

Research Briefing

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# Childcare workforce in England



## Summary

- 1 Characteristics of the childcare workforce
- 2 Qualifications and staff-to-child ratios
- 3 Recruitment and retention issues
- 4 Recommendations for change
- 5 Government policy for the childcare workforce

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## Summary

In this briefing, the ‘childcare workforce’ includes people working with children from infancy up until they start school (around age five) for early years providers and childminders registered with Ofsted or childminder agencies. Currently, it is [set out in legislation that childminding means](#) providing childcare for a reward, and at least half of the provision is on domestic premises (rather than a nursery, for example). This briefing discusses the childcare workforce in England.

In the Spring Budget 2023, the then Conservative [government announced it would be expanding entitlement to free childcare](#), which would support “hundreds of thousands more working parents”. Before it won the 2024 general election, [Labour said it would back the expansion](#). In April 2024, the [Department for Education has estimated there will need to be an extra 40,000 workers](#) (PDF) in childcare by September 2025 to support the entitlement roll-out. This is an 11.5% increase on the number of paid childcare staff in 2023.

In a 2024 report, the [National Audit Office said this increase was “ambitious given the workforce only increased by 5% between 2018 and 2023”](#). In its [2024 childcare survey, the charity Coram](#) found the “vast majority (87%)” of local authorities said the childcare workforce was a barrier to expanding free childcare. In response to the survey, local authorities also said the whole childcare sector is facing difficulty in attracting and retaining high-quality staff.

## Who works in childcare?

The [Department for Education publishes statistics on the childcare workforce](#). In 2023, there were 259,300 staff in group-based provision (such as nurseries) and 55,800 staff in school-based provision (such as nursery classes in primary schools). There were also 32,200 childminders and childminding assistants registered with Ofsted. Childminders registered with a childminder agency are not included in the DfE survey.

In 2023 most of the early years workforce was female: 98% of staff at schools and group-based providers were female, and 97% of childminders. Most of the workforce was from the White British ethnic group: 83% of staff at school-based providers were White British, 81% of staff at all group-based providers and 82% of childminders.

## What qualifications are needed?

A person does not need to have certain qualifications to work in childcare. However, there are rules around the qualifications people need to have to count towards the ‘childcare ratios’ (the minimum number of qualified staff to the number of children of different ages).

Within each childcare ratio, at least one member of staff must have an approved level 3 qualification (Early Years Educator), and at least half of all other staff must have an approved level 2 qualification (Early Years Practitioner).

Similarly, childminders do not need prior qualifications or experience before starting the role. However, there are regulations which provide for child to staff ratios. The [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#) sets out the standards that all early years providers and registered childminders in England must follow.

## What are the workforce issues?

In July 2023, the Education Committee published its [report into support for childcare and the early years](#). In the report, it identified several problems facing the early years workforce such as:

- difficulty recruiting qualified staff
- a lack of professional development
- low pay
- long hours
- low status

## What are the recommendations for change?

The [National Audit Office, which looked at the childcare market and Department for Education’s preparation for the expansion](#), recommended in 2024 that the government make better use of statistics to assess how initiatives were affecting the workforce.

The [Education Committee also made a range of recommendations](#) to the government in 2023. To help recruitment and retention, the committee’s recommendations included:

- working with local authorities to reduce the cost of training, and rewarding development and promotions with better pay
- widening qualifications available for primary school teachers to include the early years workforce.

Other organisations have also recommended improving pay and having more focus on practitioner’s training opportunities. The Local Government Association highlighted that [in 2022 Ireland had legislated for minimum rates of pay](#) for roles in the childcare sector.

## Government policy

At the 2024 Spring Budget, the government confirmed it would increase the hourly funding rates to local authorities to pay childcare providers for the “free hours” entitlement. The then education minister [David Johnston said the additional funding should “give providers a greater opportunity to increase staff pay.”](#) The government has also announced targeted initiatives to help with the funded expansion roll-out and increase the number of childcare workers:

- [A recruitment campaign](#) alongside a trial of a £1,000 sign-on bonus for early years staff. This is alongside [a grant available for childminders joining the profession](#) announced in November 2023.
- Consulting on an “experience-based route” into childcare and removing the requirement for staff with a level 3 qualification to hold a level 2 maths qualification.

In 2023, to try and reduce the costs for providers and parents, the government changed the childcare ratio for two-year-olds in early years settings from 1:4 (one member of staff for every four children) to 1:5. The government also made legislative changes so childminders can work more flexibly within the ratios and provide more childcare in non-domestic settings.

In July 2024, [Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson said early years was her “number one priority”](#) adding the new Labour government planned on recruiting staff through a “re-energised” campaign.

## Further reading

There are separate Library briefings which provide further information on government policy in the childcare sector:

- [Paying for childcare in England](#)
- [Funding of childcare providers in England](#)

## 1

# Characteristics of the childcare workforce

For the purposes of this briefing, the childcare workforce in England is made up of people who work directly with children in an early years setting from infancy up until they start school (around age five). This includes those working for group-based and school-based providers, as well as childminders registered with Ofsted and childminder agencies (CMAs).

The briefing does not include workers offering informal childcare or nannies.

## 1 How are childminders different to other early years providers?

Early years provision is defined in [section 96 of the the Childcare Act 2006](#), which sets out when care is “early years childminding”.

Under section 96(4), early years childminding means “early years provision... for reward where at least half of the provision is on domestic premises”. Part 3 states early years childminders are required to be registered.<sup>1</sup>

Section 96(5) also sets out the limit on the number of other childminders or assistants they can work with at two (three people in total).<sup>2</sup>

### Changes under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023

Under section 237 of the [Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023](#), the government has legislated to allow childminders to work with more people and spend more time caring for children on non-domestic premises.<sup>3</sup> Section 238 of the 2023 act also has changed the number of childminders or assistants a childminder can work with, from two to three (a total of four people).<sup>4</sup>

Sections 237 and 238 are currently not in force and will come into force when the Secretary of State lays the relevant regulations.

More information on this can be found in section 5.5 of this briefing.

<sup>1</sup> [Childcare Act 2006](#), Section 96(4)

<sup>2</sup> [As above](#), Section 96(5)

<sup>3</sup> [Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023](#), Section 237 and 238 and schedule 23

<sup>4</sup> [Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023](#), Section 237 and 238 and schedule 23



## 1.1 Total number working in childcare

The Department for Education (DfE) publishes annual estimates of the childcare workforce in England as part of the [childcare and early years provider survey](#). In the most recent data for 2023, the DfE has estimated there were around 347,300 paid childcare staff. This is made up of:

- 259,300 staff in group-based provision – for example, nurseries,
- 55,800 staff in school-based provision – this includes maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in primary schools, and
- 32,200 childminders and childminding assistants. This figure refers to those who are Ofsted-registered, as childminders registered with a childminder agency are not included in the survey.<sup>5</sup>

These estimates are based on the number of staff, not full-time equivalents, so do not provide the full picture of workforce capacity.

## 1.2 Changes over time

The DfE's survey data for 2023 suggests the number of paid childcare workers increased slightly in 2023, to 347,300, compared with 334,400 in 2022.

Over the longer term, the workforce structure (in terms of the type of setting staff are working in) has changed. Estimates suggest between 2018 and 2023 the number working as childminders or in voluntary group-based providers has decreased, while the private group-based provider and school nursery-based workforce has increased:

- The number of childminders has reduced by an estimated 26%, from 43,300 in 2018, to 32,200 in 2023
- The number of staff at voluntary group-based providers<sup>6</sup> has reduced by an estimated 26%, from 70,000 to 52,100
- The number of staff in private group-based childcare<sup>7</sup> has increased by an estimated 22%, from 158,800 to 194,500
- The number of staff in school nursery classes has increased by an estimated 11%, from 44,100 to 48,900.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> DfE, [Reporting year 2023, Childcare and early years provider survey](#), 14 December 2023, main text

<sup>6</sup> Voluntary organisations, including community groups, charities, churches, or religious groups.

<sup>7</sup> This includes employer-run childcare for employees.

<sup>8</sup> DfE, Reporting year 2023, [Childcare and early years provider survey](#), 14 December 2024, [custom table](#) created 24 April 2024

## 1.3

# Workforce demographics

The vast majority of the childcare workforce is female. The DfE estimates that in 2023, only around 2% of group-based and school-based childcare workers were male. For childminders, the figure was only very slightly higher, at 3%.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of major ethnic groups, the workforce is more representative of the population of England as a whole. As an example, 4% of the group-based provider workforce was Black – the same as across England as a whole (based on data from the 2021 census). 7% of workers in group-based providers were Asian (England: 10%), and 2% from “Mixed/ other” ethnic backgrounds (England: 3%).<sup>10</sup>

For school-based providers in 2023, 2% of workers were Black, 8% were Asian and 1% were mixed. For Ofsted-registered childminders, 6% were Black, 3% were Asian and 2% were mixed.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the childcare workforce were White British: this ethnic group represented 83% of staff at school-based providers, 81% of staff at all group-based providers and 82% of childminders. By comparison, in the 2021 census, 81% of people in England were reported to be White.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> DfE, Reporting year 2023, [Childcare and early years provider survey](#), 14 December 2024, main text

<sup>10</sup> [As above](#); Office for National Statistics, Census 2021, [Custom builder dataset](#), created 24 April 2024

<sup>11</sup> DfE, Reporting year 2023, [Childcare and early years provider survey](#), 14 December 2024, Section 5- Workforce: staff qualifications and characteristics

<sup>12</sup> [As above](#)

## 2 Qualifications and staff-to-child ratios

A person does not need to have certain qualifications to work in childcare. However, there are rules around the qualifications people need to have to count towards the childcare ratio.

The childcare ratio refers to the [number of qualified staff necessary in an early years setting](#) to the number of children. The ratios for England differ depending on the age of the child, and whether the care is being provided in group and school-based settings or by a childminder.

The [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#) (EYFS) sets out the standards that all early years providers in England must follow. There are different frameworks for childminders and for school and group-based providers. The EYFS explains the level of qualification and minimum number of qualified staff needed in an early years setting. Information on approved qualifications can be found in box 2 below.

### 2.1 Group and school-based settings

The ratios for group and school-based providers in England are set out in [paragraphs 3.28 to 3.46 of the group and school-based providers EYFS](#) (PDF).

Within each childcare ratio, at least one member of staff must have an approved level 3 qualification ('Early Years Educator'), and at least half of all other staff must have an approved level 2 qualification ('Early Years Practitioner'). To be included in the ratios at level 3, staff must also hold a suitable level 2 English qualification.<sup>13</sup>

Managers of childcare settings on the early years register must hold an approved qualification of level 3 (or above). In addition to this, from the start of 2024 managers must have achieved, or will achieve within two years of starting, a suitable level 2 qualification in maths.<sup>14</sup> More information on this change can be found in section 4.3 of this briefing.

<sup>13</sup> More information on the qualification levels is available from the DfE statutory guidance on [Early years qualification requirements and standards](#), 4 January 2024

<sup>14</sup> see para 1.28 of the DfE statutory guidance on [Early years qualification requirements and standards](#), 4 January 2024

There must also always be at least one person with a paediatric first aid certificate on site and available when children are present.<sup>15</sup>

## 2 What is an approved qualification?

The Department for Education (DfE) publishes [guidance on early years qualification requirements and standards](#). It explains that to have an approved qualification a person must hold a qualification the DfE recognises as “full and relevant”.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, the [DfE maintains an Early Years Qualifications List \(EYQL\)](#), which contains the recognised qualifications achieved in the United Kingdom.<sup>17</sup>

The guidance explains what is necessary for qualifications received in England after 1 September 2014<sup>18</sup> to be full and relevant.

To be counted in the ratios at level 2, a staff member must have:

- a full and relevant level 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8 qualification; or
- a qualification at level 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8 that is not full and relevant, provided that the qualification was started between 1 September 2014 and 31 August 2019, is related to early years (0 to 5 years) and is appropriate to early years practice.<sup>19</sup>

If the level 2 qualification was started from 1 September 2014 to 31 August 2019, it must be related to early years, appropriate to early years practice, approved by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) and in Ofqual’s list of regulated qualifications. If started after 31 August 2019, it must meet the Early Years Practitioner (level 2) criteria. The qualifications the DfE recognises as meeting this are in the EYQL.<sup>20</sup>

To be counted in the ratios at level 3, a staff member must have:

... a full and relevant level 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8 qualification and a suitable level 2 English qualification.<sup>21</sup>

Paragraph 1.13 of the guidance provides a list of suitable level 2 qualifications. The level 3 (and higher) qualifications must meet the Early Years Educator (level 3) criteria, and those recognised by the DfE are also in the EYQL.

<sup>15</sup> DfE, [EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers](#) (PDF), 19 January 2024, paras 3.29 to 3.46

<sup>16</sup> DfE, [Early years qualification requirements and standards](#) (PDF), 4 January 2024, p3

<sup>17</sup> As qualifications gained outside the United Kingdom are not automatically recognised by the DfE there is [separate guidance for non-UK qualifications](#)

<sup>18</sup> The EYQL contains a complete list of all pre-September 2014 qualifications that are recognised by the Department for Education as full and relevant.

<sup>19</sup> DfE, [Early years qualification requirements and standards](#) (PDF), 4 January 2024, para 1.9

<sup>20</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), paras 1.10 and 1.11

<sup>21</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 1.12

The Early Years Practitioner and the Early Years Educator criteria can be found in Annex C to E in the statutory guidance.

## Childcare ratio by age group

As set out in the table below, for children under the age of two, there must be one member of staff for every three children. In addition to the approved qualification levels, with this age group:

- the staff member with approved level 3 qualification must be “suitably experienced” in working with this age group, and
- half of all staff must have had training which addresses the care of babies.<sup>22</sup>

For two-year-olds, there must be one member of staff for every five children. For children aged three and over, there must be one member of staff for every 13 children if there is a teacher or another person with an approved level 6 qualification present. If they are not, there must be one member of staff for every eight children.<sup>23</sup>

### National mandatory minimum staff: child ratios England

Age of child	Number of qualified staff (other than childminders)
Under 2	1:3
2	1:5
3+	1:8 or 1:13

Notes: Ratio for children aged three and over is 1:13 if led by a teacher.

Providers must ensure staff have the "appropriate qualifications" to count in the ratios.

Source: [DfE, EYFS statutory framework for group and school-based providers](#) (PDF), 19 January 2024, paras 3.29 to 3.46

More information on the recent changes to the childcare ratios for two-year-olds can be found in section 4.3 of this briefing, or in the [Commons Library insight on the change in ratios](#).

<sup>22</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 3.40

<sup>23</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 3.41

## 2.2 Childminders

Childminders do not need prior qualifications or experience before starting the role. However, there are regulations which provide for child to staff ratios for childminders.

The ratios for childminders are set out in the [paragraphs 3.41 to 3.45 of the EYFS statutory framework for childminders](#) (PDF). It explains a childminder can care for up to six children under the age of eight. Within the eight children, up to three can be young children<sup>24</sup>, and only one child can be under the age of one.<sup>25</sup>

Exceptions to the ratios can be made in certain circumstances, such as if they are the siblings of children they already care for or the childminder's own child. However, the guidance makes it clear that in all circumstances, the total number of children under eight years old must not exceed six per adult.<sup>26</sup>

## 2.3 Data on staff qualifications

### Qualification profiles vary between different types of setting

As shown in the chart below, in 2023 most staff employed across all six of the main childcare setting types identified by the DfE had at least a level 3 relevant early years or education qualification – broadly equivalent to A level.

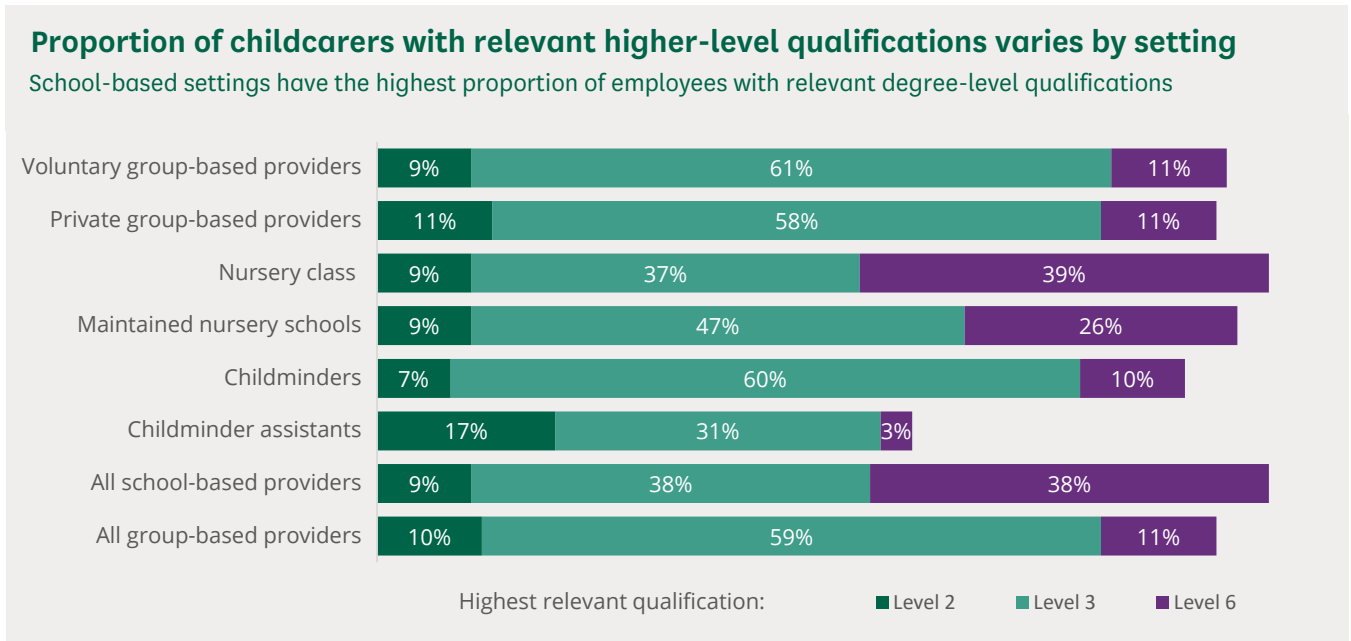
School-based settings had the highest estimates for proportions of staff with a relevant degree-level qualification, partly reflecting the different staffing models in the school-based sector, and the different staff qualification and ratio requirements for these settings.

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<sup>24</sup> The framework explains a child is a young child until 1 September following their fifth birthday

<sup>25</sup> DfE, [EYFS statutory framework for childminders](#) (PDF), 19 January 2024, paras 3.42 to 3.43

<sup>26</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 3.45



Note: Some types of settings have a higher proportion of more qualified staff, but may have fewer staff overall (for example, because ratios are higher) and the qualification profile may reflect regulatory requirements

Source: Department for Education, [Reporting year 2023. Childcare and early years provider survey](#), 14 December 2023, [custom table](#), created 24 April 2024

## 3 Recruitment and retention issues

### 3.1 Retention of childcare staff

The Department for Education's (DfE) childcare and early years provider survey found that, across all surveyed settings and types of provider, more staff were recruited than left in 2023. However, breakdowns of the working patterns of leavers, retained staff, and joiners are not published, so we cannot estimate workforce strength. As these figures relate only to surveyed providers, they may also not be representative of national trends.

The turnover rate is a measure of workforce 'churn'. In the DfE data, turnover rates are derived from dividing the number of staff leaving by the number of all paid childcare staff during the period, and expressing this as a percentage:

- In 2023, private group-based providers had the highest turnover rate at 21%, and school-based providers the lowest at 8%.
- Turnover rates have remained relatively stable compared with 2022 estimates, the exception being in the voluntary group-based setting category where the turnover rate has increased from 11% to 16%.<sup>27</sup>

#### Where are staff leaving to?

In the DfE 2023 survey data, leavers' destinations varied by type of setting. Most left for jobs at other childcare providers or school-based settings, as well as jobs outside the childcare sector.<sup>28</sup>

Of all paid childcare staff who left a provider in the year up to the survey, around 45% went to work for another childcare provider or work in a school.<sup>29</sup> Estimates for the proportions of staff leaving for different destinations are shown in the table below.

<sup>27</sup> DfE, [Reporting year 2023, Childcare and early years provider survey](#), 14 December 2023, [custom table](#), created 24 April 2024

<sup>28</sup> DfE, [Reporting year 2023, Childcare and early years provider survey](#), 14 December 2023, [custom table](#), created 24 April 2024

<sup>29</sup> The DfE said fieldwork was carried out between April 2023 and July 2023; DfE, [Reporting year 2023, Childcare and early years provider survey](#), 14 December 2023



## Around half of employees who left their role went on to another childcare provider or school, but some left the sector completely

England, 2023 reporting year

	Destination				
	Work outside of childcare	Another childcare provider	School setting with children of school age	Other	Retirement
Group-based providers	38%	32%	14%	12%	4%
School-based providers (includes maintained nursery schools)	27%	29%	17%	15%	12%
Private group-based providers	40%	34%	11%	12%	3%
Voluntary group-based providers	34%	25%	21%	13%	7%

Notes: Figures are survey-based estimates

Source: Department for Education, [Reporting year 2023, Childcare and early years provider survey](#), 14 December 2024, [custom table](#) created 24 April 2024

## Childminders

In evidence to a 2023 Education Committee inquiry, Chief Executive of the charity Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY), Helen Donohoe, explained there were half the number of childminders compared with 20 years ago when there were “around 60,000”. She also said PACEY anticipated there would be “only 1,000” by 2035.<sup>30</sup>

In a [DfE survey of providers carried out in November 2023](#), 61% of the childminders who responded said they are considering leaving the profession “at some point”. 11% of those asked said they are considering leaving within the next year, and 24% said within the two to three years.<sup>31</sup>

## Workforce challenges

In July 2023, the Education Committee published its [report into support for childcare and the early years](#). In the report, it identified several problems facing the early years workforce such as:

- difficulty recruiting qualified staff
- a lack of professional development

<sup>30</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23, para 5

<sup>31</sup> DfE, [Pulse Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers](#) (PDF), 19 April 2024, p68

- low pay
- long hours
- low status.<sup>32</sup>

Concerns have been raised that high turnover rates can impact children’s care. The Education Committee, for example, found high staff turnover was “one of the most prominent issues” cited by parents in written evidence, as “children need consistency in their care”.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, in a blog by Ofsted it explained high staff turnover affects the quality of interactions between staff and those in their care, making children’s individual needs harder to recognise. It also said mismanaging of staff turnover negatively impacts learning and development, specifically for vulnerable children, or those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).<sup>34</sup>

### Vacancies

It was reported by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC, a professional body for recruitment), that the number of active job postings in January 2024 for Early Education and Childcare Practitioners was 5.5% higher in January 2023. Compared with pre-pandemic levels (February 2020), they were 146.2% higher. The REC also found the number of active postings for Early Education and Childcare Assistants was 30.2% higher in January 2024 than February 2020.<sup>35</sup>

In a DfE survey of providers carried out in November 2023, it found group-based providers were more likely than school-based providers to have vacancies. However, it did find group-based providers were receiving on average five applications per vacancy, compared with two per vacancy in November 2022. For the same period, the number of applications per vacancy for school-based providers had stayed the same (five).<sup>36</sup>

## 3.2

### Pay

The low pay of the early years workforce has been said to be a significant factor to the problems with recruitment and retention. In a report published by the Local Government Association (LGA) in 2023, it said the workforce “is

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<sup>32</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23, para 130

<sup>33</sup> Education Committee, Support for childcare and the early years, [Summary of written evidence submitted by parents CEY1716](#), 31 January 2023

<sup>34</sup> Ofsted, [Maintaining quality early years provision in the face of workforce challenges](#), 13 May 2024

<sup>35</sup> REC press release, [Labour Market Tracker: Bounce back in demand for workers in some areas – REC](#), 16 February 2024

<sup>36</sup> DfE, [Pulse Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers](#) (PDF), 19 April 2024, p9

considered to be... underpaid and undervalued”, with staff leaving to find work with higher rates of pay and less responsibility.<sup>37</sup>

## Rates of pay

A 2020 report commissioned by the Social Mobility Commission (SMC) found around 13% of the early years workforce in England is paid under £5 per hour. It also found the average wage was less than the minimum wage at £7.42 per hour. The total workforce average in 2020 was £12.57 per hour.<sup>38</sup>

Dr Sara Bonetti, the author of the SMC report, has said the low hourly rates are due to the make-up of the early years workforce, which includes apprentices, students on placement, volunteers and childminders.<sup>39</sup>

More recently, the DfE reported that in 2022 the median pay<sup>40</sup> across all childcare staff was £10.00 per hour.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, just over one fifth (21%) of childcare staff aged 23 and over were paid at or below the National Living Wage (NLW, £9.50 per hour from April 2022 – this is separate to the National Minimum Wage).<sup>42</sup>

The SMC report found those interviewed said low wages were “a major cause of instability in the [early years] sector”. Early years staff on the National Minimum Wage struggled to meet their living costs and had left the sector for other low-skilled work, such as retail or bar work, “where wages were higher”.<sup>43</sup>

The SMC also noted parents working in the early years workforce were choosing to become stay-at-home parents as they could not earn enough for their own child’s care costs.<sup>44</sup>

## State benefit support

A 2019 report by the think tank Education Policy Institute (EPI) found childcare workers are more likely to receive state benefits. In 2018, there were 44.5% of

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<sup>37</sup> LGA, [Early education and childcare: Changes and challenges for the future](#), 30 August 2023, The now: workforce

<sup>38</sup> SMC, [The stability of the early years workforce in England](#), Education Policy Institute, 5 August 2020, p28

<sup>39</sup> Sally Weale, [One in eight childcare workers in England earn less than £5 an hour](#), The Guardian, 5 August 2020; the National Minimum Wage does not apply to self-employed workers (such as some childminders), and apprentices will be paid [the Apprenticeship Minimum Wage](#)

<sup>40</sup> In its analysis, the DfE explained it has used the median rather than the mean as the measure of the “typical” childcare worker’s hourly pay as “mean staff hourly pay per hour was between 6% and 27% higher than median... across the various provider types... [suggesting] a small number of staff have much higher hourly pay than other staff”; DfE, [Providers’ finances: Evidence from the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers 2022](#) (PDF), December 2023, p38

<sup>41</sup> DfE, [Providers’ finances: Evidence from the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers 2022](#) (PDF), December 2023, p38

<sup>42</sup> For more information, see GOV.UK, [The National Minimum Wage and Living Wage](#)

<sup>43</sup> SMC, [The stability of the early years workforce in England](#), Education Policy Institute, 5 August 2020, p29

<sup>44</sup> [As above](#)

childcare workers receiving state benefits or tax credits, compared with 30% of teachers or 34% of the total female working population.<sup>45</sup>

### Comparison with primary school staff

The Education Committee's 2023 report highlighted the pay disparity between early years staff and primary school staff. It noted the salary for a qualified primary school teacher ranged from £28,000 to £43,385 whereas the salary for a nursery assistant or qualified early years teacher is £13,000 to £24,000 and £25,714 to £36,961, respectively.<sup>46</sup>

A 2020 report by the Nuffield Foundation and the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) found "inadequate pay" was causing issues for staff retention, where some viewed working in early years as a "springboard" to teach in primary education.<sup>47</sup>

### Differences in pay by provider

The SMC report found pay levels varied by provider type, with those working for public sector providers more likely to receive a higher hourly wage. Public sector employees (working for maintained<sup>48</sup> and school-based nurseries) earn on average £8.43 per hour, whereas private sector employees (working for private, voluntary or independent nurseries or childminders) earn £7.10 per hour.<sup>49</sup>

The [DfE, in its analysis of the 2022 childcare and early years provider survey](#) (PDF), found median hourly pay varied across childcare settings. In 2022, the median hourly pay ranged from £13.00 for staff in nursery class settings and £10.34 for staff in maintained nursery schools to £10.00 per hour for staff in both private and voluntary group-based settings. Childminders had the lowest median hourly pay: £7.97 per hour.

The DfE said "this is consistent with school-based providers having a more qualified workforce on average compared to the other provider types".<sup>50</sup>

### National Living Wage

The [2023 childcare and early years provider survey](#) provides data on the percentage of early years staff aged 23 and older earning below the NLW.

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<sup>45</sup> EPI, [The early years workforce in England](#), 17 January 2019, p6

<sup>46</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23, para 136

<sup>47</sup> NatCen and the Nuffield Foundation, [Understanding the Early Years Workforce](#) (PDF), 11 February 2020, p2

<sup>48</sup> Maintained nursery schools are schools run by local authorities for two, three and four-year-olds

<sup>49</sup> SMC, [The stability of the early years workforce in England](#), Education Policy Institute, 5 August 2020, p32

<sup>50</sup> DfE, [Providers' finances: Evidence from the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers 2022](#) (PDF), December 2023, p38-39

There was variation found across providers. In 2023, the percentage of staff in England paid below NLW was:

- 11% of all group-based providers (10% at private group-based providers and 15% at voluntary group-based providers), and
- 5% at school-based providers (5% at nursery class childcare settings and 3% at maintained nursery schools).<sup>51</sup>

## Childminders

A November 2023 [report by the Early Education and Childcare Coalition](#), a coalition of childcare organisations, found pay overall was low among childminders. Many had reported being dependent on a partner's wage to subsidise their income.<sup>52</sup>

The [DfE analysis of the 2022 childcare and early years provider survey](#) also found childminders were most likely to be paid at or below the NLW (75%) compared to all other childcare staff aged 23 and over (15% in 2022). However, it did point out NLW legislation does not apply to self-employed workers (like childminders). It added childminders will carry out additional tasks (such as completing paperwork) after the children have left the premises which they are not paid for.<sup>53</sup>

The SMC report noted the additional issues childminders face with pay. As childminders are usually self-employed, they do not receive sick or holiday pay, meaning if they take holiday or are unwell, they receive no income. In addition to this, childminders have also highlighted the issue of unstable income, as parents only pay for the time their child is cared for.<sup>54</sup>

In a 2023 survey by a membership organisation, Childminders UK, it found childminders in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) can miss out on payments, due to how the local authority pays for the funded childcare hours. These childminders have said that if their local authority pays for the funded hours once or twice a term rather than monthly, they do not then qualify for UC payments in the months they receive the funding.<sup>55</sup>

The Childminders UK survey found childminders were worried about their operational sustainability when the funded hours provision is expanded, partly because of the “low hourly rate that doesn't meet their usual rates” but

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<sup>51</sup> DfE, [Childcare and early years provider survey 2023](#), 14 December 2023, Percentage earning below NLW for 'Staff earning below NLW' [table tool]

<sup>52</sup> Early Education and Childcare Coalition, [Retention and Return: Delivering the expansion of early years entitlement in England](#) (PDF), 6 November 2023, p22

<sup>53</sup> DfE, [Providers' finances: Evidence from the Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers 2022](#) (PDF), December 2023, p45, table 18

<sup>54</sup> SMC, [The stability of the early years workforce in England](#), Education Policy Institute, 5 August 2020, p34

<sup>55</sup> Childminding UK, [Childminding sustainability survey report 2023/24](#) (PDF), p6 (accessed 2 April 2024)

also because the local authority does not pay more regularly.<sup>56</sup> In a DfE survey, published in April 2024, half (50%) of the surveyed childminders said their payment schedule increased the difficulty in running their business.<sup>57</sup>

The government is currently [consulting on childminder recruitment and retention](#). One of the proposals is looking at paying childminders for the entitlement funding monthly, if requested. More information on the consultation is in section 4.4 of this briefing.

### 3.3 Hours worked

People who work for early years providers also were more likely to work longer hours than “comparable occupations”.<sup>58</sup> As set out by the Social Mobility Commission (SMC) in its 2020 report, 11% of those working in childcare reported working over 42 hours per week. This is in comparison to 3% of retail workers and 6% of female workers. For the total population, 13% reported working over 42 hours per week.<sup>59</sup>

The SMC found practitioners were exhausted and had low morale because of the “long hours and inadequate working conditions”. It concluded “long working hours, especially when unpaid or underpaid, can reduce job satisfaction and lead to higher staff turnover”.<sup>60</sup>

Providers who gave evidence to the Education Committee also discussed long hours and the stress of taking time off. Childminders especially can face longer days if there is an after-hours care offering. A provider told the committee that a 14-hour day was “quite standard”.<sup>61</sup>

### 3.4 Qualifications and development

#### Career development and training

Respondents to the Education Committee inquiry and the SMC report have highlighted a lack of career development and training within the childcare sector, with the SMC linking this to workforce instability.<sup>62</sup> The Nuffield Foundation found limited career progression (alongside low pay) as the

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<sup>56</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), p5

<sup>57</sup> DfE, [Pulse Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers](#) (PDF), 19 April 2024, p13

<sup>58</sup> SMC, [The stability of the early years workforce in England](#), Education Policy Institute, 5 August 2020, p5

<sup>59</sup> SMC, [The stability of the early years workforce in England](#), Education Policy Institute, 5 August 2020

<sup>60</sup> [As above](#), p36

<sup>61</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23, para 129

<sup>62</sup> SMC, [The stability of the early years workforce in England](#), Education Policy Institute, 5 August 2020, p13

reason those working in early years would leave to teach older age groups, whilst Helen Donohoe (from PACEY) told the committee the lack of “obvious career progression” has meant less people are choosing to work in childcare.<sup>63</sup>

The Sutton Trust charity has said for early years staff with advanced qualifications there is no clear progression path. It added that:

The current EYE [early years educator] and EYT [early years teacher] qualifications are not recognised as carrying with them the expected enhanced pay, status and conditions of employment, which means these routes have had limited attractiveness to potential candidates and so limited impact on the quality of leadership in the sector.<sup>64</sup>

Those responding to the committee’s inquiry said the main reason behind the lack of training and development was time and cost barriers. Providers said they were only able to spare staff to attend mandatory training, or the cost of the training meant only a small number of staff could attend.<sup>65</sup> The Education Committee said it heard evidence that most training is offered in work hours. This meant the training is less accessible for those who are working longer hours and cannot get the time off work (rather than being able to attend before or after work).<sup>66</sup>

It was also noted by the SMC that both the type of training and the recognition for that training (pay increases or career progression) was related to the retention issues within the childcare sector. Some staff have said they do not learn new information from mandatory training, while some refuse to take part in training without compensation.<sup>67</sup>

The SMC added that in one study, workers disliked the way training for qualifications was given (written assignments and observations), saying this should be outweighed by “practical experience with children”.<sup>68</sup> The report by the LGA had also found some local authority leads also said “not enough focus is placed on empathy or skills in working with children”.<sup>69</sup>

## Childminders

The barriers to continuous professional development regarding budget and time restrictions were faced “especially among childminders” the SMC report

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<sup>63</sup> NatCen and the Nuffield Foundation, [Understanding the Early Years Workforce](#) (PDF), 11 February 2020, p18; Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23, para 126

<sup>64</sup> Sutton Trust, [Early Years Workforce Review](#) (PDF), 25 August 2020, p7

<sup>65</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23, paras 147 to 148

<sup>66</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 147

<sup>67</sup> SMC, [The stability of the early years workforce in England](#), Education Policy Institute, 5 August 2020, p23

<sup>68</sup> [As above](#)

<sup>69</sup> LGA, [Early education and childcare: Changes and challenges for the future](#), 30 August 2023, The now: workforce

found.<sup>70</sup> In a DfE survey, published in April 2024, 27% of childminders said they would find it useful to have opportunities for formal learning and development sessions with other childminders.<sup>71</sup>

## Qualifications

The Education Committee found qualifications “are indicators of workforce professional development opportunities” and cited a report from the think tank Education Policy Institute (EPI) which said qualification levels are falling. The EPI had found “the proportion of childcare workers studying towards a higher qualification has fallen from 22.7% in 2008 to 14.9% in 2018”.<sup>72</sup>

A particular theme found in the Education Committee’s report was unequal treatment of qualifications for a childcare worker and primary school teacher. In terms of the differences:

- To work in an early years setting or nursery, a person will need to have early years teacher status (EYTS).
- To teach in a primary school a person will need to achieve qualified teacher status.

In response to the committee’s inquiry, practitioners highlighted the difference between qualifications for early years staff and teachers. Practitioners said early years initial teacher training (EYITT, which leads to EYTS) is seen as “less desirable” than qualified teacher status, “despite having the same entry requirements”.<sup>73</sup>

Respondents also said those with qualified teacher status are able to teach in an early years setting but those with EYTS are not able to teach in primary schools, which was seen as “restricting people and limiting opportunity”.<sup>74</sup> The committee noted the 2020 ‘Early Years Workforce Review’ by the Sutton Trust which said the EYTS and qualified teacher status are not seen as equal because of the “differentials in pay, career progression and professional status”.<sup>75</sup>

## Value of the childcare role

In the Education Committee’s report, early years practitioners said they felt the government does not “sufficiently [value]” early years and childcare and it

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<sup>70</sup> SMC, [The stability of the early years workforce in England](#), Education Policy Institute, 5 August 2020, p13

<sup>71</sup> DfE, [Pulse Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers](#) (PDF), 19 April 2024, p67

<sup>72</sup> Education Policy Institute, [The early years workforce in England](#), January 2019, p6; House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23, para 143

<sup>73</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23, para 144

<sup>74</sup> [As above](#) (PDF)

<sup>75</sup> Sutton Trust, [Early Years Workforce Review](#) (PDF), 25 August 2020, p6



is perceived as a low-status profession.<sup>76</sup> Stakeholders and nurseries have said early years staff do not receive the recognition for their qualifications and achievements.<sup>77</sup>

The SMC found there is an impression the early years profession is “unattractive, low-skilled [and has] low-pay” which is related to workforce instability. Those working in early years said this perception has meant there is a greater responsibility than expected which in turn increases the risk of staff leaving.<sup>78</sup>

The Education Committee’s report found for many early years staff feeling undervalued was exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic. They felt they were not recognised for their work when early years settings remained open for key worker’s children, unlike the recognition given to other key workers, such as teachers.<sup>79</sup> A 2021 survey by the Early Years Alliance (a membership organisation for early years providers) found of the respondents already considering leaving, 66% said the pandemic made this more likely.<sup>80</sup>

## 3.5 Future workforce demand

### Expansion of free childcare hours

As part of the Spring Budget 2023, the government announced it would be expanding the entitlement to free childcare, which would support “hundreds of thousands more working parents”.<sup>81</sup>

The expansion will mean by September 2025, all eligible children over nine months will be able to access 1,140 hours of funded childcare hours in England which was previously only available for some three and four-year-olds. This is commonly taken as 30 hours a week for 38 weeks a year but can be stretched over more than 38 weeks.<sup>82</sup> The eligibility criteria for the expansion will match the existing ‘30 hours entitlement’ for three and four-year-olds (see box 3 below).

The expansion is being rolled out in stages:

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<sup>76</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23, para 131

<sup>77</sup> For example PACEY and the Sanbrook Community Playgroup; [As above](#) (PDF), para 133

<sup>78</sup> SMC, [The stability of the early years workforce in England](#), Education Policy Institute, 5 August 2020, p14

<sup>79</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23, para 134

<sup>80</sup> Early Years Alliance, [Breaking point: The impact of recruitment and retention challenges on the early years sector in England](#) (PDF), December 2021, p5

<sup>81</sup> DfE, [Budget 2023: Everything you need to know about childcare support](#), GOV.UK, 16 March 2023

<sup>82</sup> For their child to be eligible for the extended entitlement, a person (and their partner if they have one) must usually be in “qualifying paid work.” Further information, including on the application process, is available on [Gov.uk at: 30 hours free childcare](#).

- From April 2024, eligible two-year-olds have been able to access 570 hours of childcare (equivalent to 15 hours a week over 38 weeks). Families could apply for this offer from 2 January 2024.<sup>83</sup>
- From September 2024, the 15 hours was extended to eligible families of children aged nine months to two years. Families could apply for this offer from 12 May 2024.<sup>84</sup>
- From September 2025, all eligible families with children aged nine months to three years will be able to access 30 hours a week.<sup>85</sup>

The [Library briefing on paying for childcare in England](#) provides information on the existing entitlements, as well as the expansion of the funded childcare hours.<sup>86</sup>

### 3 Which working families are eligible?

To be eligible for the childcare entitlements for working families (both the 30 hours for three and four-year-olds and the new entitlement for younger children), a person, and their partner if they have one, must usually be in “qualifying paid work.” This means they must expect to earn the equivalent of at least 16 hours a week at the applicable [National Living Wage or National Minimum Wage rate](#).

If a person is employed, they are not required to meet this requirement during any period in which they are in receipt of benefits in connection with sickness or parenting (such as maternity leave, maternity pay, maternity allowance, or statutory sick pay, among others).<sup>87</sup>

A couple can also be eligible if one of them is paid or entitled to specific benefits related to caring, incapacity for work or limited capability for work, and their partner is in “qualifying paid work.” The partner is not classed as in “qualifying paid work” if they are in receipt of, or entitled to, the specified benefits related to caring, incapacity for work or limited capability for work.

If a person, and/or their partner, has an expected adjusted net income of over £100,000 a year, they are not eligible.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> DfE, [When can I apply for 15 hours free childcare?](#), GOV.UK, 30 November 2023

<sup>84</sup> DfE press release, [Childcare applications for parents of 9-month-olds to open 12 May](#), 15 March 2024

<sup>85</sup> Childcare choices, [Upcoming changes to childcare support](#), HM Government (accessed 28 February 2024)

<sup>86</sup> Commons Library research briefing CBP-8054, [Help with childcare costs in England](#)

<sup>87</sup> [The Childcare \(Free of Charge for Working Parents\) \(England\) Regulations 2022](#) (SI 2022/1134), Regulations 16 and 17.

<sup>88</sup> “Adjusted net income” is gross income less certain pension contributions and other factors. For more information, see the GOV.UK webpage [Personal Allowances: adjusted net income](#). This earnings threshold is applied to each parent’s income separately.

In April 2024, the Labour party committed to back the childcare expansion plan if it won the next general election.<sup>89</sup> After winning the election, held on 4 July 2024, the new Labour government said it planned to recruit more staff through a “re-energised” campaign.<sup>90</sup> More information can be found in section 5.6 of this briefing.

### Impact on the workforce

The childcare expansion has highlighted an increased need for more childcare staff. The DfE has estimated there will need to be an extra 40,000 workers in childcare by September 2025 to support the roll-out. This represents an 11.5% increase on the number of paid childcare staff in 2023. The DfE has estimated there was a 4% increase in paid childcare staff between 2022 and 2023.<sup>91</sup>

A [2024 childcare survey by the charity Coram](#) found the “vast majority (87%)” of local authorities said the childcare workforce was a barrier to delivering the expansion of funded childcare. Local authorities also said the whole childcare sector is facing difficulty in attracting and retaining high-quality staff.<sup>92</sup>

Neil Leitch, the chief executive of the Early Years Alliance which represents early years organisations, has said many settings will not have the staff for the additional childcare places:

With the early years sector facing its worst recruitment and retention crisis in recent memory, many settings simply won't have the staff needed to deliver places to additional children – and unless funding increases to a level that allows providers to pay early years professionals a decent wage, this is unlikely to change any time soon.<sup>93</sup>

In response to a parliamentary question on the availability of high-quality childcare, the government said changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework would introduce “flexibilities” (see section 4.3, below). It also highlighted a new campaign, announced in February 2024, to support recruitment and retention of childcare staff. Information on this can be found in section 4 of this briefing.

The government has also said the phased roll-out of the funded hours is to allow the market to “develop the necessary capacity” and that the DfE’s Childcare and Early Years Provider Survey shows both the number of places available, and workforce have increased since 2022.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> “[Labour commits to full Tory childcare expansion plan](#)”, BBC, 3 April 2024

<sup>90</sup> “[Education Secretary says early years is her ‘number one priority’](#)”, Independent, 10 July 2024 (accessed 12 September 2024)

<sup>91</sup> DfE, [Spring Budget 2023 Childcare Expansion](#) (PDF), 19 April 2024, p12-13

<sup>92</sup> Coram Family and Childcare, [Childcare Survey 2024](#) (PDF), 19 March 2024, p45

<sup>93</sup> Early Years Alliance, [Parents set for disappointment as applications for new early entitlement offer open. Alliance warns](#), 2 January 2024

<sup>94</sup> PQ 18583 [[on Childcare](#)], 21 March 2024

## 4 Recommendations for change

Bodies within the childcare sector and Parliament have called for the government to make changes to better support childcare workers. This includes a better pay, increased access to high-quality training and more opportunities to progress in their career.

### 4.1 National Audit Office

In April 2024, the [National Audit Office \(NAO\) published a report on the preparations to extend early years entitlements](#) for working parents in England. The report looked at the early years market and government-funded entitlements, the preparations made by the Department for Education (DfE) for the expansion, and future risks for the DfE to achieve value for money.<sup>95</sup>

In November 2023, the DfE, local authorities and those within the sector told the NAO that the largest barrier to the roll-out was not having enough staff. The NAO had also highlighted that some early years providers were capping places as they did not have enough qualified staff to meet demand. It said despite the workforce increasing by 5% in the five years to 2023, there are “significant local variations” and that childminder numbers have fallen by 35% for the same period.<sup>96</sup>

The report highlighted the DfE’s estimation that the sector would need an additional 40,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff by September 2025. This is a 12% increase in just over two years, which the NAO has said is “ambitious” given the increase from 2018 to 2023.<sup>97</sup>

The report also noted the “ambitious workforce growth strategy” to increase the number and quality of the workforce and help retention.<sup>98</sup> These measures, such as financial incentives and launching an experience-based route into childcare, are covered in section 5 of this briefing. The NAO has said the lack of timely data on workforce changes collected by the DfE means it will not be possible to see what the impact of the interventions are at each stage of the funded hours roll-out.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>95</sup> NAO, [Preparations to extend early years entitlements for working parents in England](#), 24 April 2024

<sup>96</sup> NAO, [Preparations to extend early years entitlements for working parents in England](#) (PDF), HC701 2023-24, 24 April 2024, para 3.12

<sup>97</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), summary para 13

<sup>98</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 3.14

<sup>99</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 3.15

In its report, the NAO recommended the DfE should make better use of data to see the impact of workforce changes on future performance and costs. It also recommended the DfE “should then set out contingency arrangements for plausible scenarios with clear criteria for activating these plans”.<sup>100</sup>

## 4.2 Education Committee

In July 2023, the Education Committee published its [report into support for childcare and the early years](#). In its report the committee welcomed the announcements made on additional funding and extending the subsidised hours. However, it also made some recommendations for the government, some of which related to the early years workforce.

The [government responded to the Education Committee’s report](#) in October 2023.

### Training and development

Primarily, the committee recommended that career development for early years practitioners be made “an urgent priority” for recruitment and retention.<sup>101</sup>

To address the issues with funding for training and development, the committee suggested local authorities should find a way to provide free or heavily reduced mandatory training. In addition, some of these should be more flexible in the time they are delivered (such as evenings).<sup>102</sup>

Linked to this, to address the issues with low pay, the committee recommended that development and promotion opportunities are matched with higher pay.<sup>103</sup>

### Government response

The government said the DfE offers various opportunities for practitioners’ career advancement. This includes formal training and ongoing continuing professional development. It cited improvements to level 3 qualification criteria as well as various initiatives which aim to support practitioners.<sup>104</sup>

It also said it was taking measures to ensure the sector is prepared for the new entitlements, such as consultations on the framework and a recruitment

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<sup>100</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), Recommendations para 22b

<sup>101</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23, para 152

<sup>102</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 153

<sup>103</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 155

<sup>104</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years: Government response to the Committee’s Fifth Report](#) (PDF), 17 October 2023, HC 1902 2022-23, paras 95-98

campaign.<sup>105</sup> More information on these can be found in section 5 of this briefing.

The government committed to engaging with local authorities on the cost and availability of safeguarding and welfare training. However, it also said that, as set out by EYFS guidance, providers are responsible for finding a “competent training provider” for the training required.<sup>106</sup>

In terms of increasing pay for early years staff, the government said it has “no plans to set rates of pay for staff working in early years settings”.<sup>107</sup>

## Qualifications

In the short term, to stop further decline of qualification levels, the committee recommended the government review the requirement that staff need level 2 English and maths to count within the ratios.<sup>108</sup>

It also recommended an equivalent to the Graduate Leader’s Fund<sup>109</sup>, which gave providers funding to employ graduates or early years professionals, be reintroduced under a broader name to accommodate more early years qualifications.<sup>110</sup>

The committee recommended that the government’s recent changes to the childcare ratios (see section 5.3 of this briefing) should be “closely monitored and reversed if quality and education outcomes are seen to suffer”. It added that there should be a strong focus to develop qualifications to the same level as “comparable countries” where similar ratios are in operation.<sup>111</sup>

## Government response

In response to the recommendation on level 2 English and maths qualifications, the government said it had consulted on removing the maths requirement for early years practitioners.<sup>112</sup> The government has since removed the requirement for these staff to hold a level 2 maths qualification to count within the level 3 staff to child ratios. For more information see section 5.3 of this briefing.

The government said it is continuing to prioritise “supporting the early years workforce”. It added that although the Graduate Leader Fund is no longer in operation, it “[remains] committed to ensuring there are routes to graduate

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<sup>105</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), paras 99-100

<sup>106</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 102

<sup>107</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 116

<sup>108</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23, para 124

<sup>109</sup> The Graduate Leaders Fund was worth £305 million over the period 2008 to 2011

<sup>110</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23,

<sup>111</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 123

<sup>112</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years: Government response to the Committee’s Fifth Report](#) (PDF), 17 October 2023, HC 1902 2022-23, para 87

level qualifications in the early years sector alongside wider professional development activity”.<sup>113</sup>

In terms of the ratios, the government said the DfE will continue to monitor the skills and knowledge in the workforce. It did also say the change in ratio for two-year-olds will give managers more flexibility, adding settings are not obliged to operate at the minimum ratios.<sup>114</sup>

The government also highlighted new level 3 Early Years Educator criteria it had published in April 2024, which comes into effect in September 2024. It explained impact of the criteria:

The new criteria will improve the quality of level 3 qualifications and mean that new level 3 practitioners are ready to support the education of our youngest children from their first day on the job. It will also ensure better alignment with the Level 2 Early Years Practitioner criteria so there is natural progression up to level 3.<sup>115</sup>

This is alongside “a wider Government funded package of training, qualifications, expert guidance, and targeted support” for early years staff.<sup>116</sup>

## Making the early years a valued profession

The committee recommended the government develop a “comprehensive Early Years Strategy with a strong focus on workforce development”. As part of this, it was recommended the Early Career Framework (which helps early career teachers) should be expanded to include the early years workforce.<sup>117</sup>

Additionally, National Professional Qualifications (NPQs), a type of development course for teachers and leaders, should be promoted more to increase uptake in the sector.<sup>118</sup>

To ensure voices in the early years sector are “heard in the years to come” the committee also said the government should work on its “outreach and communication channels”.<sup>119</sup>

## Government response

In its response, the government acknowledged that recruiting and retaining qualified staff is a key issue. It said it would plan to develop new accelerated apprenticeship and degree apprenticeship routes to make the sector more accessible. Alongside this, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Careers and Enterprise Company (a careers guidance service) are

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<sup>113</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 89

<sup>114</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), paras 81-84

<sup>115</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 85

<sup>116</sup> [As above](#) (PDF)

<sup>117</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years](#) (PDF), 18 July 2023, HC 969 2022-23, para 154

<sup>118</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 154

<sup>119</sup> [As above](#) (PDF)

collaborating to promote the importance and value of the early years workforce.<sup>120</sup>

The government has also said it is developing new early years training routes and pointed to some wider routes already in operation for certain adults to gain new skills and enter the sector, such as:

- The Lifetime Skills Guarantee, where adults without a level 3 qualification can take up a free course to gain this qualification
- The Skills for Life guarantee, where adults without a GCSE in maths equivalent to grade 4 can take a free level 2 maths course.<sup>121</sup>

The government said “there are currently no plans to expand the Early Careers Framework to the early years workforce”. However, it is expanding the early years Professional Development Programme. It explained how this will help:

we are expanding the early years Professional Development Programme to support up to 10,000 additional practitioners to undertake training in the latest teaching [of] early maths, alongside communication and language and personal, social and emotional development.<sup>122</sup>

It also highlighted the new National Professional Qualification for Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL), where two cohorts began in the 2022–23 academic year. The government confirmed the qualification, which was launched in 2022, will be fully funded for the 2023–24 academic year. The government has said it will work with the sector to encourage take-up.<sup>123</sup>

## 4.3

## Public Accounts Committee

On 28 May 2024, the [Public Accounts Committee \(PAC\) published correspondence with the DfE](#) as part of its inquiry into the the childcare entitlements expansion. The committee said due to the announcement of a general election, it will not be able to publish its full report and so the correspondence will put the Committee’s conclusions and recommendations “on record”.<sup>124</sup>

PAC made six recommendations, three of which related to the early years workforce. These involved setting out contingency plans if the workforce had not increased by the required amount and developing a long-term workforce

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<sup>120</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years: Government response to the Committee’s Fifth Report](#) (PDF), 17 October 2023, HC 1902 2022–23, para 110

<sup>121</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 111

<sup>122</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 113

<sup>123</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), para 113–114

<sup>124</sup> PAC, [Correspondence from Dame Meg Hillier MP, Chair, Public Accounts Committee, to Susan Acland-Hood, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education](#) (PDF), Preparations to extend childcare entitlements for working parents in England, 28 May 2024 (letter dated 24 May 2024)



strategy. It also recommended the DfE should understand how the additional government funding was being used (see section 5.1 of this briefing), noting that it “remains to be seen... whether providers will use the opportunity to fill previous funding shortfalls, raise salaries or cover rising costs.”<sup>125</sup>

In the correspondence the committee chair, Dame Meg Hillier MP, asked for the response to be set out “in a reply to our successor Committee, within two months of the new Chair being appointed”.<sup>126</sup>

## 4.4 Other organisations

The Local Government Association (LGA) has recommended that the government develop an effective workforce plan, which focuses on recruitment, as well as ongoing career development. The LGA suggested there should be “enhanced funding” towards providers who can create training settings, allowing some providers to train staff in the workplace. Further, capacity should be available for staff to take part in training “for example, by ensuring training days are funded like schools with inset days”.

In addition to this, the LGA said the government should support a national roll-out of training to understand how to support children with special educational needs and disabilities.<sup>127</sup>

The LGA has called for a review into pay for early years workers. It highlighted a recent change made in [Ireland, which legislated for minimum rates of pay](#) for roles in the early learning and childcare sector in 2022.<sup>128</sup>

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has said the childcare sector, alongside social care, is a “cinderella sector” indicating it lacks government attention and said a comprehensive strategy is needed for the care workforce in England. The TUC has said this should involve:

- “decent pay and conditions” (including a £15 minimum hourly wage),
- skills, training and progression pathways, and
- ensuring staffing levels are based on the children’s needs, rather than “arbitrary ratios”.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>125</sup> PAC, [40,000 extra staff and 84,500 more places needed by 2025 to meet childcare entitlements in England, PAC warns](#), 28 May 2024

<sup>126</sup> PAC, [Correspondence from Dame Meg Hillier MP, Chair, Public Accounts Committee, to Susan Acland-Hood, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education](#) (PDF), Preparations to extend childcare entitlements for working parents in England, 28 May 2024 (letter dated 24 May 2024)

<sup>127</sup> LGA, [Early education and childcare: Changes and challenges for the future](#), 30 August 2023

<sup>128</sup> [As above](#); also see Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Ireland), [‘Historic’ new pay agreement to provide pay increases and wage structure for early learning and childcare workers](#), 7 September 2022

<sup>129</sup> TUC, [Every English region struggling to recruit childcare workers](#), 29 August 2023

In March 2024, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), a non-profit organisation, published [its proposals for a new social contract in the childcare system](#). To solve the problem of worker outcomes and quality, the JRF proposed a requirement to paying workers an agreed minimum wage and development plans for early years workers to increase skill and expertise.

The JRF highlighted that increasing pay would mean either additional costs to parents or increased funding from the government, citing the Early Education and Childcare Coalition report which estimated the pay reforms to cost £2.3 billion per year. As an intermediary measure, the JRF suggested increasing the lowest paid workers. However, in the long term it recommended reform across all pay bands, as just reforming the lower pay bands would not help retention of childcare workers.

## Childminders

In evidence given to the committee, the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) recommended a more localised recruitment campaign in areas where childminders are most needed. This would be instead of a “blanket PR campaign” which it said doesn’t provide childminders with support to register and through their first operational year.<sup>130</sup>

It also recommended investment into packages of support to help childminders in their first year, such as “start-up grants, support packages online and/or face to face where they can gain advice and reassurance”.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Education Committee, Support for childcare and the early years, [Written evidence submitted by PACEY CEY1273](#), 31 January 2023

<sup>131</sup> [As above](#)

## 5 Government policy for the childcare workforce

The previous Conservative government made various announcements and funding commitments to try to increase the number of staff joining and staying in the childcare sector. Since the start of the new Labour government, the Education Secretary, Bridget Phillipson said early years was her “number one priority”.<sup>132</sup>

When discussing the childcare entitlements in April 2024, then education minister David Johnston said additional funding meant the rates for all entitlements would increase in 2025/26 and 2026/27 financial years. He said the additional funding “will provide a level of certainty that we are confident will... give providers a greater opportunity to increase staff pay.”<sup>133</sup>

The minister highlighted the recruitment campaign for additional childcare staff announced at the start of 2024, and the changes made to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework “to give providers greater flexibilities to attract and retain staff”. Additionally, he drew attention to the consultation on a new “experience-based route” for childcare staff to work in the sector.<sup>134</sup>

In terms of childminders, the minister said the government was trying to encourage more into the sector with a grant scheme. He also mentioned consultations taking place to make “[childminder’s] lives easier and more flexible”.<sup>135</sup>

In the statement, David Johnston also noted that last year (2023), the number of staff had increased by 13,000 before the steps taken by the government to increase sector capacity.<sup>136</sup>

### 5.1 Additional funding

In response to a parliamentary question on the expansion of the early years provision, the government highlighted the additional £400 million of funding for the entitlements in 2024/25. It explained the £400 million includes:

<sup>132</sup> [“Education Secretary says early years is her ‘number one priority’”](#), Independent, 10 July 2024 (accessed 12 September 2024)

<sup>133</sup> [HC Deb 23 April 2024, c815-816](#)

<sup>134</sup> [As above](#)

<sup>135</sup> [As above, c819-820](#)

<sup>136</sup> [As above, c815](#)

- £67 million new funding to reflect the latest National Living Wage increase
- £57 million to support providers in respect of teachers' pay and pensions
- £288 million for the existing entitlements in 2024/25 announced in the 2023 Spring Budget.

The government added it is supporting providers in delivering the roll-out with “increases to the rate of pay, the department’s national recruitment campaign and establishing more qualification routes into the sector”.<sup>137</sup>

At the 2024 Spring Budget, the government confirmed it would increase the hourly funding rates “in line with the metric used at Spring Budget 2023” in 2025/26 and 2026/27.<sup>138</sup> This means funding rates will increase in line with the government’s forecast of cost increases. A response to a parliamentary question explained the Department for Education (DfE) “will use average earnings growth and National Living Wage to forecast how staff costs are changing for providers and CPI (a general measure of inflation) to forecast how non-staff costs will change”.<sup>139</sup>

The government has said “by 2027-28, [it expects] to spend more than £8 billion every year on free hours in early education”.<sup>140</sup> The [Library briefing covering the funding for early years providers](#) provides further information on this.<sup>141</sup>

The children’s charity Coram said it welcomed the 2024 Budget commitments to guarantee funding rates over the next two years. However, it also said “the Chancellor’s announcement does not address these existing, systemic challenges -including... addressing the recruitment and retention crisis in the childcare sector.”<sup>142</sup>

## 5.2

## Recruitment campaign

On 2 February 2024, the [government announced a recruitment campaign](#) in order to increase the number of childcare staff for the free hours expansion in April 2024.

The “Do Something Big” recruitment campaign is aiming to increase the workforce by highlighting the benefits of working with children:

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<sup>137</sup> PQ15512 [[on Pre-school Education: Finance](#)], 22 March 2024

<sup>138</sup> HM Treasury, [Spring Budget 2024](#), HC 560, March 2024, para 2.8.

<sup>139</sup> PQ 17553 [[on Childcare: Finance](#)], 12 March 2024.

<sup>140</sup> PQ 901906 [[on Childcare Provision](#)], 11 March 2024

<sup>141</sup> Commons Library research briefing CBP-8052, [Childcare funding in England](#)

<sup>142</sup> Coram Family and Childcare, [Response to the childcare announcements in the Spring Budget 2024](#), 6 March 2024

The campaign will look to boost recruitment across the sector by highlighting the vast array of childcare career routes and progression opportunities offering on-the-job training, flexible hours, and, most importantly, the chance to shape and support young lives.<sup>143</sup>

The recruitment campaign is linked to research commissioned on behalf of the DfE which found just over half (51%) of people in Britain would “consider working with pre-school children”.<sup>144</sup>

Alongside the recruitment campaign, the government is trialling a £1,000 sign-on bonus for new starters and people coming back to the profession. This is happening in 20 local authorities in England.<sup>145</sup> In the DfE survey, of the respondents who said they wouldn’t consider a career as an early years professional, 39% said an £1,000 one-off payment would make them consider a career working with children under five.<sup>146</sup>

Stakeholders and campaigners in the sector have “cautiously welcomed the offer”.<sup>147</sup> However, Purnima Tanuku, chief executive of National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) has said it has come “too late to support nurseries with the first phase of the childcare expansion”. Joeli Brearley, founder of charity Pregnant Then Screwed, said the plans were “a step in the right direction” but “a drop in the ocean”.<sup>148</sup>

Early Years Alliance chief executive, Neil Leitch said he hoped it would raise awareness of the “fantastic job early educators do”, but it would not be enough to meet the increased demand:

... given that we are now less than two months away from the first phase of early entitlement expansion, we’re clear that any suggestion that this campaign alone will be enough to drive up educator numbers in time to meet rising demand is ludicrous, and demonstrates a complete lack of understanding... of the sheer scale of the staffing crisis facing the sector.<sup>149</sup>

It has also been noted by Purnima Tanuku that the value of the £1,000 tax-free incentive is “not in line with teacher recruitment” which would help the early years sector to recruit “highly-skilled and qualified staff”.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> DfE press release, [Childcare recruitment campaign launched](#), 2 February 2024

<sup>144</sup> Perspectus Global, [Department for Education Early Years Campaign– Key Survey Findings](#), 2 February 2024

<sup>145</sup> DfE press release, [Childcare recruitment campaign launched](#), 2 February 2024

<sup>146</sup> Perspectus Global, [Department for Education Early Years Campaign– Key Survey Findings](#), 2 February 2024

<sup>147</sup> Children & Young People Now, [Cautious welcome for £1,000 childcare recruitment incentive](#), 5 February 2024

<sup>148</sup> ITV, [Childcare workers to be offered £1k as government launches £6.5m recruitment campaign](#), 2 February 2024

<sup>149</sup> Early Years Alliance, [Department for Education launches early years recruitment campaign](#), 5 February 2024

<sup>150</sup> Children & Young People Now, [Cautious welcome for £1,000 childcare recruitment incentive](#), 5 February 2024

## 5.3

## Changes to the statutory early years framework

### Changes to childcare ratios

To try to reduce the costs facing childcare providers and parents, the government has changed the number of staff to two-year-olds needed in an early years setting.

Early years childcare ratios refer to the number of qualified staff necessary in an early year setting to the number of children. The ratios for England differ depending on the age of the child and are set out in paragraphs 3.28 to 3.44 of the [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#) (EYFS).

On 4 September 2023, [the Early Years Foundation Stage \(Learning and Development and Welfare Requirements\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2023](#), came into force. Among other changes, these regulations meant the statutory minimum staff to child ratios in England for two-year-olds has changed from one member of staff for every four children (1:4) to one member of staff for every five children (1:5). The regulations also set out that in the EYFS, “adequate supervision” while children are eating now explicitly means children must be within sight and hearing of an adult.

When announcing the consultation for the regulations, the government stated the new ratios would “potentially eventually” save £40 a week for a family paying £265 per week for childcare for a two-year-old.<sup>151</sup>

Additionally, by adopting the ratio, an early years setting could either increase the number of childcare places available with the same number of staff or deliver the same number of places with less staff.

Some stakeholders questioned whether the changes would help the problems in the childcare sector. A membership organisation, [Early Years Alliance](#), [has said changing the ratio is not a solution](#) to the sector that has “underpaid, overworked early years professionals doing their best to care for and educate children who... need more individual care and education than ever before”.<sup>152</sup>

A [Library Insight provides more information on the consultation for the ratio change](#) and the government’s response.<sup>153</sup>

A DfE survey of childcare providers, conducted in November 2023, found 37% of group-based providers, and 23% of school-based providers either have or are planning to adopt the change in ratios for two-year-olds. This is more

<sup>151</sup> DfE and Department for Work and Pensions press release, [Drive to reduce the cost of childcare for parents](#), 4 July 2022

<sup>152</sup> Early Years Alliance, [Alliance slams “ludicrous, pointless and potentially dangerous” plans to relax childcare ratios](#) (accessed 28 February 2024)

<sup>153</sup> Commons Library insight, [New regulations change childcare ratios in England](#), 3 January 2024

group settings than was predicted: in the survey on the Early Years staff to child ratio consultation, 19% of group-based providers were “likely or very likely to make any changes to provisions”.<sup>154</sup>

In a November 2023 report by the [Early Education and Childcare Coalition](#), a coalition of childcare organisations, found the change in ratios increased the likelihood of staff saying they would leave the sector. Early years educators have said the ratios would have a “negative effect on their work”.<sup>155</sup>

## Consultation on other changes to the EYFS

In May 2023, the government also consulted on additional proposals for providers to have “more flexibility... within the EYFS, while maintaining quality and safety standards”.<sup>156</sup>

In its response, the government decided to proceed with some proposals which impact the childcare workforce. It committed to changing the qualifications needed to count within the ratio at level 3 and introducing an experience-based way of gaining a level 3 qualification, as opposed to gaining a “full and relevant” level 3 qualification (see box 2 on page 13 of this briefing).

### Requirement to hold a level 2 maths qualification

As stated in section 2.1 of this briefing, within each childcare ratio, at least one member of staff must have an approved level 3 qualification (Early Years Educator), and at least half of all other staff must have an approved level 2 qualification (Early Years Practitioner).

Previously, to count towards the ratio with an approved level 3 qualification, staff must have also achieved a level 2 qualification in English and a level 2 maths qualification. After a consultation, the government removed the requirement for these staff to hold a level 2 maths qualification to count within the level 3 staff to child ratios.<sup>157</sup>

The maths requirement has now been applied to managers instead. The EYFS now sets out that managers must have achieved, or will achieve within two years of starting, a suitable level 2 qualification in maths. The government explained it was still a requirement for managers as it is “an important form of quality assurance” and therefore managers can “accurately assess their own staff’s training needs”. The government also explained this change will only be applicable for new managers employed on or after 4 January 2024.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> DfE, [Pulse Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers](#) (PDF), 19 April 2024, p11

<sup>155</sup> Early Education and Childcare Coalition, [Retention and Return: Delivering the expansion of early years entitlement in England](#) (PDF), 6 November 2023, p7

<sup>156</sup> DfE, [Early Years Foundation Stage \(EYFS\): Regulatory Changes Government consultation response](#) (PDF), 27 October 2023, p5

<sup>157</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), p28

<sup>158</sup> [As above](#) (PDF)

## Experience-based route into childcare

In the consultation, the government proposed that for staff missing any level 3 criteria, an “experience-based route” should be introduced. Some respondents had said there was frustration that “highly competent and experienced” staff without a formal qualification were not counted within ratios.<sup>159</sup>

The government have said it will be proceeding with this proposal, but noted it needed time to develop criteria and processes before this proposal could be brought into force.<sup>160</sup> In a March 2024 written statement, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education, David Johnston, said the new entitlement roll-out will be monitored to further inform the experience-based route:

We will continue to monitor the needs of the EY workforce as the new entitlements begin to roll out and will use this to inform how we develop the route and when it will be introduced. We will provide more information in due course. Implementing these changes will help early years practitioners to continue to deliver their invaluable, high-quality education and care to millions of children each day.<sup>161</sup>

On 22 April 2024, the government announced [a new consultation on the proposed model of the experience-based route](#), looking at eligibility criteria and process requirements. The consultation will run for four weeks, and close on the 20 May 2024.<sup>162</sup>

## 5.4

## Professional development

### Early years education recovery programme

In October 2022, the government announced details of the £180 million investment, over three years, into skills and professional development of the early years staff.<sup>163</sup> The programmes covered by the fund are available for practitioners, leaders and settings and are set out in [the DfE’s early years education recovery programme guidance](#). It has offers in continuing professional development, funded qualifications and support and guidance.

### Continuing professional development

The recovery programme offers the following opportunities in continuing professional development:

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<sup>159</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), p29

<sup>160</sup> [As above](#) (PDF), p30

<sup>161</sup> [HCWS346](#), 15 March 2024

<sup>162</sup> DfE, [Experience-based route for early years practitioners](#), 22 April 2024

<sup>163</sup> DfE press release, [£180 million to improve children’s development in the early years](#), 20 October 2022



- Early years child development
- Phase three of the professional development programme (PDP3), which trains practitioners on:
  - communication and language,
  - early mathematics, and
  - personal, social and emotional development
- Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI)
- The national professional qualification in early years leadership (NPQEYL), a new qualification for leadership in settings
- Training practitioners to support parents to improve cognitive skills through the home learning environment (HLE)

### Qualifications

The programme will also offer additional funding for qualifications in:

- Early years initial teacher training (EYITT)
- Special educational needs coordinator (SENCO)

There is also a review of the level 3 qualification and criteria, through consultation and sector engagement, to “provide a higher-quality criteria for early years qualifications”.<sup>164</sup>

### Support and guidance

The guidance also explains the recovery programme will provide support and guidance through two offers:

- Stronger practice hubs, networks of early years settings sharing expertise and knowledge in effective practice.
- Experts and mentors, offering face-to-face or virtual support from trained experts and mentors.<sup>165</sup>

## Early years skills bootcamp

As highlighted in the government’s response to the Education Committee’s inquiry into childcare (see section 4.2 of this briefing), there will be Early Years Skills Bootcamps from 2024. This was after the DfE ran a competition for

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<sup>164</sup> DfE, [Early years education recovery programme: supporting the sector](#), 22 January 2024, Qualifications

<sup>165</sup> [As above](#)

training providers to work alongside settings to deliver the bootcamps. It explains what skills bootcamps are:

Skills Bootcamps are free, flexible employer-led courses of up to 16 weeks in sectors with skills shortage vacancies. They give adults aged 19+ the opportunity to build up sector-specific skills and fast-track learners to a guaranteed interview with an employer.<sup>166</sup>

## 5.5

## Help targeted at childminders

### Childminder grants

At the Spring Budget 2023, the government announced it would provide start-up grants to childminders to “to support the costs of set up and to grow the childminder market”.<sup>167</sup>

The scheme opened for applications on 30 November 2023, with £7.2 million of funding. A £600 grant is available for childminders registering with Ofsted and £1,200 is available for those registering with a childminder agency.<sup>168</sup>

More information on the grant can be found in the [DfE guidance on how to apply for a childminder start-up grant](#).

### Consultation on recruitment and retention

On 15 March 2024, the government announced a [consultation on childminder recruitment and retention](#) which it believes “will make a difference to childminders, and potentially other early years providers”. The consultation is looking for views on the following three policy proposals:

- improving the registration process by enabling regulated healthcare professionals other than GPs to complete GP health declarations for new childminders.
- ensuring childminders, and potentially other early years providers, are paid entitlement funding monthly by LAs [local authorities], if they request it.
- giving CMAs [childminder agencies] new flexibilities to enable them to thrive and grow.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Support for childcare and the early years: Government response to the Committee’s Fifth Report](#) (PDF), 17 October 2023, HC 1902 2022-23, para 112

<sup>167</sup> HM Treasury, [Spring Budget 2023](#), HC 1183, March 2023, para 4.163

<sup>168</sup> [HCWS78 \[Early Years Update\]](#), 29 November 2023

<sup>169</sup> DfE, [Childminder recruitment and retention consultation](#) (PDF), 15 March 2024, p7

In a written statement on the September childcare entitlement expansion, the government said depending on the consultation outcome, it would consider allowing all providers to request the funding payments on a monthly basis.<sup>170</sup>

The consultation closed on 10 May 2024.

## Regulatory changes for childminders

### Changes to the EYFS ratio

As part of the changes made to the childcare ratios (see section 4.3, above) new regulations allow childminders to care for more than three young children under five (the maximum) if they are the siblings of children they already care for or the childminder's own child.<sup>171</sup> This has meant childminders are able to work more flexibly within the EYFS in the number of children they can care for.

In the April 2024 DfE survey (conducted in November 2023), it found in most areas the impact of the change for childminders had been small. In terms of staffing pressures, 59% of childminders had seen no impact, while 24% said it had increased them. 6% of childminders had said the changes had decreased staffing pressures.<sup>172</sup>

### Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023

The government has legislated to allow childminders to work with more people and spend more time caring for children on non-domestic premises.

Under the section 237 of the [Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023](#), the Childcare Act 2006 will be amended to allow for childminders to provide more of their childcare on “non-domestic premises” (such as a local community centre or village hall). There is currently a requirement for at least half of the provision to be provided on domestic premises. Section 238 of the 2023 Act will also increase the number of other childminders or assistants a childminder can work with, meaning more children can be cared for. This has changed from two to three (a total of four people).<sup>173</sup>

Sections 237 and 238 are currently not in force and will come into force when the Secretary of State lays the relevant regulations.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> [HCWS747 \[Childminders: September Childcare Entitlement Expansion\]](#), 15 March 2024

<sup>171</sup> [Early Years Foundation Stage \(Learning and Development and Welfare Requirements\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2023](#) (SI 2023/780)

<sup>172</sup> DfE, [Pulse Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers](#) (PDF), 19 April 2024, p11

<sup>173</sup> [Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023](#), Section 237 and 238 and schedule 23

<sup>174</sup> [As above](#), Section 255(9)(a)

## 5.6 Labour government

In its election manifesto on childcare, Labour committed to “[opening] an additional 3,000 nurseries through upgrading space in primary schools, to deliver the extension of government funded hours families are entitled to.”<sup>175</sup> In addition, in its [plan for childcare and early education](#), Labour said it would support childcare staff so “they are recognised for the skilled and important work they are doing”.<sup>176</sup>

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) said opening the additional nurseries would “fully meet the expected increase in demand” of the entitlement expansion, creating 100,000 new nursery places. However, the IFS said the “bigger test” will be the recruitment and retention of staff into the new childcare settings.<sup>177</sup> The concern around recruitment and retention was also echoed by stakeholders when Labour announced its childcare plans during the election campaign.<sup>178</sup>

Since winning the 2024 general election, the Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson said early years was her “number one priority” and that the government planned to recruit more staff through a “re-energised” campaign.<sup>179</sup>

In response to a September 2024 parliamentary question on how pay impacts recruitment, the government explained it recognised the sector’s recruitment and retention concerns. It added childcare is delivered in a mixed market where providers set their own rates of pay, but the uplift in funding rates should support providers with costs “including staffing costs”:

The department recognises the concerns the sector has about workforce recruitment and retention challenges. The department continues to work closely with the sector to understand these challenges. Early education and childcare is delivered by a mixed market of private, voluntary and independent provision who set their own rates of pay.

The department is uplifting funding rates to support providers in dealing with the costs they face, including staffing costs. Current national average funding rates are broadly in line with, or higher than, nursery fees paid by parents last year. For 2024/25, this includes an investment of £67 million to reflect the increase in the National Living Wage from April 2024. Local authorities are required to pass through a minimum of 95% of the funding to early years providers.<sup>180</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Labour Party, [Change: Labour Party Manifesto 2024](#), 13 June 2024, p81

<sup>176</sup> Labour Party, [Labour’s plan for childcare and early education](#), 9 June 2024

<sup>177</sup> IFS, [Labour’s plans to build childcare spaces in schools will nudge the market in a different direction – but not transform it](#), 9 June 2024

<sup>178</sup> [“Labour urged to confirm how it will find staff for 100,000 new childcare places”](#), The Guardian, 10 June 2024 (accessed 12 September 2024)

<sup>179</sup> [“Education Secretary says early years is her ‘number one priority’”](#), Independent, 10 July 2024 (accessed 12 September 2024)

<sup>180</sup> PQ 4008 [on [Childcare: Recruitment](#)], 11 September 2024

## Review into early years

At its annual conference in October 2023, the Labour party announced plans to review the early years sector. Bridget Phillipson, the then Shadow Education Secretary, said it would be chaired by Sir David Bell who was previously the chief inspector of Ofsted, and the former permanent secretary at the DfE.<sup>181</sup>

When announcing the review, Bridget Phillipson said childcare needed “ambitious reform... to drive up standards” and to be available for all families. She continued the review would help to develop a plan for the necessary workforce:

... I am determined that new investment in childcare comes with ambitious reform, to ensure early education is available in every corner of our country for every family and every child, to drive up standards for our youngest children and for the amazing people who support and teach them.

And that focus on high and rising standards, is why today I’m announcing that Sir David will lead Labour’s work to develop the plan we need, for the workforce we need, for the qualifications they’ll have, for the settings where it’ll happen, to deliver our ambition for a modernised childcare system, from the end of parental leave to the end of primary school.<sup>182</sup>

In September 2024, the [Tes Magazine reported on an unpublished letter Sir David Bell wrote to Bridget Phillipson](#), the now Education Secretary. In the letter, reportedly sent before the July general election, Sir David Bell said he had “received vivid and compelling evidence of an underpaid and undervalued workforce, with significant shortages in key areas, as well-qualified staff seek employment elsewhere”.<sup>183</sup>

Among other recommendations for the early years sector, to help with workforce issues David Bell recommended:

- simplifying qualifications for early years
- increasing the quality and consistency of available training
- developing a new 0-7 qualified teacher status qualification
- removing funding for qualifications that “do not provide a stepping stone onto full qualifications”
- reviewing the requirements to enter the childminding market<sup>184</sup>

David Bell confirmed to Tes that there would be “no published output” as his work had been overtaken by the election and Bridget Phillipson was now

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<sup>181</sup> Early Years Alliance, [Labour announces plan for new early years review](#), 11 October 2024

<sup>182</sup> [As above](#)

<sup>183</sup> [“Labour’s early years review findings revealed”](#), Tes Magazine, 11 September 2024

<sup>184</sup> [As above](#)

education secretary. The DfE did not commit to publishing Sir David's work but said the findings would "inform" work to reform early years.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> [As above](#)

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