

Nutbrown review of early education and childcare qualifications

Note on Context and Key Issues

Introduction:

1. The earliest years of children's lives are crucial to their development. After the nurturing provided by mothers and fathers, the quality of early education and childcare that children receive during the Foundation Years is one of the most crucial ingredients to supporting their development during those years. It is crucial in preparing them to benefit from school and maximise their potential in their life beyond formal education. There is powerful evidence that a high-qualified early learning workforce of skilled, knowledgeable professionals who are child and family centred contribute greatly to children's development and achievements.
2. Building on Dame Clare Tickell's review of the Foundation Years, the Minister of State for Children and Families has asked Professor Cathy Nutbrown to lead an independent review on qualifications in early education and childcare. The Review will examine how best to strengthen training, qualifications and career pathways in childcare and early learning, both for people new to the early education and childcare sector and those already employed there. The Review will make a wide ranging assessment of the current qualifications landscape and opportunities for strengthening the system with a view to putting proposals before the Secretary of State for Education and the Minister of State for Children and Families in summer 2012.
3. This paper sets out the background to the Review. It outlines the broad history and context of workforce qualifications in the early education and childcare sector, some of the cross-cutting challenges and opportunities, and sets the scene for the key issues for the review as defined in the Terms of Reference.

History/context:

4. The UK is renowned for pioneering work in early education and childcare throughout the 20th Century. This has continued in the first decade of the 21st Century, with early education and childcare practitioners being a significant and growing part of the children's workforce in England. Figures from the 2010 Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey show that the number of staff working in childcare settings has risen by 25 percent since 2006 and there are now over 380 thousand paid staff working in early education and childcare, spread over more than 100,000 providers. This includes over 57,000 registered childminders. Between them they are responsible for the education, care, development and well being of over three million children. With the recent upturn in births numbers are growing.
5. Early education and childcare has (with the exception of early years teachers) historically been a low qualified, low status, low paid sector. Pay for those working in full day care settings has risen in recent years (to an average

of £8.00 per hour in full daycare) but parts of the sector, such as childminders, receive particularly poor remuneration. These practitioners fare relatively poorly in contrast to the schools workforce but also in comparison to other 'caring' professions – such as nursing – which have more regulated license to practice and qualifications, and greater unionisation. Partly as a consequence of this, the sector – and specifically the non-maintained parts of it – has sometimes struggled to attract and retain the most able practitioners. The proportion of paid childcare staff outside schools who are graduates (i.e., qualified to level 6) is only eight per cent. The proportion of men employed – two per cent in full day care - may in part be a reflection of men's higher wage expectations.

6. Evidence does not indicate a clear correlation between levels of pay and reward and recruitment and retention across the children's workforce¹. We know that within the workforce there is a considerable element of pride and commitment to the work. And in Scandinavian countries, where status and qualifications are considered to be higher, significant pay differentials with the schools sector remain.

7. Recent years have seen a steady improvement in the skills of the early education and childcare workforce and progress here was noted by Dame Clare Tickell in her review of the Early Years Foundation Stage. In 2010 the large majority of staff in group-based childcare settings outside schools (76 per cent) had a relevant qualification at least at level 3 and eight per cent had a relevant level 6 qualification. This represents progress since 2007, when only 65 per cent held at least a level 3 qualification and five per cent held at least a level 6 qualification. The proportion of childminders with a level 3 qualification has also increased, from 41 per cent in 2007 to 54 per cent in 2010. Increasing professionalisation appears to be delivering real benefits to children, and this is evident both from growing reports of quality from Ofsted and year on year improvement in Foundation Stage Profile results at age five.

8. Improving the skills and knowledge of the workforce reflects a shared aim for government and the sector itself. Employers have been a very strong driving force, investing in supporting their staff through Early Years Foundation Degrees, Early Years Professional (EYP) programmes and to gain good Level 3 qualifications. Meanwhile the Early Years Foundation Stage sets requirements for minimum qualification levels of staff in early years settings. Local authorities have worked to ensure that funding supports and incentivises providers to invest in raising the quality of staff and attracting and retaining the best recruits. Key delivery bodies such as the Children's Workforce Development Council have also played a significant role through promoting and improving training and development routes.

Cross-cutting challenges and opportunities

¹ Children's Workforce Development Council (2007) Recruitment, Retention and Rewards in the Children's Workforce

9. The challenge is to build on this progress in new circumstances and maximise opportunities for improvement. How do we ensure that new graduates are recruited and retained to work in the sector? How do we ensure that well designed and relevant new qualifications are well taught and gain the recognition and status they deserve? How do we balance the move toward more locally driven design and delivery of qualifications with current efforts to rationalise the system?

10. A number of changes to the wider context for delivering change are relevant:

- a. *Economic situation:* Resource constraints in settings are significant. Decisions on qualifications could impact on business viability on the front line and the Review will need to stay sensitive to this. At the same time, constraints on public spending may make costly future proposals, such as expensive new qualifications or pay subsidies, impractical. However, while moving away from overly prescriptive funding streams, support for investment in the early years has been maintained through the Early Intervention Grant and local authorities retain discretion about where and how to invest in the quality workforce. Funding also remains available for some learners via training providers, through the support provided by the Skills Funding Agency and others.
- b. *Governance and leadership:* Functions are being transferred from the Children's Workforce Development Council (notably to the new Teaching Agency). Reform of the wider vocational qualifications landscape (following the Alison Wolf's Review of vocational education) has led to a reassertion of the importance of a diverse market of qualifications, rooted in strong common principles, and strengthening of the place of post-16 education institutions in driving that market. The review says: institutions should be free to offer any qualifications they please from a recognised (i.e. regulated) awarding body, and encouraged to include non-qualifications-based activity. There will be opportunities for the sector increasingly to drive change, working with the new agency.
- c. *Wider children's workforce landscape:* Efforts have been made to make the children's workforce more cohesive. The new Level 3 Diploma for the Children and Young People's Workforce became available from 1st September 2010. The creation of this two-year, college-based course for younger learners, which can provide a bridge to degree-level study, offers a springboard into a variety of roles in the children's workforce, including early education and childcare but also playwork, teaching or nursing.
- d. *Children and families:* the Government has pledged to deliver 15 hours a week of free provision to disadvantaged 2 year olds from 2013. This will bring growing numbers of younger, more economically disadvantaged children into contact with early

education and childcare provision. It will be vital that the future workforce have the right blend of skills, knowledge, understanding and aptitude to offer high quality experiences to this group, and to be equipped to include and support the most disadvantaged children across the board. At the same time, the foundation years are important for all children and proposals will need to take into account the learning and development needs of all children.

- e. *Narrowing the Gap*: the gap between high and low achievement remains. Investment in the early years can make a difference to children's later achievement, especially in literacy (which is key to learning). The Review takes place in full awareness of the crucial effects the adults who work with children can have on their learning, development and wellbeing.

Key issues for the Review

11. The Terms of Reference document sets out the broad themes of the Review and identifies some key issues. The rest of this paper offers some initial thinking in relation to each issue. Where relevant, issues which are out of scope are also noted.

Content and delivery of early years training courses

12. Good quality training and qualifications are based on quality content that is family and child centred, reflecting the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). This means content which is grounded in up-to-date pedagogical and child development knowledge and builds capacity to understand and work with parents. It also means content which equips practitioners to monitor children's progress effectively and work across subject areas set out in the EYFS, building capacity for early learning and children's readiness to take advantage of school. Content must cover the full range of development needs across ages 0-5. Learning should take place through a healthy balance of high quality practice experience, theory-based learning, and critical reflection, which takes account of the different learning needs of trainees at different levels.

13. Specific issues for the Review:

- There have been concerns about the content of the new L3 Diploma for the Children and Young People's Workforce from the childcare perspective, including suggestions that it does not prepare learners to work with some age groups. Whilst it is early days for the Diploma, these concerns need to be explored further.
- The Government has accepted Dame Clare Tickell's recommendation of a new requirement on nurseries, pre-schools and child-minders to provide a written summary of child's development progress around the age of two.

Early feedback from consultation suggests a need to consider how best to support the workforce to deliver this.

- Practitioners may need support to improve their capacity and confidence around interactions with parents more broadly, so that they can support parents confidently to talk with their children from birth;
- Some people have expressed concern about the standard of learning which takes place in settings, including the quality requirements of settings in which practice-learning takes place.

14. Not in scope:

- The review will not consider in detail the content of early education and childcare courses (there are currently over 300 level 3 courses, for example). However, in determining the appropriateness of qualifications to meet all needs, some consideration of content will be included.

Develop a suite of qualifications which is coherent and inclusive

15. Qualifications must meet the needs of learners at all levels and stages of their career in order to attract and retain a sufficiently diverse workforce. The qualifications and pathways available should reflect the different learning styles and preferences of a wide range of trainees with different backgrounds. At the same time, the range of qualifications must be sufficiently coherent and streamlined to enable employers to understand them easily, supporting professionalism and motivation in the workforce.

16. Specific issues for the Review:

- How should 'legacy' qualifications that currently count toward EYFS requirements be treated? The Review will need to embrace the standards underpinning the new diplomas.
- Less than 2 per cent of the workforce is male. In part this may be a reflection of a wider social issue, where the traditional view of caring for very young children is seen as a 'woman's work'. But in the interests of children, the barriers to men working in early learning and childcare need to be understood and addressed.

Qualifications and career pathways that promote progression

17. Career pathways should, so far as practicable, provide progression opportunities at each level, both within early education and childcare and between the sector and the wider children's workforce. There should be clear and relevant pathways for practice-leaders as well as those who are drawn toward managerial roles. Well-defined higher level education and training routes are critical to this. Workforce needs in schools, the maintained sector, children's centres and private and voluntary sectors may well be different, though there are some core areas such as safety and wellbeing and child

development that will be universal whatever the setting because these are essential for all children.

18. Specific issues for the Review:

- Despite recent progress in improving qualification levels, there is still a great disparity between maintained schools (where 42 per cent of early years staff are graduates) and non-schools settings (eight per cent of staff are graduates). How might we foster a qualifications ladder which attracts, nurtures and retains graduates in all parts of the sector, including those working with the babies and toddlers?
- Evidence indicates that those gaining EYP status are tending to move on to jobs in the pre-school phase and not working with children under three years of age. Given the Government's commitment to provide free childcare to all disadvantaged two year olds, and the evidence on the importance of quality for the youngest children, it will be important to consider this.
- Experienced and qualified professionals are also needed for centre management, as well as for leading practice. Concerns have been raised about the lack of focus on the management and business skills required, particularly at Level 3. The Review will need to consider this, including drawing on existing leadership qualifications such as the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQCIL).
- Evidence shows that Early Years Professional Status is starting to gain recognition in the sector but there are mixed views on the consistency of the training and assessment leading to EYP status. CWDC is reviewing the EYPS standards and there will be a need to consider these issues and consider how to build on the successes of EYPs.
- Are existing possibilities for progression for early education and childcare workers into other parts of the children's workforce sufficient, and if not how may they be strengthened?

19. Not in scope:

- The Review will not consider wider issues of pay and conditions
- The training and qualifications of teachers, children's health workers, playworkers and social workers are beyond the scope of the review having been looked at extensively elsewhere.

Consistently high standards across all qualifications

20. We want a system that ensures that all qualifications and training are of a consistently high standard to meet the needs of children, families, practitioners and employers. This depends on clear expectations at each level, and appropriate rigour in design and delivery of courses, rigorous

recruitment procedures for trainers, a high quality of assessment and excellent quality assurance processes.

21. Specific issues for the review:

- What minimum requirements will ensure that new entrants, especially to level 2 courses, are suitable for a career in early years and childcare and are able to work effectively with children and families post qualifying?
- What expertise and qualifications should we expect trainers to have? And how can we ensure that those levels are implemented across the wide variety of settings in which training takes place?
- How confident can we be about the quality and consistency of assessment of learners and how can we support awarding bodies to implement a rigorous quality assurance regime in the future².
- What expectations should there be on the appropriate time taken to achieve qualifications?
- What role is there for Government funding agencies in helping to ensure standards, and that public money is well spent?

22. Out of scope

- This review is not remitted to look at staff:child ratios. However, some view may be developed as to the implications of higher or lower levels of staff qualifications according to the evidence available.

Raising the status of the profession through qualifications

23. We want a profession that attracts in the most able and talented people to be practitioners and leaders in the workforce, as well as retaining the best of the current workforce. This means that qualifications and progression routes must be strong and clearly understood by all, including those outside the sector. If we can ensure that education and childcare is seen as an attractive long-term career, investment in training will deliver long term gains.

24. Specific issues for the Review:

- The evolving status of Early Years Professionals (EYPs). The first survey of practitioners that have achieved EYP status showed 76 per cent felt obtaining EYP status had improved their sense of professional status. Yet many respondents felt that those outside their settings (including other professionals) had little understanding of EYP status. How can we address this, ensuring that newer qualifications are well understood by all?
- Currently there is inconsistency in the type of language we use to describe those who work in early education and childcare. The terms nursery

² CACHE; City & Guilds; Edexcel; NCFE; OCR; EDI; ABC Awards

nurse, early years worker, professional, practitioner and pedagogue have all be used variously. How might we use language to raise the status of careers in the sector?