice and better experiences and outcomes for babies and young children. It would also help the sector to be perceived as more highly skilled and professional, improving its status.

**2.20.** But there are risks around those in the workforce without a level 3 qualification, particularly members of black and minority ethnic groups, which some evidence suggests are less likely to hold higher levels of qualification. If the minimum level of qualifications is raised, we shall need to introduce robust ‘ladders and bridges’ for those who want to improve their qualifications so as not to lose valuable people who currently work with young children.

**2.21.** I am also aware of the crucial issue of leadership in this context – if the entire workforce is at a minimum of level 3, what does that do to our expectations of those leading settings? Would we want to demand more of them? I want to give this issue more thought before coming to any conclusions.

**Content and Tuition – for further consideration**

**What should be the expectations for the content and age-range for early years qualifications, and the preparation demanded to achieve them?**

**Should we seek to raise the minimum level of qualification required of the workforce, and if so, to what and by when?**

### 3 QUALITY

However qualifications are designed, it is how the courses and training are delivered in practice that matters. The early education and childcare setting experiences of those pursuing qualifications make a real difference to how well they learn and how effective they are once they have finished studying, and achieved their awards.

It is worrying, therefore, that there can be significant variations in the quality of delivery at both training providers and settings. The interaction between learner, tutor, and setting can be poor. This can mean too much being asked of setting managers in assessing training. Alongside this, it can be difficult for tutors to maintain a strong current knowledge of the sector.

Literacy and numeracy skills are also a concern, with neither enrolment on courses, or completion of awards, necessarily dependent on achieving a good standard of English and maths.

#### Defining quality

**3.1.** The quality of the delivery of qualifications has a major impact on the ability of a learner to develop the right knowledge and skills, and of their subsequent ability to be effective in the workplace. So, although ‘quality’ is important across the board, I am talking here about the quality of the teaching and learning experience for those working towards a qualification. Even the most well conceived qualifications will only be as good as the way they are taught and developed in practice. The roles of learning centres (Further Education Colleges, Higher Education Institutions, and other training providers), lecturers, assessors, examiners, and settings are all critical to ensuring that a qualification that looks good on paper is experienced in the best way by learners.

**3.2.** The quality assurance process is necessarily complex, involving Ofqual, Ofsted, the Quality Assurance Agency (for higher education qualifications), awarding bodies, sector skills councils,

the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), individual colleges and other learning centres, and, on a more informal basis, local authorities, employers, and sector bodies.

### A quality learning experience

**3.3.** The ways in which qualifications are offered to learners appears to be varied. 64 per cent of respondents to the Call for Evidence noted the variation in how different training providers delivered qualifications. They felt that too much variation in provision of training, quality of tutor, and lack of standardisation led to very different experiences for learners depending on the chosen provider. Worryingly, only 6 per cent of respondents thought that qualifications and training courses were well delivered across the whole sector, with positive comments mainly about higher education courses.

**3.4.** At the same time, I have heard many affirming examples from students and lecturers about their own learning experiences, which I am sure reflect what people value in other subjects and sectors: passionate tutors with expert knowledge, helping learners to understand and achieve, leading to better employment prospects.

*“... there are some very well delivered training courses, and this relates to all levels of qualification. It is very dependent of course on the enthusiasm, skills and knowledge of the tutor. When the tutor has recent experience of working in the field, whether paid or voluntary this can make a positive difference.”*

North Yorkshire County Council

**3.5.** As previously mentioned, there has been strong support for qualifications that require learners to experience practice in a variety of settings, ensuring that they have a richer pre-qualifying experience. In part this is dictated by the content of a qualification – what the awarding organisation demands – but there is also a role for learning centres in supporting opportunities for learners to go to different settings.

## What are the concerns about the quality of delivery?

**3.6.** Learning centres play the most important role in delivering a quality learning experience. Regardless of the quality assurance structures in place, what goes on in an Further Education College or other training provider is likely to have the biggest impact on the learner experience, through the pattern of teaching and placements, the order in which things are taught, learning support, and so on.

**3.7.** Although some variation in approach can be a good thing – responding to different strengths and learner needs for example – the clear message from my Call for Evidence and consultation events is that there is not enough consistency. I have heard first hand how some local authorities and settings will only work with certain learning centres because they have developed strong relationships with them and trust them to deliver qualifications effectively. Aside from the impact this has on learners in other learning centres, this approach based on local reputation must have an impact on the mobility of the workforce. It undermines the universality of a qualification to act as a proxy across the country.

**3.8.** Frustration has been expressed to me on a number of visits to early years settings by employers who often feel a lack of support from learning centre staff. At the same time, a number of FE lecturers have expressed the same frustration to me, suggesting that the way courses are structured leaves little time to visit students in settings as they would like, and indeed as is optimal to establish a full view of the student's work in practice.

**3.9.** The settings I have visited take a studious approach to confirming whether learners have demonstrated the practice expected of them on a course. But I am not confident that this is systematic practice, not least because we know that not all settings are of outstanding quality, with a sufficient sense of what should be expected of learners.

**3.10.** I am concerned to be told that some learning centres, under pressure to achieve high completion rates, push students through a course even if they are not suited to a career in the early years. In my Call for Evidence, 10 per cent of respondents expressed concerns that assessors were able to pass learners who they felt

had not adequately achieved. Funding pressures are cited as the most common reason for this, alongside pressure to be seen as a high performing institution (with good completion rates). I have seen no evidence that this is common practice – and recognise that this is unlikely to be an issue specific to the early years. But it must be a concern that some people believe this, and points to a need to take steps to build in greater rigour and assurance on standards.

*“Many early years qualifications at level 3 and below seem to ‘spoon feed’ individuals information and it is often difficult to engage newly qualified level 3s in critiquing some aspect of service delivery/philosophy and approach etc. Motivation is sometimes lacking and support during placement is often woeful.”*

Susan Mellors, University of Nottingham

**3.11.** In order to deliver an early years qualification effectively, we should have high expectations of the tutors leading courses. I have been fortunate to meet dozens of tutors at my consultation events, teaching at all levels, and I have been consistently struck by the passion and knowledge they have shown. But I have also been told that the quality of tutors is not always all that it should be. There seem to be three main issues here: ensuring that lecturers and trainers have up-to-date experience of the sector, ensuring that those teaching students have sufficiently high qualification levels themselves, and ensuring that they have sufficient time to supervise students on placements.

**3.12.** Specifically, I have been given examples of tutors teaching courses at level 3, when this is the highest qualification they themselves hold. I have heard of some instances where tutors teaching Foundation Degrees are only qualified to level 3. The reasons for this are currently opaque, and the extent of the practice is also unclear. Linked to this is the quality and knowledge of assessors, and the question of whether they are able to make the good judgements about student attainment, if they do not hold the qualification (or higher) themselves than that which they are teaching and supervising.

*“Training providers for graduates have not always been as knowledgeable as their trainees in early years specialism, although this is now beginning to improve.”*

North East Lincolnshire Council

**3.13.** Also relevant here is the quality of support in settings. At every consultation event I have held people have expressed concern that there appears to be no link between the quality of provision in a setting (e.g. as measured by Ofsted), or the quality of the setting’s staff and manager, and the ability to host students. In my Call for Evidence, 13 per cent of respondents made the specific point that learners undertaking training in a poor quality setting would suffer from not being able to experience good practice.

**3.14.** Several people have questioned the suitability of work-based learning as a route for people without any previous early years sector experience. They have expressed concern that the work-based learning route – originally conceived as a way of recognising the skills and knowledge that experienced members of the workforce possess – lacks the rigour and depth of knowledge necessary to train new entrants to the workforce.

*“I sometimes struggle with the youngsters who have been allowed to do an NVQ rather than a full time college based course as they appear to have big gaps in their knowledge and skills. I do not take NVQ trainees unless they have had significant amounts of pre-NVQ experience, and will only support students from local colleges on full time Diploma and BTEC courses.”*

Jayne Pratt, Izzies Nursery

### **Literacy and numeracy**

**3.15.** At present, there is no requirement for those studying at any level to demonstrate competence in English and mathematics in order to complete an early years qualification. Even on an Apprenticeship route, which at level 3 demands level 2 English and

maths, a learner who fails to obtain their level 2 in English and maths can still receive the early years specific award (e.g. the Diploma).

*“[The most important things children need from the early years workforce are] good interpersonal communication skills, including the ability to listen to family members as well as talk.”*

Trudy Mason, Fairfield Playbox Preschool

**3.16.** Throughout the consultation events, the lack of basic literacy and numeracy requirements for courses was highlighted as a potential weakness, given the importance of these skills in communicating with parents and supporting the learning and development of babies and young children. 39 per cent of respondents to the Call for Evidence mentioned the importance of communication skills being a key part of early education and childcare qualifications. 8 per cent of respondents specifically suggested it would be inappropriate for practitioners without good literacy and numeracy skills to have a role in educating children.

### **Quality – for further consideration**

**What is the best way to ensure that tutors have up-to-date knowledge and skills and are qualified to the right level?**

**How can we ensure that settings are supported to play an effective role in the training of their staff and students on placement?**

**What levels of literacy and numeracy should we expect of the early years workforce, and how can we secure these?**

## 4 RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND PROGRESSION

Once we are confident that we have qualifications that cover the right areas of knowledge, and we are confident that they are being taught and experienced to a high standard, the final question to consider is how we encourage people onto courses and into the sector, and help those in the sector to progress.

There is agreement over the importance of a well trained and qualified early years workforce to ensure that babies and young children reap the benefits of high quality early education and care. But at the same time, there is an almost universal view that the sector is perceived to be low skilled and low status.

This affects recruitment onto courses, into employment, and the progression of staff through the qualification system throughout their career.

There is an appetite to 'raise the bar' – to demand an even more knowledgeable and skilled workforce, which includes teachers, and to monitor the continued learning and development of those undertaking qualifications to ensure the best practice.

### Recruiting and retaining the best

4.1. I believe that working in the early years sector offers huge rewards. Watching babies and young children develop and grow, and being able to support this process, is a privilege. Those working with babies and young children are able to have a profound impact on some of the most impressionable and vulnerable members of society.

4.2. But, despite this, our brightest and best candidates are seldom attracted or encouraged towards working with young children. I am not saying that excellent practice should be

restricted to the academically minded, but we need to ensure that those recruited to learning programmes which lead to work with young children are keen to study and learn as well as show empathy and a natural affinity for working with children. And we need to ask why a rewarding career in the early years is not as appealing as it might be.

### The reality of recruiting, retaining, and progressing

*“For too long Early Years work has been perceived as an alternative to hairdressing and a suitable route for those who fail in school”*

*Dr Celia Greenway, University of Birmingham*

*“There is a common but wrong perception that it is ‘easy’ work... Higher achieving students are dissuaded by head teachers and careers advisors from entering this area”*

*Early Childhood Studies Degrees Network*

4.3. Too often, the early years sector is seen as low skilled and low status, which has a direct impact on who wants to enrol on courses. I have heard dozens of examples of people being told to study childcare because they lacked the qualifications to enrol on other courses, or because it was the only course with places available. Almost universally this happens to women. And this does not apply just to 16-18 year olds; I have heard other examples of adults being encouraged into childcare as a career by the local job centre, despite having no previous experience or present inclination.

4.4. This has a knock-on impact when newly qualified practitioners apply for jobs. As previously mentioned, I have heard a general message of discontent from the employers I have spoken to over the lack of appropriate skills and knowledge amongst applicants. This has led some employers to adopt labour intensive recruitment practices.

4.5. For example, I visited one setting where the interview process for applicants included inviting them to spend time working in the setting, so they could be observed 'on the job'. This could well be seen as good recruitment practice, but in this case it was a process developed to compensate for a failure in the qualifications process. Recruitment is time-consuming for both applicants and employers, and has a cost that will be borne by either the taxpayer or the parent paying for provision directly. It is important that qualifications can be taken as proxy for a set of knowledge, skills and understanding which need not be further tested each time someone applies for a job. This means that interviews can instead be used to check out other aptitudes less obvious from a qualification or application form.

4.6. I am not interested only in new entrants to the workforce, but am also keen to understand how those in the sector continue to take qualifications to improve their skills and their career prospects. Obtaining the right qualification can open doors to more senior positions (e.g. a supervisory or management role) or to different parts of the sector (e.g. Children's Centres, Reception classes, etc.). But in order to do this, clarity is needed on what skills are needed for different roles and which qualifications can provide these skills. The responses to the Call for Evidence suggest that this clarity is lacking, that progression routes are not well understood, with most people commenting on the lack of progression opportunities and lack of clear progression pathways.

4.7. It is worth saying that a variety of progression routes is not always a bad thing – people need different options and will want to choose their own path – but there is a risk that people are confused about the best option for them. An additional difficulty is that the range of opportunities is not always open to everyone, often depending on location and availability of funding. It is not obvious to what extent the lack of clear progression routes is dissuading people from joining the sector, or encouraging people to leave it.

4.8. The importance of recruiting and retaining effective leaders was a recurring theme in consultation events. This is something the Allen Report identified was essential in improving workforce

capability.<sup>4</sup> It was suggested that well-qualified, experienced leadership is key to driving up quality of provision, and also that less experienced staff will benefit from good, thorough support and supervision. It is also key in safeguarding children (as shown in the Munro Review).<sup>5</sup>

**4.9.** For me, leadership is not confined to a position that one takes up at a point in one's career, nor is it limited to a role one applies for. Rather, leadership refers to dispositions and opportunities to 'take a lead' on something, or to show initiative. Good leaders in positions of management in a setting can create opportunities for new leaders to emerge from those with lower level qualifications in the workforce.

**4.10.** There are already some leadership and management qualifications available for those working in education settings, such as the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and, more relevant to the early years, the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) provided by the National College for School Leadership. Some people whom I spoke to at my consultation events had experience of these, and had welcomed leadership qualifications and courses that are specific to the early years field. However, others regarded these types of qualifications as unavailable to them, or 'not for people like me'.

*"There is a clear need for a level 4 qualification focusing on leadership and management. There is demand for such a qualification from the current early years and childcare workforce"*

*Pre-School Learning Alliance*

**4.11.** Specifically, it has been put to me that more could be done to ensure that the leaders in the sector represent our society and that

<sup>4</sup> Paragraph 16, Early Intervention: The Next Steps, an independent report to Her Majesty's Government by Graham Allen MP, January 2011.

<sup>5</sup> The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report – a child-centred system, an independent report to Her Majesty's Government by Professor Eileen Munro, May 2011

children and workers experience the benefits from women and men who bring a range of life experiences. This is important so that all have the opportunity to work with good leaders who can instil a sense of aspiration in those who work in the teams they lead, and in the children and families in the communities around those settings and services.

*“Whilst there are significant black and minority ethnic practitioners at entry and frontline levels this does not extend to more senior level practitioners”*

CWDC

**4.12.** The recruitment of men into the workforce is a particular issue; the early education and childcare workforce is overwhelmingly female, averaging between 98 and 99 per cent depending on setting type.<sup>6</sup> There are widespread perceptions that childcare is “women’s work”, just as fixing cars is “men’s work”. I have also heard reports of parents being suspicious of men working in childcare. In a survey of parents Netmums conducted to help with this review, around 16 per cent of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement: *“I would be happy leaving my child with a male childcarer.”* Young children can benefit from spending time with men as well as women, yet many children do not have this experience.

**4.13.** The Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) (see **figure 7**) continues to be an issue that raises debate across the sector. The overall view is positive. People are clear that the EYPS both improves the skills and knowledge of the holder, and those with EYPS have been successful in stimulating effective practice in settings (although there are some concerns that not all settings are making best use of those who hold EYPS).

**4.14.** Major concerns about parity have been expressed to me, however, particularly with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). In

<sup>6</sup> Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2010, published by the Department for Education in September 2011 (OSR17/2011)

particular, the point has been made that it seems wrong that somebody with QTS, who has spent a career as a secondary school history teacher, for example, could lead a nursery class in a school, whilst an EYPS is not able to. I have found no evidence that this happens in practice – schools recruit based on applicants' careers and experience, not just the QTS title – and teachers who have transferred across age phases usually do so having undergone some training to prepare for the change, but the anomaly provokes some upset in the sector. Some with EYPS I have spoken to have even expressed regret that they chose the EYPS route over QTS, whilst it appears others have used the EYPS as a springboard onto QTS routes, thus becoming teachers working with young children in Key Stage 1 in schools.

***Figure 7 – Summary of the Early Years Professional Status***

Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) was created in 2006 to help professionalise the early education and childcare workforce. It is a graduate-level status for the early education and childcare sector (those working with children aged 0-5).

EYPS is achieved by demonstrating a set of professional standards that relate to working with children from birth to five. There are currently 39 standards in all and they fall into six areas:

- Knowledge and understanding.
- Effective practice.
- Relationships with children.
- Communicating and working in partnership with families and carers.
- Teamwork and collaboration.
- Professional development.

The EYP standards are, however, currently being reviewed. A new EYPS training and assessment programme was launched in January 2012.

To date, 9,365 candidates have attained EYPS, and around 2,000 candidates are in training towards EYPS.

EYPS is currently led by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) but from 1 April 2012 responsibility for EYPS will move to the new Teaching Agency.

## Improving qualifications, improving status

4.15. The perceived status of the profession comes from a mixture of factors, including how early years workers see themselves, how parents and families perceive them, how other professionals see the early years workforce, and what members of the workforce aspire to be in the future. It is also not something that is fixed – it changes with context and over time.

4.16. I have met many people who are proud of the work they do, yet do not feel their role is given the status it deserves and would like it to be recognised more highly (in terms of payment, working conditions and perception). Childminders, in particular, have expressed their sense of being undervalued members of the early childhood workforce.

*“The perception of early years workers as low-status has serious implications for child protection. Early years staff may have daily contact with vulnerable children and their families, but, because they are undervalued by other professionals, they may not receive information or be included fully in the safeguarding process”*

*Barnardo’s*

4.17. As part of a consultation with users of the online discussion site Netmums, I asked some questions about how parents perceive the status of the early years workforce in comparison to a number of other professions (**figure 8**).

**Figure 8 – The perceived status of the profession (survey of Netmums users asked ‘please rank the following professions in order of status’)**

Ranked by order of status	Profession
1	Casualty nurse
2	Secondary school teacher
3	Primary school teacher
4	Vet
5	Health visitor
6	Nursery school worker
7	Web designer
8	Childminder
9	Nanny or au pair
10	Cleaner

4.18. Although this is an imperfect survey of opinion, it does seem to back up the belief held by the sector that the public and the families they work with perceive them as being a low status profession, and one that is not comparable to those who are educating children in schools.

4.19. I am pleased with the range and number of suggestions people have made about improving the status of the profession. I think, if we are able to get the content and processes of supporting people working for qualifications right, improving the skills and knowledge of the workforce, this will help to improve the status of the profession. At the same time, until we improve the public perception of the profession, this is not necessarily going to be the career of choice for many high achievers, making it harder to raise the levels of skills and knowledge in the workforce. This suggests to me that complementary action may be needed to tackle both perception, as well as making substantive improvements to the levels of skills, knowledge, understanding and professionalism in the workforce.

4.20. Better pay was cited by 47 per cent of respondents to the written Call for Evidence, as something that would improve status and attract graduates. It was suggested that pay should be better linked to qualification level, to create clearer progression and encourage continuing professional development. Though pay is outside the remit of my review, I recognise that this is an important factor in the status of any workforce.

4.21. 44 per cent of respondents suggested a positive publicity campaign – ideas ranged from a government media campaign to positive characters/storylines in soap operas and celebrity advocates – could help to improve status.

4.22. While the wider public perception of careers in the early years may be a significant barrier, there are also questions around the role of careers guidance services, particularly in schools. The future of careers guidance is changing, with the planned introduction of the National Careers Service and the new duty on schools to secure independent careers guidance for their pupils. We need to ensure that good information is available to men and women who are considering work with children and offer support to careers advisers about the different roles available in the early years sector, and what qualifications can equip them to excel in these roles.

4.23. Earlier in this report, I stated that I am continuing to consider the implications of raising the minimum level of qualification in the workforce to level 3, in line with Dame Clare Tickell's recommendation. Whatever else the benefits of this approach are, I note that this could have a positive impact on the status of the profession – it could no longer be considered to be limited to a job for unqualified staff – but a career for those with good qualifications and routes to progression.

4.24. Similarly, I recognise the likely positive impact to the status of the profession and the calibre of staff recruited if standards of literacy and numeracy are demanded in order to achieve early years qualifications. This is not a reason to pursue the policy in itself, but it would be a beneficial outcome nonetheless. Set against this will need to be an understanding of the impact on recruitment in raising the bar – would it have a detrimental impact on the flow of staff into the profession? Would we lose a valuable dimension to the workforce?

4.25. There are two other suggestions that have been made to me that are worth setting out in more detail: introducing an early years initial teacher education route; and introducing some form of licensing system for the sector.

## The role of teachers in the early years

4.26. Widespread support has been expressed to me for the role of teachers in early years settings. Those in favour argue that teachers improve the overall status of the profession and they note the evidence supporting the positive impact that teachers already have in early years settings, also highlighted in the Field Report.<sup>7</sup> There are obviously costs involved in increasing the number of teachers working in the early years, which need careful consideration, but more teachers would help to demonstrate the important links between the early years phase and Key Stage One. The Early Years Foundation Stage (from birth to five) is the beginning of the education system, and people have made the argument to me that teachers have a place in this education, beginning with babies.

*“In all early years settings where education is taking place teaching and learning should be planned and led by a qualified teacher working alongside well qualified support staff... Teaching younger children is no easier than teaching any other age group and, therefore requires the same degree of training”*

NUT

4.27. Some go further, and argue that more teachers are only part of the answer. In order to maximise the effectiveness of any investment in teachers in the early years, I have had many people suggest to me the creation of an Early Years Initial Teacher Education (ITE) route, leading to QTS, which covers ages 0-7. This would be a route of absolute parity with other teacher education courses – it would in fact be the same basic education route – but it would provide the specialist knowledge and skills needed in the early years sector. They also argue that an early years ITE route would need to be even more rigorous than the current EYPS, would need to match the amount of time spent in settings in other routes to QTS, and also include a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) probationary period.

<sup>7</sup> Para 3.32, The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults, an independent report to Her Majesty’s Government by Frank Field MP, December 2010

4.28. There are some voices against the proposition, concerned that the label of ‘teacher’ carries too many connotations of formal learning that fail to reflect the way that babies and young children are supported in the early years sector. Points against teachers also include the potential costs of training, and the knock-on effects the improved terms of pay and conditions for QTS holders could have on the rest of the sector. Finally, they ask the pertinent question of what would happen to existing EYPs. These are all important questions that I will consider during the next phase of my review.

### Would licensing help?

4.29. Licensing has been suggested to me as a way of improving the status and standards of the profession, being seen as a mark of quality. A licensing approach that demanded periodic reaccreditation could be used to ensure minimum levels of continuing professional development, helping ensure that those working in the sector have up-to-date knowledge and skills. As well as being raised during my consultation events, I have also spoken to sector organisations that are actively pursuing licensing for their members, such as the National Childminding Association (NCMA). The National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) has also raised licensing as an option.

4.30. Different approaches have been suggested. One key distinction to consider is whether a licence should be mandatory, so a member of the workforce would need to hold a licence before working with babies and young children (in effect replacing the ‘full and relevant’ qualifications list), or whether it is a voluntary licence that confers status on the holder, making it a ‘badge of honour’ that new and existing early years workers would aspire to hold.

4.31. There are existing examples in other countries. In Scotland they operate mandatory licensing where the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) is responsible for registering people who work in social services, including the early years, and regulating their education and training. To register, a worker must satisfy criteria, which include holding the appropriate qualifications for the job they do and being able to evidence good character. Managers and lead practitioners are required to achieve registration within six months of starting employment.

4.32. Another example is the voluntary licence operated by the Institute for Learning (IfL), a professional body for teachers, tutors and trainers in Further Education. Members are required to keep up to date with their vocational or subject specialism, as well as the latest practice in teaching and training methods.

4.33. There is some attraction to the ideas of a 'licence' as a way of creating a more straightforward measure of professionalism, mirroring approaches in other sectors, such as nursing or social work. Licence holders would be easily identified and it would be clear what they would have to demonstrate in order to hold a licence, thus removing some of the confusion of using a wide range of qualifications.

4.34. But there are also many issues and potential difficulties to be resolved if a licensing system were to be introduced. It is not clear which organisation would be well placed to establish and manage a licensing scheme, nor how such a scheme would be funded. How far the sector, and specifically members of the workforce, would see a licence as an additional bureaucratic burden is unclear. And we would need to be very clear, especially in the context of my review, how a licence would link to the qualifications system, and that the introduction of a licence to practice does not introduce further complications, or restrict entry to the profession because people cannot afford their licence.

## **Recruitment, retention, and progression – for further consideration**

**How can we best establish clear progression routes for all members of the sector (including black and minority ethnic groups), and support less well qualified members of the workforce to progress?**

**Is there a strong case for introducing an early years initial teacher education route, and how might the practical obstacles be addressed?**

**Is there a case for a licensing system and, if so, what model might be best?**

## 5 CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

*“Children only get their early years once and this is the age and stage we have the greatest influence over and will make the greatest difference to their future lives and well being”*

*Lis Smart*

**5.1.** I would like to repeat my thanks for the very helpful and comprehensive suggestions, advice and information that I have been given by so many individuals and organisations in the sector, who represent a wide range of interests and concerns. The different opinions on some issues is prompting me to question further and I shall continue to discuss and deliberate before I publish my final report in the summer. So I will continue to speak with as many people as I can as I consider my final recommendations.

**5.2.** I shall continue to consult on the issues set out in this report, to test out ideas and look for ways of resolving some of the complexities that presently exist.

**5.3.** As the range of views presented in this report demonstrates, the task is huge, therefore further involvement of those to whom this issue matters, is crucial. However, I am also optimistic that with creativity and willingness to find solutions, we can make the future qualifications system better than the one that exists today, in the interests of *all* young children and their families. Working with young children is an immensely challenging and rewarding career, we need a qualifications structure that does justice to all involved in this multifaceted workforce.

**5.4.** The responsibilities for all those who work with and for young children and their families are immense. High quality care and education must meet *all* children’s learning and developmental needs. Children need adults who understand the research and theory which underpins their day to day work and decisions, so that they can develop their own, personal interactions with babies and young children and create environments for them where they

are respected, nurtured and emotionally secure. Those adults need to be able to work in partnership with parents too.

5.5. When we talk of babies, toddlers and young children we must think of learning in a broad sense; infant-appropriate pedagogies of looking, listening and loving, alongside the capacity to stimulate and challenge children to ask questions, explore, play and seek answers. Fundamental to young children's healthy, all round development, and crucial to the development of their thinking, is the part adults play in their lives and learning. Positive and close relationships with known adults, or key persons, are crucial for *all* young children in early years settings.

5.6. I shall continue to think about the issues raised in this interim report so that we can seek a future which sees a high status professional workforce for children which ably meets the needs of them and their families.

5.7. For more information on the next phase of my Review, please go to [www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview](http://www.education.gov.uk/nutbrownreview).

## GLOSSARY

AB	Awarding Body
CACHE	Council for Awards in Care, Health and Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status
EYQTS	Early Years Qualified Teacher Status
FE	Further Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
NCMA	National Childminding Association
NCB	National Children's Bureau
NCSL	National College for School Leadership
NDNA	National Day Nurseries Association
NNEB	National Nursery Examination Board
NOS	National Occupational Standards
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OFQUAL	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PLA	Preschool Learning Alliance
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
SSSC	Scottish Social Services Council
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SFA	Skills Funding Agency