

Speech

Sam Gyimah: vision for early years workforce and Millie's Mark

From: [Department for Education](#) and [Sam Gyimah MP](#)
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Childcare and Education Minister speaks to the NDNA conference and introduces Millie's Mark, a voluntary safety standard for nurseries.



Thank you for that kind introduction. It's a pleasure to be here today (4 July 2016) at the NDNA 2016 conference.

Just over a year ago the government introduced legislation to extend free childcare for working parents and during that time I think we have made clear our commitment to the early years and giving children the best start in life.

In September the early implementers will mean that working parents of 3- and 4-year-olds in some areas of the country will be able to use [30 hours of free childcare](#), with the national roll-

out following a year later in 2017. At the heart of 30 hours - as with the existing entitlements - is high-quality provision, because quality of provision delivers the best outcomes for children - helping to prepare them for school and improving their future life chances.

In terms of quality, the workforce is the sector's biggest asset. Having the right people with the right skills and being able to deploy them in the best ways makes a big difference to outcomes. As Andreas Schleicher of the OECD has said, "staff qualifications are one of the strongest predictors of the quality of early childhood education and care."

In November last year I set out my wider vision for the early years workforce. I want young people to consider the early years as a career of choice and a sector in which they can pursue long-term ambitions. I want those already working in the sector to have the opportunity to enhance their skills and to pursue the qualifications that enable them to progress and develop.

Today I want to say more about this workforce strategy and my vision for it. I want the strategy to support development of a well-qualified workforce with the right knowledge and skills to deliver high-quality early education and childcare for all children aged 0 to 5. I also want the strategy to support the supply of a sufficient workforce to deliver free entitlements by removing barriers to attracting, retaining and developing staff. Today I will outline the approach and initial thinking that is informing the strategy's development, ahead of launching it later this year.

But I'd like to start with a reminder of how much there is to celebrate already among the dedicated early years workforce:

- between 2008 and 2013 the proportion of staff in full day care with at least a level 3 qualification increased from 75 to 87% and we are making incremental steps to increasing the graduate workforce
- the quality of the workforce is a key factor in delivering good-quality provision and so it is unsurprising that as the qualification levels of staff have risen, so too has the quality of provision; statistics released this week show 86% were

judged good or outstanding

- and most importantly the benefits of better-quality provision have impacted on children; EYFS profile results showed 66.3% of children achieved a good level of development compared with 60.4% in 2014

This provides us with a solid foundation on which to build and make more progress.

My starting point for developing the workforce strategy has been to make sure that I understand the challenges facing the early years workforce. To inform this I have spent the last few months listening to feedback from stakeholders. And then I have begun to consider what government's role might be in helping to address those challenges.

As you all know, beyond the minimum requirements set out in the [Early years foundation stage framework](#), employers are free to staff their settings as they wish. Providers rightly adopt a staffing model which suits the needs the children and parents they serve and which fits their business model. Employers are responsible for attracting and recruiting staff, making sure they have the appropriate qualifications to count in ratios, setting rates of pay and supporting staff development.

So what then is the role of government?

I believe government has a role in supporting the development of a well-qualified workforce with the right knowledge and skills to deliver quality early education and care to young children and to support the delivery of the free entitlements - especially because with the 30 hours offer, government will be an even bigger buyer of childcare than before. I have emphasised how important it is for government to set quality standards and I have committed publicly to making sure that the current ratios and qualification requirements for staff will remain.

But government also has a responsibility to make sure that national policy does not present barriers to developing the capacity of the workforce to deliver high-quality childcare - I want the sector to thrive.

I am therefore committed to making sure that the workforce strategy actively removes or reduces barriers to attracting, retaining and promoting staff and to showcasing the sector as a great place to work, with clear progression routes for those considering a career in the early years. As part of this, I believe it is our responsibility to make sure that whatever staffing model providers choose to adopt, they have the confidence that potential employees who have undertaken early years specific training regulated by government have the knowledge and skills they need to do a good job and deliver quality childcare and early education.

I believe that government also has a role, alongside employers, in developing clear progression routes for early years staff and supporting childcare providers to establish the best structures and approaches to sharing learning and accessing good-quality CPD.

As I said earlier, I have been listening. And over the past few months I have heard some clear messages coming from a range of stakeholders, including the NDNA who have been vocal on a number of issues on your behalf.

We all know that people's career choices can be made early in their lives and many of you have told me that you do not think that careers advice about roles in the early years sector is attracting sufficient or appropriate people into the early years. I want to tackle this and will be setting out a plan of action through the strategy. I also want to consider how we reach out to those who have worked in the sector before to encourage them to return and to those who are considering a career change and want to enter a rewarding role that makes a real difference to society.

The most common issue that people have raised with me in terms of attracting staff has been the recruitment of staff at level 2 and 3 since the introduction of the GCSE requirement for level 3 staff in September 2014. I have heard from employers that they feel the requirement is reducing the pool of new staff coming into the sector. But there are also those who support the requirement and say that other factors such as an improving

economy are impacting on recruitment to a greater extent. And others have said that the decision to enable trainees to take GCSE English and maths alongside their EYE training is helping more and more staff to access level 3 whilst also providing valuable transferable knowledge, skills and qualifications for individuals.

I have heard the concerns from significant parts of the sector for swift action to remove the GCSE requirement and I want to ensure you that I will be revisiting the options on how to make sure the sector has both the right number of staff and the right quality of staff to deliver 30 hours alongside the workforce strategy.

As part of that I think it's important to consider the fundamental principles behind numeracy and literacy qualification requirements for members of staff and how best to make sure staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need to deliver high-quality early years education and care.

In government we are increasingly taking an employer-led approach to the development of qualifications - across all occupations. The work of apprenticeship trailblazer groups reflects this and the forthcoming publication of the Sainsbury review into technical education will also support this employer-led approach.

The early years educator was the result of extensive sector consultation on the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct a level 3 role and has been welcomed by employers. I want to continue this joint approach and am considering how the workforce strategy can complement the wider government focus on employer led qualifications development.

Part of government's drive on quality has been to supply the sector with a pool of specialist early years graduates through the EYP and EYT training programmes.

Graduate places are fully funded by government, course fees are paid and there are incentives available for eligible learners through bursary payments. We want to continue to support the

sector to access graduates through the early years initial teacher training programme in 2017 to 2018.

Government also offers funding to support employers to release staff undertaking employment-based early years teacher training and I encourage employers here today to consider that scheme.

The schools white paper includes proposals for the reform of QTS and this provides exciting avenues for us to explore and we will do so. But we must also not lose sight of the fact that the majority of early years teachers work in the PVI sector where QTS is not required, but where specialist graduates can support improved quality.

As I said earlier it is not government's job to tell settings how to manage their workforce and as you know there is no requirement in the EYFS for settings to employ a graduate, but I would like to encourage employers to consider government's offer to support employment-based initial teacher training.

Employment-based routes provide an opportunity for those already working in the sector to progress. I understand however that the lack of a clear progression route from level 3 to level 6 may be standing in the way of some staff moving on, and this is something we will consider further.

Overall I want the strategy to encourage people to join the sector because it offers the opportunity to improve the life chances of children at the earliest and most important stage of their lives and because there is potential to learn and progress on a professional basis. As I have said before, my vision is that the sector is recognised as a place where people can work their way up to become an early years educator, an early years teacher, a centre manager, a manager of a chain, or perhaps an entrepreneur establishing their own childcare business.

Career progression is not just about qualifications, it is also about having access to professional development that supports staff to improve their practice, acquire specialist knowledge and skills, and become system leaders. I believe that government has a role in facilitating that development by helping to establish the

infrastructure and supporting the partnerships through which settings can share good practice and access informal CPD that supports improved quality.

We have provided funding to support partnerships between teaching schools and PVI's to improve children's readiness for school by improving the skills of the workforce. There have been great results from supporting staff development across special educational needs and disability; literacy, speech and language and communication, and improving the early education of disadvantaged children.

It's really pleasing to see teaching schools building capacity in the system in this way that will help to create a successful future childcare system. I want us to consider how we can continue to support quality improvement activity through the workforce strategy, and encourage providers to focus on specific issues such as SEND where we know improvements can be made.

I hope that this focus on recruitment, retention and progression gives you a sense of what I see as the scope for the workforce strategy and I look forward to sharing more with you later in the year.

When we think about workforce quality, it's important to remember that staff have an incredibly important role in supporting learning and development and keeping children safe and well. There's nothing more important than the safety and security of children - we trust the workforce to look after their well-being.

That's why I'm pleased to announce today that the Department for Education has awarded our host this morning, NDNA, the contract to deliver a voluntary quality mark for nursery providers that have trained all of their staff in paediatric first aid.



The mark will be known as Millie's Mark, to commemorate Millie Thompson who tragically passed away at her nursery in 2012 following a choking incident. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Millie's parents, Joanne and Dan, who have campaigned tirelessly in their daughter's memory to reduce the chances of such tragic accidents happening in future. I know that Joanne is looking forward to talking to you more about this later today.

Nurseries will be able to apply for the mark later on this summer and the mark will help to provide parents with the assurance that their child is being cared for by safe and knowledgeable staff. It is hoped that, over time, this initiative will help ensure that as many staff members as possible are trained in these important, life-saving skills.

I am very much looking forward to continuing to work with NDNA and Dan and Joanne, and to seeing the nurseries that go over and above the existing statutory requirements recognised for their efforts to ensure that their staff have the right skills and to keep children safe.

And I am pleased that today I can go further than this as we publish our [response to the consultation on paediatric first aid](#).

Our proposals received a warm welcome from the sector. And, from this September, all newly qualified level 2 and level 3 staff

must also have first aid training to count in the ratios. This will mean an extra 15,000 staff a year coming into the sector with first aid training, providing vital reassurance to parents that their children will be well cared for.

The government is prioritising the early years because we know how important they are for children's development and future life chances. I look forward to continuing to work together with all of you in the sector as we develop our workforce strategy and meet the wider aim of giving children the best start in life.

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