

Evaluating the Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree: A Qualitative Study of Employers' and Mentors' Experiences

Jean Taylor, Richard Brown, Sarah Dickens

National Centre for Social Research

Research Report
No 752

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ISBN 1 84478 737 0

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all the employers and mentors who gave their valuable time to take part in this study and who shared their experiences and opinions so freely with us.

We have been ably supported throughout the project by Bichelle Masrani and Cheow-Lay Wee at DfES.

At *NatCen*, we are grateful to Dawn Snape for her initial involvement in the study. We are also grateful to Wendy Duldig for her help with the interviews, and to Emma Weddell and Martha Warrenner for their assistance with the analysis.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction (chapter 1)

This summary presents the findings of a qualitative study exploring employers' and mentors' views and experiences of the Early Years Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degree (EYSEFD).

The introduction of Foundation Degrees was announced by David Blunkett in February 2000. A new Higher Education (HE) qualification, Foundation Degrees (FDs) were set up in order to allow people within the workplace to build on existing expertise and continue working at the same time as studying for a higher level qualification. One of the Foundation Degrees developed was in the Early Years. Designed with potential students firmly in mind, a 'typical' student was envisaged as being mature, possibly with family commitments as well as a job in a low paid sector. Flexibility of delivery and strong support were key features, including a support package from DfES consisting of a fee waiver, a £500/year bursary, loan of a laptop computer and printer, a childcare grant and funding for supply cover and mentoring.

This study is part of a wider programme of research evaluating the EYSEFD, involving qualitative and quantitative work with HEIs, employers and students. The aim was to explore the role of employers and mentors of Early Years Foundation Degree students, specifically:

- the nature of information employers and mentors have received about the EYSEFD and their levels of satisfaction with this;
- how employers and mentors conceptualise their roles in relation to the EYSEFD students, particularly in relation to WBL and mentoring;
- the types and levels of involvement of employers and mentors with EYSEFD students, and explanatory factors for this;
- employer and mentor motivations for supporting the student through the EYSEFD, and feelings about their role;
- the logistics of accommodating an EYSEFD student in the workplace in terms of WBL, mentoring, supply cover and finances;
- impacts of the EYSEFD on students' work, the setting, other staff members, the EY sector as a whole and the students' future career progression;
- employer and mentor views about the value of the EYSEFD to their setting, and feelings about how the experience of accommodating and mentoring an EYSEFD student could be improved.

In total, 54 people were interviewed, across 37 different institutions: 17 employers, 18 mentors and 19 employer-mentors. These institutions fell into six main groups: state-funded primary schools; private primary schools; private nurseries; state, local authority or voluntary sector nurseries; nurseries in receipt of funding from flagship initiative such as Sure Start or the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative; and sessional care providers, for example playgroups.

Employer involvement in the EYSEFD (chapter 2)

Employers became involved in the EYSEFD through a variety of different means, from those who had proactively suggested it to employees themselves through to those who knew nothing about the EYSEFD until approached by employees or potential mentors.

Employers received information about EYSEFD from five main sources: the student themselves, the mentor, written information from the college, face-to-face contact with the college and finally in some cases contact with the college tutor. Exceptionally, employers undertook information gathering exercises on the degree themselves.

Employers' satisfaction with the information they had received varied, depending on: how proactively they were involved in the EYSEFD; how much time they felt they had to keep abreast of the EYSEFD; their levels of confidence in delivering WBL; the extent to which they delegated responsibility for the EYSEFD to the mentor; levels of interest in their employee's progression on the course and their perceptions of how well the student was doing on the course.

Where employers felt that they would like more information, this was about: the nature and scope of the EYSEFD course; the role of the employer and mentor; exactly what the college or student would require from the employer, for example in relation to day release and facilitating WBL; the assignments students were being asked to undertake and their employee's progression on the EYSEFD.

Understanding of the EYSEFD amongst employers was mixed, and depended on how they became involved in it and the level and nature of information they had received. Whilst amongst some employers understanding was good, amongst others there was lack of clarity about the relationship of the EYSEFD to other qualifications, progression routes from the EYSEFD, the content of the EYSEFD - including the balance between theory and practice - what WBL comprised and the way WBL was assessed.

Where employers felt that they lacked information or understanding about the EYSEFD, there were a number of implications. First, the less employers understood about what students were doing on the EYSEFD, the less likely they were to make arrangements for accommodating WBL or mentoring. Second, limited information often led to a reliance amongst employers on EYSEFD employees to keep them updated, which could be problematic where relationships between the employer and EYSEFD employee were not strong. Finally, lack of communication between the college and the workplace led some employers to express concerns about how adequately their employee's WBL was being assessed, and about the robustness of the resultant qualification.

In spite of dissatisfaction with levels of information about the EYSEFD, and variations in employer understanding, employers were broadly happy about agreeing to support employees through the EYSEFD. This was for one of three main types of motivation:

- **A broad commitment to staff training in general:** these employers said that they would be likely to support staff through *any* relevant qualification because this had a positive impact on staff skills and retention. Although this sentiment was expressed across all settings, it appeared particularly strong in private nurseries where keeping good staff was regarded as a challenge.
- **A specific interest in the EYSEFD:** these employers in addition felt that the EYSEFD specifically had benefits. First, the EYSEFD's focus on the foundation stage was welcomed, particularly in primary schools, where there was sometimes a feeling that it had received less emphasis in the past than it merited, but also in settings such as a nurseries, where employers were keen to further develop the reputation and quality of the setting. Second, a number of employers welcomed the fact that it was a higher level qualification, particularly in primary schools which tended to be able to offer more progression opportunities (see Chapter 5). The EYSEFD was also regarded as advantageous by employers in multi-agency settings, who welcomed its focus on multi-agency working. Finally, there was some feeling that the government might in the future demand that all higher-level early years workers had the EYSEFD, and that supporting a student through it was thereby a means of securing the future of their employee's career and the setting.
- **Student-centred motivations:** finally, a number of employers said that their primary motivation for supporting the employee through the EYSEFD was for the sake of the employee themselves, rather than the setting. At one end of this spectrum were employers who were frank about having little interest in the EYSEFD. They had agreed to it because it was easy to accommodate logistically but did not think the setting would benefit because they felt the employee was '*already*' very able, or was likely to leave once they gained the EYSEFD. At the other end were employers who had made sacrifices to support the employee and were proactive in doing so. These employers tended to feel that their employee's current position and qualifications did not reflect their worth and were keen to help them progress in their careers, even if this meant losing them. Employers in this group were most often based in smaller nurseries and sessional care settings, where opportunities for progression were limited (see Chapter 5).

Whilst in some instances employers expressed no, or very few, concerns about supporting an employee through the EYSEFD, in others initial concerns were raised about the amount of the employee's time the EYSEFD would take up, the ability of employees to cope with its demands, the inability of the setting to recognise the EYSEFD in terms of a pay rise or promotion, and the impacts on the setting of accommodating the EYSEFD.

Employer roles in relation to the EYSEFD varied considerably, ranging from those who had practical, hands-on involvement in terms of supporting it logistically and getting involved in the employee's work through to those who had very little or no

involvement at all. The type of setting specifically did not seem to be an explanation for this variation. Rather, key explanatory factors were: employer levels of interest in the EYSEFD; the extent to which employers understood that the EYSEFD involved WBL; the extent to which they delegated overseeing the EYSEFD to the mentor; whether following the employee's progress in the EYSEFD was seen to fit with more general line management responsibilities; how able they perceived students were; the amount of time they had available; how close their relationship with the student was; and their levels of confidence in the college delivering the EYSEFD.

The role of the mentor (chapter 3)

People became mentors in various ways, although most typically they were invited by students to do so. The main reasons for mentors being approached to take on the role were that they had prior experience of mentoring, were more experienced than the EYSEFD employee, or worked closely with the employee on a day to day basis. The impression was also given in some instances that there was no alternative person to take up the role.

In larger settings with clear hierarchies and highly qualified staff, such as primary schools and multi-agency settings, mentors were more likely to have been approached because they had prior mentoring experience or occupied a more senior position. In smaller settings, mentors were typically approached because they worked closely with the student on a day to day basis, or because they were the only person to take on the role; mentors in these settings were often not more qualified than the EYSEFD employee.

Mentors were usually positive about taking on the role as they saw it as important for the student and a rewarding role for themselves.

Mentors received their information about the role from four main sources: the EYSEFD student; written information from the college; meetings organised by the college; and contact with the college tutor when they visited the settings.

Where mentors were most positive about receiving information from the student, this tended to be because they had a good working relationship with them and felt confident in their ability to communicate the college's requirements. However, there were also cases where mentors doubted whether the student was keeping them fully informed about the requirements of the degree, and felt that the information should be supplemented by more contact with the college.

Views about written information from the college were mixed. In some cases, this information was felt to have helped define the purpose and nature of the EYSEFD and role of the mentor. However, in other cases it was felt to have been confusing, or '*vague*', leaving mentors uncertain about their role.

Views about the usefulness of college meetings also varied. Positively, mentors said that they had been reassured by the face to face contact, and felt that it had helped to clarify what was expected of them. On the other hand, there were mentors who reported that the meetings had been unhelpfully unclear about the role of the mentor

and short on practical information about how to mentor. Mentors also reported having been unable to attend meetings because they were only told about them at short notice, or because they were held at inconvenient times or locations. Common requests were for more notice to be given, and for college tutors to visit mentors regularly in their setting, rather than relying on them attending college meetings.

In most cases, the impression given was that meetings with college tutors in the setting were ad hoc, and occurred when tutors were in the college anyway, visiting or assessing students. Whilst there were mentors who had been satisfied with their meetings with the college tutors, more often these were felt to have been rushed and unsatisfactory.

The extent to which mentors felt that they needed information in order to carry out the role effectively varied. Some mentors with previous experience felt confident that they knew what they were doing without a large amount of information; there were also less experienced or qualified mentors who were also happy to mentor without having received much information, because they were happy with adopting a 'reactive' role (see below).

However, more often, limited information went hand in hand with dissatisfaction with the role. In particular, mentors said that they had felt unsure about what the role should comprise and '*inadequate*' because they did not feel they were supporting the student as well as they could be.

In terms of actually carrying out the role, three main typologies were evident:

- The '**reactive mentor**': what characterised these mentors was that they saw themselves as being there for the EYSEFD student as and when they were needed, and did not take a proactive role in setting up meetings or activities with the student, or in evidencing their work. These mentors were often from smaller settings, lacked prior experience of mentoring and were not more qualified than the students they were mentoring. As a result they lacked the confidence to take on a more proactive role. However, this group also included more experienced or qualified mentors who did not feel that they had the time or level of information needed in order to take on a more proactive role. Whilst some in this group were happy with the role they had adopted, there were also mentors who felt guilty or dissatisfied, feeling that they should be doing more, but unclear about what.
- The '**pastoral mentor**': these mentors conceptualised their role as being primarily to provide pastoral support, and were more proactive in providing it than the 'reactive mentors' described above. Often mentors in this group were also studying for the EYSEFD themselves, and were not evidencing work because the college tutor had adopted this role.
- The '**quality control mentor**': these mentors saw their role as being primarily to oversee the quality of the EYSEFD student's work and were proactive in the mentoring role. They evidenced work on a regular basis and often adopted a constructively critical stance towards the student's written and practical work. Often these mentors were more qualified than the EYSEFD student and had a

higher position in the organisation, therefore seeing the mentoring role as an extension of their line management role. As a result, they were more likely to be based in larger settings with clear staff hierarchies, for example multi-agency settings or primary schools.

In addition to levels of information received about mentoring, feelings about the mentoring role were also influenced by levels of prior experience; levels of confidence in the role; the mentors' relationship with the student, and whether mentoring had a positive effect on the relationship; feelings about how rewarding it was to help a student; the amount of time they had available to devote to the role; and views about the personal benefits of taking on the role.

Accommodating EYSEFD students (chapter 4)

There were three main ways in which settings accommodated work-based learning (WBL): by providing support in relation to WBL exercises, by revising staffing arrangements to give students different experiences within the setting, and by giving students or their mentors time to undertake it. As described in Chapter 2, whilst some employers were very proactive in these arrangements, others were much less so, leaving the arrangement of WBL primarily up to the student and/or mentor.

Accommodation of mentoring comprised two broad tasks: making arrangements for mentoring meetings to take place and, where relevant, for mentors to undertake observations or read assignments.

Whilst some EYSEFD students took a day or half day off work to attend college, in other cases attendance at college did not necessitate time off work, because the teaching took place outside of the students' working hours. Whilst some employers secured cover for staff when they were at college, others said that they reduced the number of children they took at these times, reduced EYSEFD employees' pay to reflect the hours taken off from work, or re-arranged staff timetables, for example changing the days that part-time staff worked so that they could attend college.

A number of key factors affected the ways, and extent to which, employers went about accommodating WBL, mentoring and student attendance at college. These were:

- **employer perceptions of what WBL and mentoring entailed:** as described in Chapters 2 and 3, whilst some employers and mentors understood WBL and mentoring to entail additional tasks to their employee's day-to-day work, others viewed them much more passively, feeling that they did not comprise much more than what happened on a day-to-day basis anyway. This understanding obviously affected the extent to which employers involved themselves in accommodating these tasks.

- **time:** finding time to accommodate mentoring meetings and WBL could be particularly difficult where the setting only learned of the college's requirements at short notice, and where the mentors' non-contact time was very limited.
- **proximity and availability of the mentor:** it was often easier for students and mentors to meet where they worked closely together, and where the mentor felt that work and personal commitments did not preclude them meeting regularly with the student. Willingness of mentors to use non-work time depended on their understanding of the role, relationship with the student and other commitments, both at work and home.
- **students' personal qualities and commitment to the setting:** it was often the case that the more talented and committed to the early years a member of staff was perceived to be, the more likely employers were to make arrangements for accommodating WBL and attendance at college that were beneficial to the employee.
- **ease of arranging cover for WBL, mentoring and student attendance at college:** employers who found this most easy to arrange were those: in larger settings where there was more flexibility around cover; who had good and reliable external cover; who were only having to arrange cover for one, rather than several, EYSEFD students; and who were able to afford it (see below).
- **students' responsibilities in the workplace:** ease of accommodation depended also on the level of seniority of the EYSEFD student, with the absence of more senior staff from smaller settings often being particularly difficult to accommodate.
- **ease of accommodating student absence on particular days of the week:** a number of employers lamented that their employee's college day fell on a day when the setting was particularly busy - usually, in these cases, mid-week - and felt it would be preferable for the course to be run towards the end of the week, particularly Friday.
- **perceptions of fairness in relation to other staff:** some employers said that they did not want to pay staff for when they were at college because they had not done this for other members of staff taking additional qualifications, and did not want to seem to be being unfair.
- **perceptions on impact on children:** in some instances, employers were concerned that lack of staffing consistency had a negative impact on the children; other employers however felt it was good for children to have a change of staff. The perceived quality of the cover was the main factor influencing how employers felt about this.

- **perceptions of the EYSEFD more widely:** finally, employers' willingness to release students for college and WBL was affected by the extent to which they valued staff training and development generally, and the EYSEFD specifically; this is described in Chapter 2.

Where employers felt that the DfES money for cover (£500) was sufficient, this tended to be where the EYSEFD student was a more junior position with an inexpensive role to cover, or where they only needed to take a small amount of time off - for example two hours a week - to attend college.

A second group said that although the funding was not sufficient, they were able to pay for cover relatively easily because they had training budgets which covered it (usually state primary schools), sufficient surplus income to be able to easily afford it (some private primaries and nurseries), or money from other sources which enabled them to support the student – for example, a primary school and local authority funded nursery receiving money from the local authority specifically to support the student.

However, there were also employers across a range of settings, but particularly voluntary nurseries and playgroups, who were unable to pay easily for the extra cost of cover that they wanted. These employers had to use less experienced cover staff, raise money through fund-raising, reduce the employees' salaries to take into the account the time they were off work or, in one exceptional case, ask the employees to help meet the costs of cover themselves.

Awareness of what was required of employees who wanted to convert their EYSEFD into a BA in terms of fees and time off work varied greatly. The only employers who said that they might consider funding students through this additional year were some primary school head teachers who wanted to see the EYSEFD progress eventually to teacher status within the school.

It was striking that whilst there were employers who struggled to accommodate WBL and student attendance at college logistically and financially, they were nevertheless prepared to do so, out of commitment to staff training and/or the individual employee. However, some of these - particularly those in settings with more limited financial resources - raised doubts about whether they would be able to continue supporting employees through the EYSEFD in the future, especially if they no longer received funding to do so.

Impacts and career progression (chapter 5)

Employers and mentors across the range of settings included in the research felt that the EYSEFD had had a positive impact on the employee taking the qualification and on the setting more widely.

Reported positive impacts on the employee included greater reflective and organisational skills, improved confidence and more independent thinking. Key positive impacts on the setting included the EYSEFD employee having instigated useful changes to policy or practice and other staff having learned from the EYSEFD employee. There were also employers who felt that the setting had been encouraged as a result of having an employee take the EYSEFD to accord more importance to the Foundation Stage. Finally, some felt that having an EYSEFD employee would lead to positive impacts on the reputation and the sustainability of the setting.

A few less positive impacts were cited, most notably EYSEFD employees feeling stressed or being over-critical of other staff in the light of their learning, or more rarely implementing changes or activities which did not seem to fit with the ethos of the setting. However in none of these cases did the employers feel the disadvantages outweighed the advantages.

A number of employers felt that the impact of having an employee take the EYSEFD were negligible. These tended to be employers who had played a very limited role in relation to the EYSEFD, and had viewed it from the start as of being of benefit to the employee rather than the setting.

Those settings which felt most able to recognise the EYSEFD with a promotion or pay rise or both were those which had scope for role diversification, notably state primary schools, and settings with a range of different job titles and salary scales such as large nurseries and multi-agency settings.

However, there were settings across all of the main groups included in the research that felt unable to recognise the EYSEFD with promotions or pay rises. The key explanations for this were lack of positions into which to progress EYSEFD employees, inability to afford a pay rise, lack of recognition of the EYSEFD on the setting's pay scales, and in some cases employer reluctance to recognise the EYSEFD for fear of upsetting more experienced but less qualified staff.

A number of employers who had supported staff through the EYSEFD had or were expecting to lose them to school-based roles, local authorities, multi-agency settings, or higher up positions in similar organisations. Others - including settings who were unable to accord a promotion or pay rise to EYSEFD students - were expecting their EYSEFD employer to stay. Reasons given were that the employee had taken the EYSEFD for their own satisfaction and self-esteem, and that they were happy working where they were for a range of personal and job-related reasons.

For the most part, employers who had or were expecting to lose EYSEFD employees were nevertheless positive about the experience. This tended to be for one or several of the following reasons: they had found it relatively easily to accommodate financially or logistically; they believed the setting had experienced significant benefits; they had strong personal reasons for wanting to support the employee in their career development.

Nevertheless, many employers felt that in order for them to accommodate further EYSEFD students in the future they would need to set a limit on the number they could accommodate at any one time, and in some cases might need to stop paying for cover. Some employers also said that in order to ensure their continued support, colleges needed to show more professionalism in terms of the organisation of the course and their communication with the employer and mentor. Finally, there was a feeling that more clarity was needed about what the qualification meant in terms of career progression.

Positively, employers and mentors in primary schools often felt that the EYSEFD supported the upskilling of teaching support staff, and provided a welcome alternative route into the teaching profession. However, there was also some concern that without evidence of more rigorous assessment of the EYSEFD it could become a way of getting more teachers '*on the cheap*', or of getting teaching assistants to take on more responsibility without sufficient remuneration.

Employers in nursery and sessional care settings often felt on the one hand that the EYSEFD would raise the status of EY workers which they hoped in the long term might lead to better remuneration for the work. However a key concern was that it was currently an ambiguous qualification, which was accorded no formal recognition. In addition, there was a worry that if going on to teaching status came to be seen as its main *raison d'être*, nurseries and sessional care settings would be little more than cheap early '*training grounds*', without then reaping the long-term benefits of improved learning around the Foundation Stage that the EYSEFD offered.

Conclusions and recommendations (chapter 6)

Employers experienced a range of 'de-motivators' and 'motivators' to supporting EYSEFD students; these can be conceptualised as factors which fell on opposite sides of a set of scales; the heavier the weight on one side or another, the more or less positive employers felt about accommodating the EYSEFD.

The key 'de-motivators' to accommodating the EYSEFD were:

- a lack of information and contact with the college about the EYSEFD, including about its potential benefits to the setting;
- lack of information from colleges about the role of employers and mentors in facilitating the work-based part of the EYSEFD and supporting the student;
- logistical and financial difficulties in accommodating WBL, mentoring and student attendance at college;
- lack of confidence in the quality of the EYSEFD, based on the perception that potential students, the setting and/or the WBL are poorly assessed;
- lack of awareness or appreciation amongst employers of the benefits that having an EYSEFD student in the workplace could bring to the setting; and
- lack of progression opportunities within the setting.

Conversely, key 'motivators' to accommodating the EYSEFD were:

- a strong commitment on the part of the employer to staff training generally, early years qualifications specifically, or to the career development of the individual employee;
- the ability to accommodate the EYSEFD logistically and financially;
- confidence in the degree strengthened by good information from the college and regular tutor visits to the workplace (rare);
- the perception that having an employee studying for the EYSEFD brings significant benefits to the employees' practice and the workplace more generally; and
- the existence of progression opportunities within the setting for employees who completed the EYSEFD.

This research has demonstrated that these 'motivators' and 'de-motivators' currently have different weights. Particularly 'heavy' factors currently are employers' commitment to staff training and development both generally and in relation to the early years and commitment to the career development of individual employees. These factors can be so strong that they lead employers to go to great lengths to accommodate the EYSEFD even where some of the 'de-motivators' are also strongly present, such as lack of information from and contact with the college, logistical and/or financial difficulties in accommodating the EYSEFD and lack of progression routes within the setting.

However, employer accounts also suggest that there will be a time-limit to the extent to which the 'motivators' will outweigh the 'de-motivators', particularly in settings where accommodation of the EYSEFD is a significant financial and logistical burden, such as nurseries and sessional care providers. This is particularly given the concern in these settings that - given their frequent inability to offer progression routes - they might become mere '*training grounds*' for EYSEFD students who then leave and take their expertise elsewhere. It seems that these settings require more 'encouragement' to support EYSED students; cutting the funding they receive for cover could risk doing the opposite.

More positively, there are other settings who find it easier to accommodate EYSEFD students, and to offer progression routes. The ability to offer progression is particularly evident in multi-agency settings, state primary schools and some larger nurseries. These settings are often more positive about continuing to support the EYSEFD, as they perceive themselves as able to reap the benefits.

Other key findings to emphasise are: the variations in WBL and mentoring experiences across settings; and the variation in mentoring models. As a consequence, it seems that students' experiences of the EYSEFD can currently differ greatly depending on their employer and mentor.

Recommendations

This report outlines a number of key recommendations, based on explicit suggestions made by employers and mentors. These are:

- **Increased and clearer communication between colleges and settings** about the roles of employers and mentors; what WBL is meant to entail; and how the course is being delivered by colleges. This could occur through introductory and ongoing meetings, the identification of a key contact person at colleges, and regular visits to settings by tutors.
- **Improved early and ongoing support for mentors.** This might include more clarity on their roles, training on mentoring adults in further education, more visits from tutors, periodic mentor meetings or facilitated workshops and quality assurance of mentoring.
- Alterations to the **content and format of the EYSEFD** for example, through more emphasis on caring and teaching developmentally delayed children, more guidance to students on background reading, and more notice prior to assignments. Employers and mentors also felt that the course could in some instances better targeted for experienced practitioners, but also that early assignments should be tailored with the fact that they might be returners to education in mind.
- **Assessment and quality assurance** should be undertaken more consistently, transparently and rigorously. This required better support for mentors in their roles, and more contact between colleges and work settings.
- The **existing and ongoing funding of the EYSEFD** was also a key issue. Recommendations included: the provision of funding which more accurately reflected the cost of obtaining cover for college attendance, and to a lesser degree WBL and mentoring; on a wider level, for **financial support for Early Years settings to help them to retain employees who have built up an expertise in the Early Years** though the EYSEFD who might otherwise leave because of lack of opportunities for progression or pay rises within their setting.
- The **promotion of the potential benefits and progression routes** associated with the completion of EYSEFD was a final area of improvement recommended by employers and mentors.

1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a qualitative study exploring the roles of employers and mentors of Early Years Foundation Degree [EYSEFD] students. The research was commissioned by the Department of Education and Skills and was carried out by the National Centre for Social Research.

1.1 Background

As outlined in Mowlam et al (2003), the need for skilled workers in the childcare sector was addressed by the National Childcare Strategy Green Paper in 1998, which stated:

We want to ensure that all childcare is of good quality, so that it meets the needs of children, and parents can have confidence in it. We aim to increase very substantially the number of skilled, qualified people working with children.¹

Fourteen National Standards were brought out in 2000 to complement the National Childcare Strategy. One of these required managers in childcare settings to be qualified to a level 3 or above (for the qualifications framework, see Appendix A). Regulation of childcare facilities was transferred from local authorities to OfSTED in July 2001, in order to develop national day care standards, which would be monitored and assessed.

Key objectives for the EY sector were set out in the DfEE 2001 Green Paper, 'Schools: Building on Success'. Targets for qualifications and training were specified, with more than 200,000 people set to attain new or higher childcare qualifications within three years. Staff development would be facilitated by streamlining the many different EY qualifications as well as establishing a clear career pathway.

The introduction of Foundation Degrees was announced by David Blunkett in February 2000. A new Higher Education (HE) qualification, Foundation Degrees (FDs) were set up in order to allow people within the workplace to build on existing expertise and continue working at the same time as studying for a higher level qualification. Flexibility was a key part of the FD design, with delivery strategies such as work-based learning, distance learning and part-time and full-time college attendance intended to enhance the ability of students to balance work and study as well as home/family life.

1.2 Development of the Early Years Foundation Degree

The Early Years Foundation Degree (EYSEFD) can therefore be seen as the culmination of a recognition of these developments as well as a recognition of the need for the EY sector to:

¹ <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/childcare/main4.shtml>

- employ skilled and qualified staff;
- provide a pathway for professional development;
- offer a way of learning that enables practitioners to continue working.

To reflect these needs, the EYSEFD was developed by the Qualifications Team at the Early Years Unit at the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), with a Working Group of key representatives drawn from HE providers, LEAs, HE monitoring bodies and EY representative bodies. A Statement of Requirement was developed by the Working Group, outlining the EYSEFD course content and delivery strategies, to be used as a guiding document for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to develop their EYSEFD courses.

The Statement of Requirement was not a typical way for HEIs to develop courses but rather was an innovative effort to streamline the course content across HEIs and promote national standards for students on the EYSEFD, linking underpinning knowledge and understanding of the EY sector to work practices. Also, those EYSEFDs written with the Statement could then apply to the DfES to have the course recognised and sector endorsed. Whilst giving the 'official stamp' of approval from the DfES, this also meant that part-time students on these recognised courses were eligible for a financial package, an important distinguishing feature of the EYSEFD in contrast to other Foundation Degrees.

The childcare sector is a low wage sector, with nursery nurses earning on average £12,700 per annum² making cost a potential barrier to EY workers returning to study. In addition, part-time students (as many of these students were expected to be) were unable, according to funding streams in place at the time of this research, to access HE funding mechanisms available to full-time students only, such as student loans and childcare grants³. The DfES therefore devised a support package designed to promote take-up of the course, which consisted of:

- a fee waiver
- a £500/year bursary
- a childcare grant
- loan of a laptop computer and printer
- funding for supply cover and mentoring.⁴

The first three of these were available just for part-time students, the last two for full-time as well as part-time students. The fee waiver and bursary were available to part-time students for the first two years of study only.

On graduating from the EYSEFD, it was planned that students would achieve the new employment level of Senior Practitioners. Employers' and mentors' perspectives in relation to the career progression of EYSEFD students are described in Chapter 5.

² 2002-2003 Childcare and Early Years Work Force Survey, Sure Start Unit, DfES, pending publication

³ However, as of autumn 2004, part-time students become eligible for a suite of financial support measures for the first time. See http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2003_0149

⁴ The supply cover funding was not provided at the start of the pilot, but was introduced part way through the year.

The Early Years Foundation Degree was introduced in two stages. Firstly, pre-pilot courses began in January 2002 at two HEIs, at which point the Statement of Requirement was published. Secondly, pilot courses began in autumn 2002, at a further 14 HEIs which had been recognised by DfES.

At the same time as the EYSEFD was being developed, work was also taking place to establish routes into teaching for EY workers, thus moving towards the establishment of a career structure with clear pathways for progression within the EY sector (see Appendix B).

1.3 Evaluating the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Degree

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills to evaluate the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Degree. There are different components of the evaluation, consisting of a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, as well as a longitudinal element. In summary it involves six key research activities:

1. Qualitative case studies of HEIs piloting the EYSEFD (Mowlam et al, 2003)
2. Qualitative mapping of EYSEFD delivery strategies (Mowlam and Snape, 2004⁵)
3. Longitudinal quantitative student surveys (Blom and Snape, 2004⁶)
4. Analysis of administrative data (Blom and Snape, 2004⁷)
5. Qualitative follow-up interviews with students (Knight et al, 2005⁸)
6. Qualitative study of the role of employers and mentors in relation to the EYSEFD

Different methodologies have been used for different elements of the evaluation to ensure that all the research questions are answered appropriately. Qualitative methods have been best placed to look at the implementation process and explanations for outcomes, and quantitative for numerical outcomes and prevalence. An important aspect of the programme of research has been the ability for different parts of the research to inform each other. For example, findings from the qualitative case studies were used in the development of the questionnaires for the longitudinal quantitative student surveys.

1.4 Qualitative study of employers and mentors of EYSEFD students

This report constitutes the findings from the sixth activity of the research programme, the qualitative study of employers and mentors of EYSEFD students.

⁵ Mowlam, A. and Snape, D. (2004) Qualitative Mapping of Delivery Strategies Amongst EYSEFD Providers. Second Report in series of EYSEFD Evaluation. Published by NatCen.

⁶ Blom, A. and Snape, D. (2004) Evaluation of the Early Years Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degree: Report of the Baseline Student Survey. Published by NatCen.

⁷ Blom, A. and Snape, D. (2004) Evaluation of the Early Years Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degree: Statistical Profile of Students and Institutions. Published by NatCen.

⁸ Knight, K., Tennant, R., Dillon, L., and Weddell, E. (2005) Evaluating the Early Years Foundation Degree: A qualitative study of students' views and experiences. *Publication forthcoming.*

1.4.1 Background to the study

Employers play a critical role in the delivery of the Early Years Foundation Degree. Students of the EYSEFD are generally already working in Early Years employment settings so are often very experienced. The EYSEFD facilitates the students to become competent and skilled practitioners to the standard of a Higher Education Level 2 or National Occupational Standards Level 4. In order to achieve this, they have to gain practical experience in an Early Years workplace, supported by a mentor, which constitutes the work-based learning element (WBL) of the course. On the basis of the competencies achieved by students during the WBL - alongside the academic work undertaken – they are awarded the Foundation Degree.

As part of the evaluation of the Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree (EYSEFD), the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), conducted a series of qualitative case studies at five institutions which were piloting the course⁹. Staff, students and employers were interviewed in order to find out the different perspectives of each of the core stakeholder groups involved in the implementation process.

As a result of this study, areas identified as being of particular interest for future research were the role of employers and mentors in relation to the Foundation Degree, particularly in relation to accommodating and facilitating the students' WBL. These issues were also identified as being of interest in the review of Foundation Degrees undertaken by the Quality and Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education in 2003, which identified a number of aspects of working with employers as areas for further development and improvement, including:

- involving employers in the summative assessment of student's work-related skills;
- the need for employers to have more information in order to help them contribute effectively to FDs: and
- the variability of student's experiences of WBL¹⁰.

In addition, some of the issues raised during this study related specifically to the type of employment setting in which WBL was carried out. However, due to the small sample size, it was impossible to say anything conclusive in this study about the way that the setting could influence employers', students' and mentors' experiences of the EYSEFD. Following discussion with DfES, it was therefore agreed that there was scope for undertaking additional work with employers involved with the EYSEFD in order to explore the issues outlined above further.

1.4.2 Aims of the study

The aim of this study was to explore the role of employers and mentors in relation to Early Years Sector Endorsed Foundation Degree students, specifically:

⁹ Mowlam, A; Murphy, J; Arthur, S *Evaluating the Introduction of the Early Years Foundation Degree*, DfES 2003

¹⁰ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/public/foundation/contents.htm>

- the nature of information employers and mentors have received about the EYSEFD and their levels of satisfaction with this;
- how employers and mentors conceptualise their roles in relation to the EYSEFD students, particularly in relation to WBL and mentoring;
- the types and levels of involvement of employers and mentors with EYSEFD students, and explanatory factors for this;
- employer and mentor motivations for supporting the student through the EYSEFD, and feelings about their role;
- the logistics of accommodating an EYSEFD student in the workplace in terms of WBL, mentoring, supply cover and finances;
- impacts of the EYSEFD on the students' work, the setting, other staff members, the EY sector as a whole and the students' future career progression;
- employer and mentor views about the value of the EYSEFD to their setting, and feelings about how the experience of accommodating and mentoring an EYSEFD student could be improved.

1.4.3 Methodology and sampling approach

In order to obtain the sample, all students within selected survey fieldwork areas were told about this research project at the end of the autumn 2004 survey and asked if they would be willing to pass on their employer's contact details. They were reassured that all of the research interviews are completely confidential, and specifically that no information would be passed between individuals taking part in the interviews.

A screening exercise was then conducted amongst the employer sample, to ascertain the type of institution that they worked for, and the names of the mentors. This exercise illustrated that employers and mentors of EYSEFD students were working in six key types of settings. These settings were made the basis for the sampling strategy and were:

1. state funded primary schools
2. private primary schools
3. private nurseries
4. state, local authority or voluntary sector-funded nurseries
5. nurseries with funding from the flagship initiatives such as the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative and Sure Start
6. sessional care providers

The screening exercise also identified that whilst in some cases the employer and mentors were separate people performing different roles, in others the same person was both the employer and the mentor. The sample therefore included three key groups:

1. employers
2. mentors
3. employer-mentors

Where an institution had both an employer and a mentor, the decision was taken to interview both these people. Interviewing employers and mentors from the same setting allowed for the exploration of the different perspectives of employers and mentors, and the interaction between them.

In terms of secondary sampling criteria, the sample included diversity as far as possible in terms of geographical area, whether students were working full-time or part-time and the number of EYSEFD students in each setting. The sample also included a number of peripatetic mentors, who were based at different institutions to the student, and employers at institutions that had taken on placement EYSEFD students, as opposed to having a current employee who was taking the EYSEFD.

1.4.4 Sample details

Sample summary

In total 54 people were interviewed, 17 employers, 18 mentors and 19 employer-mentors, across different institutions. The sample is summarised in the table below.

Institution Type	Employer	Mentor	Employer-mentor
State funded primary school	4	4	4
Private primary school	3	3	2
Private nursery	3	3	4
State, LEA or voluntary-sector funded nursery	2	2	4
Flagship initiative funded nursery	2	2	3
Sessional care	3	4	2

Of these institutions, 19 had one EYSEFD student in the setting, 13 had two, and 5 had more than two. With the exception of two playgroups and a private nursery, mentors were based in the same setting as the EYSEFD student/s. In the majority of settings the EYSEFD student/s were current employees at the setting. The exception was a local authority funded childcare centre, which had taken on three placement students, and a local authority funded nursery, which had taken on one part time placement student for the EYSEFD alongside a permanent employee who was doing the degree.

In the following sub-sections, more details are provided about the sample and the students they were working with, by institution type.

1.4.5 State funded primary schools

In this setting employers and employer-mentors were senior teachers, deputy head teachers or head teachers. Mentors were either reception teachers or teachers of older primary school children. Employers, mentors and employer-mentors varied in

their levels of certification, holding qualifications such as B Eds, Cert Eds and honours degrees.

Students tended to hold less senior jobs such as teaching assistant, nursery nurse and SEN support posts. However, some were more senior, for example one was a class teacher and another was the school's ICT co-ordinator. Typically, students were less qualified than their employer, mentors or employer-mentors holding qualifications such as GCSEs, NNEBs, NVQ Level 2 and TA qualifications.

1.4.6 Private primary schools

In this setting employers and employer-mentors were senior teachers, deputy head teachers or head teachers. Mentors were reception teachers, head teachers or the heads of school departments. Employers, mentors and employer-mentors had different levels of certification, holding qualifications such as Cert Eds and PGCEs.

EYSEFD students often held less senior jobs than employers and employer-mentors, such as teaching assistant or kindergarten or nursery leader. Typically EYSEFD students were also less qualified than their employer, mentors or employer-mentors holding qualifications such as NNEBs, and NVQ Level 3 or 4s.

1.4.7 Nurseries

Employers and employer-mentors in this setting were typically owners, heads or directors of nurseries. Mentors were often nursery teachers or managers. Employers, mentors and employer-mentors held a variety of qualifications such as NNEBs, BTECs, NVQ Level 3 or 4s, degrees and masters degrees and Cert Eds. Some were Montessori qualified.

In this setting, students tended to occupy less senior jobs than their employers and employer-mentors. However they were sometimes as senior as their mentors, holding positions such as nursery officer, senior nursery manager or deputy nursery manager. EYSEFD students tended to hold qualifications such as NNEBs, BTECs and NVQ Level 3 or 4s and were therefore in many cases as qualified as their mentors.

1.4.8 Sessional care settings

Sessional care based employers and employer-mentors were typically managers, heads or directors of sessional care providers. Mentors were assistant playgroup leaders, deputy managers and an infant teacher. Employers, mentors and employer-mentors held a variety of qualifications such as BTECs, NNEBs, diplomas in pre-school practice and in some cases an honours degree or Cert Ed.

Students tended to occupy less senior jobs than their employers and employer-mentors, although there were also cases where students were on the same level or even a higher level than their mentors. They often had similar levels of qualification to their mentors.

1.5 Fieldwork and analysis

Fieldwork was conducted between the 10th May and 19th July, 2005. Interviews were carried out in employers' and mentors' places of work, and lasted for about an hour and a half.

Interviews were carried out using a topic guide developed in consultation with the department (see Appendix C). Different topic guides were used for employers, mentors and employer-mentors. The topic guide helped to ensure systematic coverage of key areas across interviews, but was also used flexibly in order to allow issues of relevance for individual respondents to be covered through detailed follow-up questioning and probing around pertinent issues. In this way, respondents were able to discuss the issues in their own words and with their own emphasis.

Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using 'Framework', a content analysis technique developed by NatCen. It involves the systematic analysis of verbatim interview data within a thematic matrix. The key topics and issues emerging from the interviews were identified through familiarisation with interview transcripts. A series of thematic charts were then drawn up and data from each transcript were summarised under each topic. This then allowed for the detailed exploration of the charted data, exploring the range of views and experiences in different themes and allowing comparison across cases and groups of cases.

Where names are used in quotations or case examples, these have been changed to preserve confidentiality. It is indicated whether someone was an employer, mentor or an employer-mentor, and the type of institution they worked in.

1.6 Report outline

The remainder of this report is divided into five further chapters:

Chapter 2 outlines different routes through which employers became involved in the EYSEFD, the information made available to them about the degree, their conceptualisation of the degree, employers' motivations for supporting students on the degree and any concerns they had about this involvement. Finally, it considers the different ways in which employers viewed their role in relation to the degree.

Chapter 3 explores the roles of mentors of EYSEFD students, including consideration of how individuals became mentors, the level and type of information they received about the role and how this affected their roles. It describes how mentoring was carried about in practice, and finally, people's feeling about being a mentor.

Chapter 4 examines how EYSEFD students were accommodated in work settings, the logistical, financial and personal challenges associated with this, and factors affecting how this was done.

Chapter 5 looks at employers' and mentors' feelings about having an EYSEFD student in the workplace, impacts on the students' workplace skills and attitudes, on the setting more widely, and on parents and children using the setting. It then goes on to examine views of the impact of the EYSEFD on employees' career progression, and employer views about supporting future EYSEFD students through the degree.

Chapter 6 outlines the key conclusions of this study, and recommendations made by employers and mentors for the further development and improvement of the EYSEFD.

2 EMPLOYER INVOLVEMENT IN THE EYSEFD

Employers play an important role in accommodating EYSEFD students in their work places and supporting students more widely. This chapter examines employers' attitudes towards, and involvement in, the EYSEFD.

The chapter begins by outlining the different routes through which employers became involved in the EYSEFD, the information made available to them on the degree, and their conceptualisation of the degree. It then goes on to explore employers' motivations for supporting students on the degree and any concerns they had about this involvement. The chapter ends by exploring the different ways in which employers viewed their role in relation to the degree.

This chapter is based on interviews with respondents who were either employers or employer-mentors to EYSEFD students.

2.1 How employers became involved in the EYSEFD

Employers became involved in the EYSEFD through a number of different means, ranging from employers who had proactively suggested it to employees through to those who had been approached by employees who were interested in undertaking the qualification, or made aware of it by future mentors, who had identified it with specific students in mind. In cases where employees had suggested the EYSEFD to students themselves, they tended to have learned about it through word of mouth, or through contacts in the HEI or local authority. In more exceptional cases, employers had been involved in the development of the EYSEFD themselves.

An employer in a multi-agency setting had been involved in the development and design of the EYSEFD alongside a nearby university. They were targeted as a pilot site for the delivery of the WBL, and staff members became aware of the EYSEFD in this way.

Finally, in some cases, students were already undertaking the course when they were hired, or were accepted as placement students by employers; in the former cases, employers had agreed to let them continue with the EYSEFD in their new place of employment.

Where employers were proactive in introducing the course to their employees, this tended to be where they had undertaken similar qualifications themselves and perceived them to be of value, or where they had a strong commitment to staff training, and felt that the EYSEFD would challenge and develop their staff members. Whilst in some instances this commitment stemmed from a feeling that both the setting and the individual would benefit from the EYSEFD, there were also instances where employers' main reason for suggesting the EYSEFD to a member of staff was that they took a strong personal interest in the development and progression of the individual staff member.

Where employers had been approached by employees or future mentors about their participation in the EYSEFD, they generally reported that they had been happy to agree to the employee taking the EYSEFD. This was typically because they felt that it was important to support staff development, might bring advantages to the setting, for example through sharing learning about the Early Years, or that it might improve staff practice and motivation. In many cases this was in spite of the fact that accommodating an EYSEFD student in the workplace presented the employer with extra work in terms of accommodating their employee's attendance at college, and in some cases arranging cover for their WBL (see also Chapter 4).

The means by which employers became involved in the EYSEFD did not necessarily impact on their subsequent attitude towards the course. For example, employers who had been proactive in encouraging students to apply for the EYSEFD sometimes went on to delegate a large part of the responsibility for supporting students to the mentor. Similarly, employers who had not been aware of the course prior to being approached about it by a student could go on to be actively supportive and accommodating of students.

A nursery nurse from a private nursery found out about the EYSEFD when she enquired about undertaking a degree in Early Childhood Studies. The college suggested that she might prefer to undertake the EYSEFD as there was more funding available with it, and it was more appropriate for students with children. Her employer had no reservations about supporting her.

The head teacher of a public primary school identified their staff member as being an appropriate candidate for the EYSEFD during a professional interview, when the student expressed the desire to develop her role. Together they decided that the student should try to train to become a teacher over a long period of time, and the head teacher, who had learned about the EYSEFD through a flyer, suggested that the course might be a good vehicle for this development.

2.1.1 Agreements of commitment

Employers had in some cases been asked by colleges to sign letters of commitment to supporting the students, and in others cases colleges checked (verbally) that employers understood the course requirements and agreed to support them.

Formal agreements of commitment to supporting students generally did not appear to have made a significant impression on employers, with many struggling to recall whether or not they had done this. Where it had occurred, there is no evidence to suggest that it had resulted in employers taking a different attitude to supporting the EYSEFD or conceiving of their role differently, although some welcomed agreements which also clarified their roles and responsibilities.

2.2 Information about the EYSEFD received by employers

2.2.1 Information received by employers

Employers received information about EYSEFD from five main sources; the student themselves, the mentor, written information from the college, face-to-face contact with the college and finally in some cases contact with the college tutor.

Exceptionally employers undertook information gathering exercises on the degree themselves.

Mentors and students were often the main source of information about the EYSEFD, both at the outset, and once the course was underway. Employers typically tended to gain information on the EYSEFD from students and mentors informally, by asking them about their progress in passing, or by discussing issues raised as part of the degree on a one-to-one basis, or through lunchtime staff room discussions, for example. Employers sometimes also received information from students and mentors, or sought more formal periodic updates from the mentor on the running of the course, and their student's progress.

Whilst some employers were satisfied with receiving information about the EYSEFD via students, others were concerned that because communication tended to be ad hoc and informal, it did not provide them with a good ongoing knowledge of what was happening on the course. In addition, concern was expressed that where students were struggling with the course, they might be reluctant to feed this back to employers, who would therefore be unable to offer support. Conversely, there was a feeling that where students were doing well on the course, they might be overly modest and not share this information. Satisfaction with receiving information via the mentors varied according to the extent employers wanted an active role in the EYSEFD themselves, see section 2.2.2 below.

Written information from colleges took the form of booklets or letters of introduction to the course, giving an overview of the EYSEFD and in some cases outlining what was required of settings as part of the WBL. Employers had sometimes received more detailed information in the form of handbooks or folders but did not appear to have read this information in detail. Levels of satisfaction with this form of information tended to depend also on how involved employers wanted to be in the EYSEFD, but in general this was not felt to be an adequate source of information on its own.

Exceptionally, employers were invited to attend introductory meetings at the HEIs providing the EYSEFD. There was limited evidence of employers attending these however, either because of general time constraints or because they were held at unhelpful times or because the college was perceived to be too far away. Where employers were able to attend, however, they found them to be useful because they were given additional information on the course, and were able to put faces to names. Attendance at this type of meeting was in other instances viewed as being part of the mentor role, although in fact mentors tended to encounter similar problems with attendance, see Chapter 3, below.

Where tutors had visited work settings to undertake assessments of students or see how they were getting on more generally, employers had sometimes used this as an opportunity to ask questions about the format and requirements of the EYSEFD or student progress. Whilst respondents had welcomed this opportunity, there was also commonly a feeling that this contact seemed opportunistic on their part, and that tutors should build meetings with employers into their work place visits more formally. This contact was also not felt to preclude the need for more ongoing information from the college.

Finally, where employers felt that they had not been given sufficient information, some were proactive in obtaining further information themselves, for example by undertaking internet research on the qualification, or reviewing materials relating to similar qualifications.

2.2.2 Employer feelings about information received

Employers' levels of satisfaction in relation to the information they had received about the EYSEFD varied significantly, ranging from broad satisfaction to strong dissatisfaction. In some cases employers who had been involved in the degree from the early stages indicated that there had been some improvement in the clarity and accuracy of information about the EYSEFD as it bedded down, although even in these cases there remained instances of employers who were dissatisfied.

A number of overlapping factors explained levels of satisfaction with information received; these are described below. A broad finding was that those employers who took an active interest in the EYSEFD tended to feel that they would have benefited from more information from the HEI about the EYSEFD and their employee's progress on it. A further broad finding was that lack of early information was viewed particularly negatively by those employers who had subsequently found the course to be quite demanding on their time and resources as an individual or setting.

Amount of information received

The first factor explaining levels of satisfaction was the *amount* of information received. As outlined above, this seemed to vary significantly between employers, ranging from those who had attended meetings at the HEI or met the course tutors in the employment setting through to those who relied on handbooks or the student themselves for information, or who felt they had received very little information at all.

The variable levels of information received by employers seemed have occurred as a result of different HEI practices with regard to informing employers about the EYSEFD, the extent to which information received was shared between employers, mentors and students and the how proactive employers were in seeking information.

Employer need for information

The second factor was how much information employers felt that they needed about the EYSEFD, which was based on a number of variables, described below.

- **How employers viewed their role in relation to the EYSEFD**

As described in Section 2.5 below, there were significant variations between employers in terms of how they viewed their role in relation to the EYSEFD. Whilst some were very keen to play an active part, others were happy to limit their involvement to the occasional catch-up with the student or mentor, or to overseeing logistical issues, such as arranging cover. Unsurprisingly, the more restricted an employer's view of their role in relation to the EYSEFD, the less they tended to feel the need for detailed information about its content and their employee's progress; conversely, the more actively involved employers were, the more they tended to feel the need to be kept well-informed. A particular request from the more interested employers was for more information about the nature and scope of the EYSEFD course, the role of the employer and mentor, exactly what the college or student would require from the employer, for example in relation to day release and facilitating WBL, the assignments students were being asked to undertake, and how they were getting on with the EYSEFD.

The head teacher of a private primary school was happy for his kindergarten leader to be taking the EYSEFD, because she was doing it in her 'own time', but did not feel that it would bring many benefits to the setting because she was 'already' an excellent kindergarten leader. He was happy to delegate involvement in the EYSEFD to the mentor, and did not feel the need to receive any information about the EYSEFD or his employee's progress.

- **Time**

Related to the above factor, employers' feelings about the levels of information they needed were also influenced by how much time they felt that they had to keep abreast of developments in relation to the EYSEFD and their employee's progress on it. In particular, some respondents acknowledged that they could have been more proactive in finding out about the course or getting updates on student progress from the student, mentor or college, but felt that time constraints and other demands on their time made this challenging in practice. The feeling here was that the HEI should provide detailed, easily digestible updates, either through regular tutor visits to the setting, or in the form of written bulletins.

- **Employer confidence about delivering WBL**

Employers' previous experience of and confidence in accommodating students on WBL in their setting was an additional factor influencing their information needs. In particular, amongst employers taking an active and interested role in the EYSEFD, those who lacked prior experience of work-based qualifications tended to feel the need for more detailed information from the college than those who had had employees take work-based qualifications in the past. This was not universally the case however, with some employers with previous experience of work-based qualifications nevertheless feeling the need for detailed information about the EYSEFD on the grounds that it was new, and likely to be very different to their experiences of accommodating for example NQTs or NVQ students.

- **The perceived role of the mentor**

Employers who played more narrowly defined roles, and delegated responsibility for supporting students to mentors tended to be more satisfied with the relatively limited information from colleges than those who were actively involved themselves. They assumed that the mentor would have, or be able to obtain, the information they needed and were happy with receiving information second-hand through the student and mentor.

However, there were also instances where employers felt that, although they had delegated the bulk of responsibility for supporting students to the mentor, communication with the mentor was not working well, and they were receiving insufficient feedback. This tended to happen in cases where the mentor was based on a separate site or in a separate organisation to the employer.

- **Levels of personal interest in their employee's progress**

Whilst employers were all interested to some degree in their employee's development, there were instances where the employer had taken a marked personal interest in the development and progress of the employee taking the EYSEFD (see also Section 2.4, below). This group of employers tended to be particularly concerned when they felt that information about the students' progress on the EYSEFD and how the setting could best influence this progress, was not forthcoming.

- **Perceptions of how the student was doing on the EYSEFD, and how well the course was organised**

Where employers had concerns about the level and intensity of the course, and their student's abilities to complete it and achieve good marks, lack of information also tended to be a particular concern. This was particularly the case for employers who perceived themselves as *'investing'* in their employee through allowing them to take the EYSEFD and who were therefore concerned that their investment might not be bearing fruit.

Marie, the manager of a private nursery, was recently told by her EYSEFD employee that she had failed two of her modules, and was having to re-take them. Marie noted that the employee sounded 'embarrassed' about this, so did not want to press her. Marie felt concerned, but did not know who to contact in the college to ask about how the employee was doing overall, and whether there was anything more that could be done to help her in the workplace.

Related to this, there were also employers who had the understanding - based on their conversations with the EYSEFD employee - that certain aspects of the course were poorly organised, a finding that chimes with the longitudinal student study which found that students reported a general sense of disorganisation surrounding the EYSEFD.¹¹ For example they had heard that information about assignments was

¹¹ Knight, K., Tennant, R., Dillon, L., and Weddell, E. (2005) Evaluating the Early Years Foundation Degree: A qualitative study of students' views and experiences, Chapter 2. *Publication forthcoming.*

inadequate, assignments were poorly timed, or that high staff turnover on the part of EYSEFD teaching staff had created difficulties for the students. Employers with this understanding often felt that had they been better informed about the course structure and content at the outset, they would be better able to step in and help with any difficulties the student was having. Without this information they could feel helpless about doing anything other than providing encouragement and moral support.

It could also be the case however, that where employees were perceived to be doing well, employers wanted to hear about this in more detail from the college so that, for example, they could feed this back to schools governors, or in parental newsletters. More exceptionally, employers felt that being given feedback from colleges would be invasive, and that students should be able to feedback voluntarily.

2.2.3 Understanding of the EYSEFD

Understanding of the EYSEFD amongst employers was mixed, and closely related to how they became involved in it, and the level and nature of the information they had received. Whilst understanding on the part of some employers was good, others appeared to have limited, and in some cases inaccurate, understanding of the EYSEFD and its key elements.

Employers were broadly aware that the EYSEFD was equivalent to NVQ 4, and was aimed at staff working with children in early years settings. There was also a broad understanding that the qualification performed an important role in supporting more experienced, and often older workers in having their knowledge and expertise recognised, in line with the original conception of the course. There were also employers who strongly identified the EYSEFD as being a route into teaching, and generally understood the qualification as being equivalent to the foundation year of a teaching degree. Finally, some employers distinguished the EYSEFD from NVQ level 4, because the later was viewed as being geared towards staff wanting to move into management positions.

However, employers were in other instances unclear about the relationship of the EYSEFD to other qualifications and its value. In particular, employers felt that they were unclear as to what EYSEFD completers were viewed as being equipped to do, whether or not the EYSEFD conferred BA status, which roles it was anticipated that they would progress into and whether the EYSEFD was called what it was because it was a foundation level degree, or was for people working with foundation level children. In exceptional cases, employers were confused as to whether or not attaining a EYSEFD qualified staff to work as a teacher. In addition to this uncertainty, limited understanding led to onwards progression routes being conceived very narrowly, with some employers viewing the EYSEFD's sole purpose as being to promote progression into teacher training (see also Chapter 5 for details of employers' attitudes towards the progression of staff who completed the EYSEFD).

The form, content and delivery of the EYSEFD was also unclear for employers in several respects. First, there were employers who did not seem clear that WBL

comprised a significant part of the EYSEFD, or what it was intended to entail. Employers were also not always clear about the practical aspects of the EYSEFD, in particular how long it took to complete. Finally, the way in which the EYSEFD was assessed represented lack of clarity on the part of some employers, who were uncertain for example as to who was responsible for assessment, when and where it was meant to be undertaken, and for which elements of the course.

2.3 Impact of employer understanding of, and attitudes towards, the EYSEFD

It was evident that the quality and nature of employers' understanding of the EYSEFD had a number of implications for their feelings about the EYSEFD and the way that they went about accommodating the student, and in some cases mentor.

First, where employers had little (or no) understanding of what the student was doing on the EYSEFD, they were unsurprisingly less likely to have planned ahead in terms of accommodating WBL, securing cover for when students were attending college or completing assignments, or for mentoring to take place. Conversely, the better informed employers were, the more likely they were to make arrangements in advance for accommodating WBL, attendance at college and completing written work. Logistics of accommodating students in the workplace are discussed further in Chapter 4.

Second, limited information could result in ongoing reliance on the student to find out how the course was going, and what it required of them. Where students were senior or viewed as being very responsible and able, employers had fewer concerns about relying on them for information on the course. Conversely, where students were viewed as being less reliable, employers were not as confident that they would receive accurate information about course timings. Less confident or able students, were also felt to be reluctant to keep employers apprised of how they were doing on the course.

In addition, lack of communication with the college led some employers to express disappointment with the EYSEFD more generally, and concerns about its quality. A particular feeling in this context was that, given the EYSEFD was work-based, lack of communication on the part of the HEI with work-place settings suggested that the course lacked the necessary quality-control to ensure that the students' work-place experiences were of sufficient high quality. Employers who felt like this commonly requested for work places to be assessed for suitability at the start of an employee's involvement with the EYSEFD, and regularly throughout the course. Related to this, a number of employers also expressed concern about the way that WBL was assessed, particularly where college tutor visits to the setting had been non-existent or rare. In particular, they wondered how college tutors could assign a mark to the employee's work-based practice without having been there to observe it themselves. As a result they queried the standards demanded on the course, and robustness of the resultant qualification.

2.4 Motivations for supporting students

It was striking that despite there often being dissatisfaction about levels of information about the EYSEFD and significant variation in terms of employer understanding about it, employers were generally broadly happy to allow students to undertake the EYSEFD, for three main, sometimes overlapping, groups of reasons, which are described in more detail in the sections below:

- a broad commitment to training, but not necessarily the EYSEFD specifically;
- a specific interest in the EYSEFD; or
- student-related motivations.

Employer's early motivations for supporting students in undertaking the EYSEFD sometimes changed over time as they became more familiar with its content and came to appreciate different aspects of it. For example, some employers whose motivations for supporting the student originated with the employee's desire to undertake the degree came over time to appreciate that it also had significant benefits for the setting (described in Chapter 5).

2.4.1 A broad commitment to staff training in general

One group of employers were motivated to support students through the EYSEFD not so much because they had an interest in the EYSEFD *specifically* but rather because they had a broad commitment to supporting staff training in general, and felt that they would be likely to support members of staff through any qualification that appeared relevant to the setting, and likely to improve their practice.

Specifically, these employers named a number of benefits to supporting staff through setting-related qualifications:

- **Increased expertise, reflectiveness and quality:** Employers from a range of settings were motivated to accommodate the EYSEFD student because they viewed staff upskilling as beneficial in supporting the introduction of new ideas, reflection on existing approaches and development of good practice. In some cases, these employers had supported the EYSEFD employee through other qualifications in the past, and reported that they had brought a great deal back to their setting.
- **Positive impact on staff retention:** Improved retention was identified by some employers as a motivation for supporting employees who wanted to undertake the EYSEFD, and indeed other work-based qualifications. They felt that employees were more likely to remain and progress within settings over the medium to long term if they felt that their employers had invested in them and were interested in their career development.

Employers who expressed this broad commitment to staff training came from the full range of settings included in the research. However, this commitment seemed particularly predominant amongst private nurseries, seemingly because it was often seen as difficult to retain good staff because of the perceived growing competition from Children's Centres.

An employer from a private nursery felt it was a straightforward decision to support a senior member of staff to undertake the EYSEFD . She felt that undertaking training was likely to improve staff performance, but also that one of the reasons why the staff member in question has stayed at the nursery was because of its perceived willingness to support training.

A primary school head teacher said that she was very happy to support four of her employees through the EYSEFD, when approached, because she felt that the qualification was likely to improve their skills and thereby encourage them to consider taking up additional responsibilities within the school. She said that she would have been equally happy to have supported them through another qualification provided that it was relevant to the setting.

2.4.2 A specific interest in the EYSEFD

A second group of employers expressed the same benefits as those described above, but in addition expressed benefits relating to the fact that the qualification was the EYSEFD specifically. These employers tended to be those who were familiar with the content and format of the EYSEFD.

The first perceived benefit was the focus of the EYSEFD on early years and foundation stage children. Employers felt that this focus would be helpful in developing staff understanding and expertise in this area, and improving service delivery in this respect. This was particularly the case in settings such as primary schools, where could be a feeling that the foundation stage had perhaps received less emphasis and attention in the past than it merited, particularly in the light of developments such as Birth to Three Matters. However, the emphasis on the foundation stage could also be seen as a significant benefit by employers in settings such as nurseries which already had a specialism and experience in this area, but who wanted to develop their reputation and quality further.

An employer from a private nursery felt that the EYSEFD appeared to be a really useful qualification because of its emphasis on foundation stage practice and child development. The employer felt that having students undertake the EYSEFD was likely to have positive benefits for the setting, in particular, by developing service quality within the already 'fantastic' pre-school room.

A second perceived type of benefit relating to the EYSEFD specifically was that it was a high level qualification that supported already experienced staff with qualifications such as NVQ 3 or NNEB through to Foundation Degree, BA or even in some instances qualified teacher status. Employers in primary schools tended to be most positive about the EYSEFD in this respect given that, as described in Chapter 5 below, there were more varied opportunities for staff progression as a result of achieving the EYSEFD than in other settings in the sample; for example, going on to achieve Higher Level Teaching Assistant status, taking on additional responsibilities such as SEN or IT co-ordinators or even going on to train as a teacher within the setting.

However, this was also seen as a significant advantage in multi-agency settings such as Children's Centres, where there were varied opportunities for staff advancement, and in nurseries where management 'gaps' were anticipated in the near future, and where the employers saw the EYSEFD as a solid base for equipping their employee to fill the gap.

A further benefit of the EYSEFD specifically, mentioned by employers in multi-agency settings such as Early Excellence Centres and Children's Centres, was that they understood the EYSEFD had a strong emphasis on multi-agency working and would therefore better equip their employees with the necessary skills to work in these settings.

A multi-agency team in a city-based Early Excellence Centre was in the process of restructuring. The employee regarded the EYSEFD as having helped develop the skills and knowledge of one staff member, thereby preparing her for a new role in reconfigured team.

In addition, a number of employers across all of the settings included in the research expressed the view that whilst setting managers were not currently required by the government to have the EYSEFD, they might be in the future. As a result, they regarded supporting an employee through the EYSEFD as a means of safeguarding the future of the setting.

Finally, there were also employers who felt more broadly that the EYSEFD qualification was likely to be of increasing significance in the Early Years sector in the future, particularly with the drive to create Children's Centres in every area. They therefore felt that supporting an employee through the qualification was a means of helping them to secure their careers in the sector.

2.4.3 Student-centred motivations

Finally, there was a group of employers whose predominant motivation for supporting the employee through the EYSEFD was for the sake of the employee themselves. In these instances, benefits to the setting were secondary considerations, or were not considerations at all; for example, the employers did not think that the setting was likely to benefit from the employee's involvement in the EYSEFD. Employers in this group tended to be based in smaller nurseries or sessional care settings – where opportunities for progression tended to be limited (see Chapter 5) and also in schools and pre-schools where the EYSEFD employee already occupied the highest position in the nursery, for example kindergarten leader.

The extent to which these employers were passive or reactive in relation to the EYSEFD and their employee's ongoing involvement in it varied. At one end of the spectrum were employers who were quite frank about having little interest in the EYSEFD. They had agreed to the employee studying the EYSEFD because they did not think it would do the setting 'any harm'; for example, the employee was attending college in their own time, or they had found it financially and logistically easy to accommodate - and because the employee was keen to do so. However, they did

not think that the setting would benefit for a number of reasons: they had limited awareness of it's content and benefits; they felt that the employee was already as well-qualified as they needed to be for their role, and therefore likely to leave if they achieved the EYSEFD; or because it did not fit as well as other qualifications with the ethos of the setting.

An employer and owner of a private Montessori nursery had no real reservations about allowing an employee to go on the EYSEFD. She assumed that because it was child based, [you] 'can only assume that it's good news' and did not feel that it would cause any substantial disruption or have cost implications for the nursery. However, she said that she would have preferred the employee to have studied for a Montessori qualification, because this would have been more relevant to the setting.

In exceptional cases where employers had this attitude, students were already undertaking the EYSEFD when they became employed by setting.

An EYSEFD student was already undertaking the EYSEFD when they were hired as a deputy manager of a private nursery. The employer accepted this as a fait accompli, not feeling that she could object, but did not perceive the course as having any clear or immediate benefits to the setting, and felt the individual was already well-qualified to do the job.

At the other end of the spectrum were employers who were proactive in encouraging their employee to take the EYSEFD, and in supporting them through it. This was even though they saw it as being mainly about benefiting the employee rather than the setting, for example because they felt they were likely to 'lose' them after they had completed the EYSEFD, or that the setting was having to make considerable sacrifices to enable them to take the EYSEFD in relation to financial or staff resources. In some cases these employers (and mentors) were also making considerable personal sacrifices, for example taking work home because they had given up time to support the student. Employers at this end of the spectrum tended to have a very protective attitude towards the members of staff taking the EYSEFD and their career development - often because the employee was perceived to have more potential than they had yet fulfilled - and were making the sacrifice because they felt it was important to give them encouragement and support to move on in their careers.

The head of a local authority funded pre- school agreed to allow a pre-school teacher (who had been based in the pre-school for twenty years) to undertake the EYSEFD because she was very keen to do so, and because the employer felt that the employer's current qualifications and position did not reflect her ability and experience. The head was covering herself for when the employee was at college, with implications for her own work load, and said that the supply money received from DfES did not come near to covering the cost of this.

2.5 Concerns about students taking the course

Whilst employers were broadly positive about supporting EYSEFD students, for the reasons described above, a number of initial concerns were also raised about doing so (the longer term experiences of employers in accommodating the EYSEFD are considered in Chapter 5). These were not expressed by all employers, some of whom had very few concerns at all.

The first type of concern related to the amount of time the EYSEFD would require from students. Employers worried for example that undertaking the EYSEFD would be challenging for students with substantial personal or familial responsibilities, in particular where students had young children.

The ability of some employees to cope with the demands and ultimately complete the EYSEFD was a subject of concern for other employers, particularly where they had doubts about their employee's academic abilities. For example, there were employers who felt that individual employees were likely to struggle with the demands of the course either because they had left school early with minimal study skills, or were not particularly academically able. In other cases students had ongoing personal problems, which employers worried that the demands of the course would aggravate. Where employers had these concerns, they were sometimes frustrated by what they perceived to be the college's failure properly to assess student's aptitude for the course. They also sometimes questioned whether the local college was sufficiently prepared to teach and support these students to a degree standard.

A final concern of employers on behalf of students related to the perceived lack of financial rewards for students completing the degree, particularly in those settings (see Chapter 5) where employers felt that they could not offer job promotions or salary rises as a result of completion of the EYSEFD.

The impact that having the student undertake the course would have on the setting was another concern for employers. A number of potentially negative impacts were identified. The first related to the impact of the course on employee performance. Whilst employers were often optimistic that the EYSEFD would improve employee skills and practice (see Section 2.4, above), concern was also expressed by some that the demands of the course could impact negatively on the amount of time and energy EYSEFD employees had available for their jobs. There were also employers who were worried about the impact of the employee being away from the setting to attend college, and the finances of paying for cover. Finally, a number of employers with several staff in the setting undertaking the EYSEFD said that they had felt initially concerned about the burden of re-organisation, and the impact that having a number of staff off-site would have on their service delivery.

2.6 Employer roles in relation to EYSEFD students

This section considers how employers viewed their roles in relation to EYSEFD student, and how this worked in practice. Employers who were also mentors obviously tended to play an amalgamated role. This section focuses on the distinct roles they played as employers, whereas mentoring functions are treated in Chapter

3. First, the section describes the main types of employer involvement in the EYSEFD, some of which were overlapping. The main factors influencing the roles employers adopted are then explored in section 2.6.1, below. It is important to read this section in the context of findings from the longitudinal qualitative study, which found that whilst students' experiences of employer involvement varied, it was very important for students to feel that their employer was behind them even if they were not actually providing them with much practical support.¹²

- **Logistical involvement**

Logistical involvement comprised setting time aside for students and mentors to meet to discuss and undertake WBL; supplying students with policy statements for example on child protection, and sometimes discussing it with them; looking over letters to parents requesting permission for observations and making decisions about staff schedules. It could also include more ad hoc involvement, for example where students needed extra time off to complete an assignment. This type of involvement tended to occur where there was a fairly proactive mentor, who was undertaking the more 'hands-on' work with students.

The acting manager of a community nursery had a number of placement students undertaking the EYSEFD. She viewed her role in relation to them as being very similar to the one she played in relation to students undertaking other training: general facilitation, providing policies to the students, and ensuring that they had access to the necessary experiences to complete the course. She felt that the mentor's role was to supervise the students, and make sure that things were going smoothly for them.

- **Involvement relating to professional development**

Involvement relating to professional development included employers monitoring and assessing student's progress on the course both at college and in the workplace, as part of their wider managerial responsibilities. These employers generally felt that the EYSEFD was of value, and reflected the types of skills and competencies that they would like to see in their staff's everyday practice, and their progress on the course was therefore important to them. Again, these employer approaches tended to occur where mentors were playing fairly pro-active roles.

- **Practical, hands-on involvement**

Practical hands-on involvement tended to include undertaking observations, reading through work-related learning materials, and reading through assignments. These roles tended to be undertaken in parallel to mentor's responsibilities, with employers stepping in where they had a particular interest (for example in observing the employee's practice). In other cases, students approached them for specific elements of support because they were viewed as having particular skills, for example in relation to written compositions.

¹² *Ibid*, Chapter 3.

- **Personal involvement and emotional support**

Personal involvement and emotional support tended to occur on an informal, ad-hoc basis and included asking the student how they were progressing, having lunchtime discussions with them, and offering support to them where needed. The longitudinal qualitative study of students found that this type of support could be critical in encouraging students to continue with the course.¹³

- **Limited involvement**

Finally, some employers had very limited involvement in supporting or accommodating students on EYSEFD. Employers in this group regarded overseeing the EYSEFD as the mentor's task, and did not tend to be aware of what their employee was doing on the EYSEFD, or to know much about the qualification.

An employer in a private primary school felt that her role in relation to the EYSEFD student had been very limited. She viewed the student as a bit of 'a loner', and said that she had only had one discussion with the student on the EYSEFD, in relation to an early essay. She had not spoken to the employee about the EYSEFD since then, although the employer acknowledged that this could be because the employee knew she was very busy.

2.6.1 Factors influencing employer roles

There were a number of factors which influenced the types of roles that employers adopted in relation to the EYSEFD students. Setting was not an overarching explanation here, although it sometimes affected the extent to which the various factors below affected employers, and has been identified where relevant.

The first was employer levels of interest in the EYSEFD. As described in section 2.4 above, employers had a range of different motivations for supporting students on the EYSEFD. Enthusiasm in the degree appeared to be reflected in employers keeping students up to date about developments in the early years sector, discussing their courses with the EYSEFD employees, and going to extra ends to accommodate the course. Conversely, where employers were less enthusiastic about the EYSEFD, or its benefits to the setting, they tended to view the course as the student's responsibility and thus took a more limited role in supporting them.

A second influencing factor was employers' understanding of WBL which, as described in section 2.2 above, varied. Specifically, where it was viewed as distinct from student's everyday work and understood to be a significant element of the EYSEFD, employers were conscious of the need to put to time aside to facilitate it, including observations by the student and mentor. There were also employers who regarded it as their responsibility to ensure that the WBL opportunities available to students were sufficiently diverse (covering different subjects or age groups), and of a high standard. Conversely, where employers had not understood that WBL was a

¹³ *Ibid*, Chapter 3.

significant part of the EYSEFD they unsurprisingly had much lower levels of involvement in its facilitation.

A third significant factor affecting employer roles was how they perceived the role of the mentor. Where employers viewed mentors as having the primary responsibility for providing advice to students, dealing with day-to-day issues in relation to WBL and raising any issues about accommodating them they tended to conceive their roles much more narrowly. In particular, they had limited involvement in work-based learning, or supporting the student more widely. Employers were particularly willing to delegate responsibility to mentors who were experienced members of staff who tended to hold senior positions in the group settings, or who had responsibilities relating to the course, for example head of the foundation stage or responsibilities for training and development. Where employers tended to view the mentoring role more narrowly, for example relating primarily to pastoral support, they were more involved in logistical and practical roles. This tended to occur in smaller settings, or instances where mentoring staff were more junior.

Employers' roles in supporting staff training and development also influenced their involvement with the EYSEFD. Employers who were actively involved in staff development, for example, as line managers, oversaw student progress in parallel to these related responsibilities.

The perceived ability of EYSEFD students represented another influencing factor in how employers viewed their roles. Where students were viewed as being competent, employers appeared to be more confident about allowing them to pursue the EYSEFD independently, with or without the support of the mentor. Conversely, where students were struggling with the level or content of the course, or were dealing with personal problems outside work, employers responded in different ways, including reading through assignments, giving them time off to complete them or providing emotional support. However, other employers expressed frustration at having to accommodate students who were struggling with either the time demands or the level of the EYSEFD, and were frustrated by the perceived shortfalls in the support offered by colleges. This frustration was compounded where they felt that student's abilities had not been assessed properly by the college at the outset.

The amount of time employers had available also contributed to their conception of their own roles. The seniority and level of responsibility held by employers was one expression of this. Employers in larger settings, or with responsibilities for several settings, for example where they owned a chain of nurseries, appeared to know less about the student's progress. Conversely, employers in smaller settings, whilst still busy, appeared to be more closely engaged with students.

Employers' closeness to students represented an additional influencing factor. This related to firstly, the degree of contact they had with the students within the setting (and amount of time they had to speak with them) and secondly, personal closeness between employers and students. Where employers and student had close working relationships or personal friendships, the degree to which employers were engaged with students' progress and were ready to support them tended to be greater than when the relationship was more distant.

A final influencing factor on employer roles was their confidence in the college delivering the EYSEFD. In particular, where employers expressed doubts in the level of support, organisation or teaching quality on the part of colleges, they sometimes appeared more likely to step in and get involved with providing emotional support, and help with assignments. Conversely, where the student was felt to be well-supported by the college, employers were less likely to do this. It was also the case that where employers were unhappy with the amount of contact between the HEI and the workplace setting, they were in some instances more likely to step in to monitor the quality of the employee's WBL themselves or ensure that the mentor was doing so adequately. This was particularly the case for employers with a strong interest in staff training or quality standards.

2.7 Chapter summary

There were three main reasons why employers agreed to an employee taking the EYSEFD. First, there were employers who said that they would support an employee through *any* relevant qualification, because doing so brought benefits in terms of staff skills and retention. Second, there were employers who said that they were interested in the EYSEFD specifically. This was because they: appreciated the focus on the foundation stage (primary schools in particular, but also nurseries keen to develop their expertise in this area); welcomed the fact that it was a higher level qualification (again, most commonly primary schools, where opportunities for progression were more diverse); and appreciated its emphasis on multi-agency working (Children's Centres and Early Excellence Centres).

Finally there were employers who said that their primary motivation for supporting the employee through the EYSEFD was for the sake of the employee themselves, not the setting. Employers who felt like this tended most commonly to be based in settings where opportunities for progression through the EYSEFD were very limited. Some of these employers were frank about having little interest in the EYSEFD; they were supporting the employee because it did not cause the setting any difficulties to do so. However, in other cases these employers were proactive about supporting the employee, and were doing so because they wanted to help them progress in their careers, in spite of having to make sacrifices to do so.

Employer roles in relation to the EYSEFD varied considerably, ranging from those who had practical, hands-on involvement in terms of supporting it logistically and getting involved in the employee's work through to those who had very little or no involvement at all. Setting specifically did not seem to be an explanation for this variation. Rather, key explanatory factors were: employer levels of interest in the EYSEFD; the extent to which employers understood that the EYSEFD involved WBL; the extent to which they delegated overseeing the EYSEFD to the mentor; whether following the employee's progress in the EYSEFD was seen to fit with more general line management responsibilities; how able they perceived students were; the amount of time they had available; how close their relationship with the student was; and their levels of confidence in the college delivering the EYSEFD.

Employers' levels of satisfaction with the information they had received about the EYSEFD varied. Generally speaking, however, employers who were interested in the EYSEFD felt that levels of contact with the college had been insufficient, and would have liked more information about: the nature and scope of the EYSEFD course; the role of the employer and mentor; exactly what the college or student would require from the employer, for example in relation to day release and facilitating WBL; the assignments students were being asked to undertake and how the student was getting on with the EYSEFD. There was evidence that lack of contact with the college could have a negative effect on employers' ability to accommodate the EYSEFD, and on their attitudes towards the rigour of the qualification.

3 THE ROLE OF THE MENTOR

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the role of the mentors to EYSEFD students. Specifically, the chapter looks at the way that people became mentors and the level and type of information they received about the role, and how this affected ability to perform the role and attitudes towards it. The chapter then goes on to describe how mentoring was carried out in practice, identifying three distinct typological groups. Finally, the chapter describes the main factors influencing feelings about being a mentor, and the implications of being a mentor in addition to an employer.

This chapter raises a number of problems as well as benefits of the role, but should be read in the context of a key general finding of the longitudinal qualitative student study, which found that students viewed having a mentor as vital for the EYSEFD even where they were receiving less support than they would have liked.¹⁴

3.1 Overview of mentors

Mentors held a range of positions, including nursery and reception teachers through to nursery managers, senior teachers and head teachers, and varied in the qualifications they held. Typically, those working in LEA funded and private primary schools had qualified teacher status and were as or more qualified than the EYSEFD student they were mentoring.

Those working in nurseries and sessional care held a wider range of qualifications, ranging from qualified teachers through to NVQ Level 4, NVQ Level 3, NNEB, Advanced Diplomas and BTECS. In these settings, mentors were less likely to be more qualified than the EYSEFD student they were mentoring; implications of this are discussed later in the chapter.

3.2 The process of becoming a mentor

Mentors were approached about adopting the role in a number of different ways. In the most typical scenario, EYSEFD students approached mentors directly and asked them to take up the role. This usually involved some discussion of what the role would involve, although the level of detail imparted to the mentor by the student varied significantly, as described in section 3.3, below. These students had typically discussed with their employer who they would like to be their mentor prior to approaching the mentor.

In other instances, mentors were approached by employers and asked to adopt the role, again usually following a discussion with the student. There were also mentors who had been approached (via the employer) by the student's EYSEFD providing college.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, Chapter 3.

Generally speaking, mentors were happy with the way that they had been approached, and there was little evidence that the manner in which they were approached impacted on their subsequent attitudes towards mentoring.

Across employment settings, mentors reported four broad and overlapping reasons for having been approached to take on the role:

- **They were currently mentoring or had previously mentored** their EYSEFD student or other colleagues, for example, NQTs or NVQ students.

A respondent was invited to become a mentor by the head teacher of the LEA funded primary school in which she was teaching. This was because she had been a Qualified Involvement Teacher in a nursery and had prior experience of mentoring work-based learners.

- **They were more experienced or working at a higher grade than the student** and as such considered suitably placed to act as mentor.

The manager of a private nursery became an employer-mentor for her EYSEFD students because she was a higher rank and had worked in the setting for a greater number of years.

- **They worked closely with the student on a day-to-day basis and had a strong working relationship.** In some of these cases, the mentors in this group were more qualified or working at a higher grade than their student was. However this was not always true, particularly in smaller settings.

A room leader in a small voluntary pre-school became the mentor of the employee who worked in the room with her. Although she was not more qualified, she felt she was in the best position to take on the role because she worked closely with the student on a day to day basis and was in a good position to observe her work.

- **Nobody else could take on the role.** In these instances, the impression given was that there was little choice about who could take on the role, because there was only one person available to do it. Whilst in some cases these mentors were more qualified or experienced than the student, more often this was not the case.

A playgroup worker became the mentor for the playgroup leader, in spite of the fact that she was less qualified and experienced, because she was the only person who worked with the playgroup leader on a regular basis.

Larger settings with clear hierarchies and highly qualified staff, such as primary schools and multi-agency settings were more likely to have approached mentors on the basis of previous mentoring experience or because of their more senior position. This was sometimes also the case in smaller settings such as nurseries and sessional care. However, in these settings it was more typically the case that mentors were chosen because they worked closely with the student on a daily basis

or were the only person available to take on such a role. In two smaller settings in the sample there was considered to be no appropriate person to take on the mentoring role, and peripatetic mentors were used instead.

3.2.1 Formalising the role

Some mentors recalled having signed a formal agreement of commitment to take on the role, but others did not. There were no instances in this sample of mentors being interviewed by the college to assess their suitability prior to taking on the role.

Those who had signed a formal agreement of commitment were happy to have done so, and recalled feeling that it was a normal and expected part of the process to have their role in the EYSEFD formalised.

Feelings about not having signed a formal agreement of commitment or not having been interviewed by the college were mixed, and tended to depend on how mentors perceived the role (see section 3.4 below). Those who regarded the role as being primarily to provide informal support did not tend to be concerned about lack of formal contact; they saw themselves as being there to support the student as the student saw fit and were happy to negotiate this with the student over time.

However, those who understood that the mentoring role required a number of more formal tasks, such as evidencing and monitoring work, tended to be more concerned by the lack of formal contact. In particular their feeling was that colleges should check up on the suitability and commitment of mentors prior to the student commencing the EYSEFD, in order to ensure that the student received high quality work-place support and monitoring. They were concerned that the absence of formal contact would pose a risk, in some settings, of the work-place element of the EYSEFD being performed to a low level. Finally, an absence of a formal contact led some mentors to feel that the college was not valuing their input into the EYSEFD sufficiently highly.

3.3 Sources of information about mentoring

Information that mentors received about the EYSEFD and their role came from four main sources; the student themselves, written information from the college, meetings organised by the college and finally in some cases contact with the college tutor in the employment setting. Each of these sources of information are discussed. The section then concludes with a discussion of overall levels of satisfaction with information received, and the impacts of information on mentors' feelings about and ability to perform the role.

- **Information from the student**

Where mentors gained information from students, they described how their student acted as an intermediary between them and the college. Here, students gained information while they attended the college-based parts of the EYSEFD and relayed this to their mentors when they returned to the workplace. This included information about what the mentor role would involve and how much time it would take, what the EYSEFD was, and the nature of their written assessments and work-based learning.

Mentors' accounts suggested that the level and quality of information received from this source varied, from students who provided mentors with regular and detailed descriptions of the role and the requirements of the EYSEFD through to those who only provided sporadic and - in the eyes of the mentor - unsatisfactory, information.

The extent to which mentors were happy receiving information through the student varied. Where mentors were most positive, this tended to be because they had a good working relationship with the student, and felt confident that the student was an able and conscientious practitioner who was aware of the importance of communicating the EYSEFD's requirements. Mentors were much less happy about receiving information via this source where they doubted whether the student was keeping them fully informed about the requirements of the degree, or where they felt that the information was being received *in place* of further, more detailed information from the colleges.

An employer-mentor based in a small playgroup said that although she regularly asked the EYSEFD employee what he was doing on the degree, he was very rarely forthcoming. As a result she felt ill informed about what he was doing on the degree, and what she should be doing to help him. She felt that this severely limited her ability to mentor effectively, and said that she would have felt much happier had she been kept well informed by the college about what the employee was doing on the EYSEFD and how she could best support him.

- **Written information from the college**

A number of mentors said that they had received a booklet from the college at the outset of the course, outlining what was expected of them in the mentoring role.

Typically, mentors appreciated receiving leaflets and handbooks from the college in the initial stages of mentoring. They helped define the role of not only the mentor, but also the student and the employer. Mentors mentioned that the handbook explained how long the role would last for, the benefits of doing an EYSEFD, what was expected of the student and the modules students would undertake.

Miriam, a mentor in a private nursery, received a detailed handbook from the college, which she felt helped her to understand what her responsibilities were towards the student she was mentoring.

However, in rare cases mentors found receiving a handbook unhelpful. They either felt overloaded with information, meaning they became confused about what mentoring entailed or found the handbook too 'vague', leaving them uncertain and unconfident about their role.

- **College meetings**

Mentors often said that they had been invited to attend meetings with college tutors, other mentors and in some instances students prior to beginning mentoring or a few weeks after taking on the role. They described these meetings as having been to define the mentoring role, to give an overview of the EYSEFD more generally and, in

the case of ongoing meetings, to keep mentors up to date with the EYSEFD and the progress of their student.

Views about the usefulness of these meetings varied. On the one hand, a number of mentors said that they had found them a very positive experience. They had been reassured by the face-to-face interaction, and felt that it had served to help define and clarify the mentor role, explaining exactly what was required of them, what the EYSEFD comprised, and what the EYSEFD student would be doing at various points in the course. They also regarded the meetings as a useful opportunity to share learning with other mentors, and talk through any concerns that they had had with other mentors and the college tutors.

On the other hand, there were mentors who felt that meetings organised by the college had not met needs. Several reasons were given for this. First, some mentors said that they had not gained a clear understanding from the meetings about what the role of mentor should comprise. Indeed, in some cases mentors said that the college tutors themselves had seemed unclear about the mentor role, and felt that this should have been clarified before they attended the meeting.

Jane, a mentor in a private nursery, attended the initial mentoring meeting at the college where the EYSEFD employee in her setting was studying. She said that a lot of the meeting was spent debating what the role of a mentor should be. She found this 'confusing' and said she had expected the college to have a clear stance on what mentors should be doing.

Second, several mentors said that the meetings had concentrated on giving an overview of the EYSEFD at the expense of information about how to mentor in practise. They felt in particular that it would have been useful to be informed about how to conduct observations, fill out evidence forms, and give constructive feedback.

Third, there were mentors who felt that the meetings had provided them with very little information over and above what they had already been told in written information provided by the college. They felt as a result that the meeting had been a 'waste of time'.

Annie, an employer-mentor working as full time teacher at a private primary school attended a 'road show' style meeting with the EYSEFD providing college. She felt the information she was given only validated the leaflet her student had given her. Mentors did not get one-to-one time with tutors, rather they were spoken to in a group. Consequently, Annie felt it had not been worth travelling to the meeting.

Finally, some mentors complained that they had only been told about the meetings at very short notice, or that the meetings were held at inconvenient times or locations and that they had therefore been unable to attend. There were also mentors who found that other commitments, illness and holidays meant they missed meetings. Several gave the impression that they felt they should not be called upon to attend meetings in their spare time. A common request amongst mentors was for meetings to be held more than once, and for more notice to be given. There were also

mentors who felt that instead of asking mentors to attend college, college tutors should visit them in their setting.

- ***Meetings with college tutors***

There were also instances of mentors who said that they had met with college tutors in their employment setting and discussed their role. In most cases the impression was given that these meetings were ad hoc, and occurred when college tutors were in the college anyway visiting or assessing students.

Some mentors considered tutor visits to the employment setting a useful source of information. This was particularly the case where they had spoken to the tutor about how to approach mentoring, been reassured about their approach, and discussed the progress of the student and forthcoming work-based learning assignments and how to approach observations.

Lydia, a mentor working as a nursery teacher in a private nursery had been visited by a college tutor soon after she began mentoring. They had discussed what Lydia was expected to do with the student file and how she could adapt student tasks to their particular work setting. She felt happier about mentoring as a result of the visit, because the tutor had clarified her role.

These visits were regarded as less useful however where tutors only spoke very briefly with mentors, or focused their visits entirely on meeting with or assessing the student. Some mentors suggested that colleges should provide a dedicated tutor to liaise with mentors. They thought such a person could support them regularly on a one-to-one basis by guiding them in how to fill out forms and explaining what mentoring should involve at particular points in the EYSEFD. Mentors also felt this college tutor could identify student weaknesses, which the mentor could then focus support upon. The longitudinal qualitative student study found that students were also keen for college tutors' visits to the setting to be a forum for direct contact between the tutor and their mentor (and employer).¹⁵

3.3.1 Overall levels of satisfaction with information, and impacts

Mentors' overall levels of satisfaction with the information they received was mixed, and depended on factors such as the actual level of information they had received, and the extent to which they felt that they required information in order to carry out the role.

The first factor affecting mentors' levels of satisfaction was *how much* information they received. As can be seen from experiences described above, this varied significantly, from mentors who had attended several college meetings, received literature from the college, and been kept updated by their EYSEFD student through to those who had had very little contact from the college, or who felt that their student had been poor at informing them about the role and about the requirements of the

¹⁵ *Ibid*, Chapter 3.

EYSEFD. Unsurprisingly, those who were least well informed tended to be the least satisfied, feeling that lack of information affected their performance and confidence in the role (see below).

A second factor was the extent to which mentors felt that they *needed* information in order to carry the role out effectively. This was not related solely to levels of experience. For example, in some cases mentors with previous experience of mentoring or work-based learning felt that they did not require a large amount of information in order to perform effectively as an EYSEFD mentor. They felt confident that they knew what mentoring involved, and were happy to carry out the role in consultation with the EYSEFD student. This was especially the case for some given that, in contrast to their experience of mentoring for other qualifications, they did not have an assessment role.

Ruth, the Foundation Stage co-ordinator in a private primary school also had experience of mentoring NQTs. She said that whilst the information she had received about being an EYSEFD mentor had been much more limited, she was not worried about this, because she saw the role as being to support rather than assess. She also felt that if she did have any queries, she could easily telephone the college tutor.

Conversely, there were also experienced mentors who expressed real concern at what they regarded as low levels of information. In particular, they tended to compare the EYSEFD negatively with other qualifications such as NVQ and NQT, where they felt they had been much more fully and formally informed about what the role comprised. They were concerned that in comparison they had been given a very limited steer on what they should be doing and that as a result they were performing the role less effectively.

Mentors with little prior experience of mentoring, lower qualifications, or more limited experience were most likely to express the need for detailed information, and to be disappointed if they had not received it. However, there were also mentors in this group who did not regard lack of information as a problem. These were typically the mentors who were happy to adopt a 'reactive' role in relation to EYSEFD student (see Section 3.4, below).

However more often it seemed that limited information went hand in hand with concern about dissatisfaction with the role. Specifically, there were three main implications of limited information. First, not gaining enough information from the student, college or via tutor visits meant mentors were more likely to feel unconfident and unclear about what their role comprised, and how to carry it out. A consequence of this was that they felt unsure about what to expect of the student in terms of practical assignments and written work, which limited their ability to facilitate the assignments and to plan ahead in terms of time and input. A further consequence was that they felt guilty or inadequate, because they did not feel that they were providing as much support to the EYSEFD employee as they felt they needed.

Marion, an employer-mentor and manager of a private nursery had concerns that she had not supported her student enough or in the right ways because her lack of

information had left her in an 'ignorant little bubble'. Indeed, she felt that if she had not undertaken the EYSEFD herself, she would have had no understanding of how to mentor at all.

Natalie, a mentor in a local-authority funded pre-school did not have any contact with the college at all before becoming a mentor and has not made contact since because of a heavy workload and because she does not know who to telephone. Although she will sign things that the students 'shove under [her] nose', she has never felt that she knows what she is doing, and has a 'nagging doubt' that she is letting the students down.

There were also mentors who said that that lack of information resulted in them feeling undervalued by the college. This had led in some cases to mentors feeling disheartened about their involvement with the EYSEFD. Finally, some mentors also said that they had gained an unfavourable impression of the EYSEFD as a result of the lack of information. For example, they said that the degree seemed unprofessional, because it did seem to be run in an organised way, or that, for a work-based degree, there seemed to be a striking lack of emphasis on ensuring that the student received quality support in the work-place.

The longitudinal qualitative study of students found that there were also students who were unclear about what the mentoring role would comprise; an implication was that they did not feel able to 'ask enough' of their mentor, because they did not know what they were able to demand of them.¹⁶

3.4 The role of the mentor

There was variation in the way respondents understood the role of the mentor and the manner in which they mentored their students. These variations, and the reasons for them, are explored in this section.

3.4.1 Ways of establishing the mentoring role

Mentors were mixed in how they went about establishing themselves as mentors. Some established the role by becoming involved from the very outset of their student's engagement with the EYSEFD, for example, helping them fill in the first forms and assisting from that point on. Some discussed the course with their student and did a lot of reading to find out exactly what the mentor role was.

More typically, respondents did not actively seek to establish themselves in the mentor role. Rather, for these mentors the role evolved as the student progressed through the course. This was particularly the case for those who were already regarded as informal workplace mentors, who consequently felt that they already undertook the role.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, Chapter 3.

3.4.2 *Typologies of mentoring*

It was striking that there was considerable diversity amongst mentors in the sample in terms of what they understood mentoring to comprise, and how they went about mentoring. Whilst some had regular contact with the EYSEFD employee, signed off their work-based learning, and adopted a constructively critical stance towards their practical and written work, others had very little contact with the employee and in some cases did not appear to be evidencing that work had taken place.

This section describes the three mentoring typologies that were evident in the data: 'reactive mentors', 'pastoral mentors', and 'quality control mentors'. Whilst mentors did not tend to shift between these groups over the course of their involvement in the EYSEFD, this study did find that the intensity of support provided by mentors could shift over time, reflecting changes in the students' confidence; this was also a finding of the longitudinal qualitative student study.¹⁷

The 'reactive mentor'

What characterised mentors in this group was that they saw themselves as being there for the EYSEFD students as and when they were needed, and did not take a proactive role in setting up meetings or activities with the student. One mentor in this group, for example, described himself as being there for the EYSEFD students whenever they wanted to '*let off steam*'; another as being there if the EYSEFD employee had any queries or problems, or if they wanted help with facilitating work-based learning. Whilst some mentors in this group did say that they commented on written work, this was always at the request of the student. Often 'reactive' mentors did not talk about evidencing work, and it was not always clear to them that this was part of their role. Where they did, this was again done in a reactive rather than proactive way, and without any real understanding of or involvement in what they were signing off; one mentor, for example, said she felt as though she was '*just signing things*' that were put in front of her.

The manager of a private nursery said that she rarely meets with Emma, the deputy manager, to talk about the EYSEFD. She feels that she knows very little about what modules Emma is doing at any particular time, and has had no involvement in looking at Emma's written work, or observing her. She has never acted as a mentor before, so feels the role is 'alien' to her. She does not feel that the information from the college about what the role comprises has been very clear, and has never received a visit from the college tutor.

Many of the mentors in this group were from relatively small settings, were not more qualified than the EYSEFD students they were mentoring and did not have prior experience of mentoring. As a result, they often gave the impression of lacking the confidence to take a more proactive role. This was particularly the case given that they frequently felt that they had received very little information about the role from the college and therefore felt '*in the dark*' about what they were supposed to be doing. In addition, some 'reactive mentors' said that the EYSEFD employee they

¹⁷ *Ibid*, Chapter 3.

were working with did not give the impression that they needed them very much; either because they were extremely capable and confident or, in one case, because the mentor believed that they had an exaggerated self-belief.

There were also mentors in this group, however, who were more experienced or qualified than the EYSEFD students they were mentoring. One explanation for the adoption of a 'reactive' role in these cases was heavy workloads; for example the mentor had a lot of other tasks, which could sometimes include mentoring other students, and did not feel able to put aside a lot of time for the role.

The head teacher of a state primary school had decided to mentor the four EYSEFD students in his setting himself because they had recently had a high staff turnover, and he did not feel he could guarantee the students the same mentor for two years unless he performed the role. He was also mentoring two NQT teachers. Because of his busy schedule, he did not put aside specific time to spend with the EYSEFD students; rather, he said he was there to listen to them when they had problems. When he did talk to them, this tended to be informally, in 'snatched time.'

A further explanation was that people other than the designated mentor were actually carrying out the more hands-on mentoring role. For example, there were two cases of mentors in primary schools who said that the classroom teacher in which the EYSEFD student was based was actually doing most of the mentoring, although they were not the official mentor. There were also two peripatetic mentors in this group who felt that their distance from the student's day to day work necessarily meant that they were less able to be proactive, instead encouraging the student to come and see them when they wanted to talk anything over.

However, there were also mentors in the more qualified group who felt that the role had worked out as it had because they had received so little information about the role, and felt very unclear about what it should comprise. They felt that this was particularly the case in comparison to qualifications such as PGCEs, which had a much more clear set of requirements around mentoring.

Charlotte was working as an assistant head teacher in a LEA funded primary school. She had mentored for staff on PGCE and B Ed. courses in the past and had formally monitored and evaluated working practice for these students. Charlotte expected to mentor her EYSEFD students in a similar manner. However, she was 'shocked' that mentoring EYSEFD students in comparison seemed very informal, merely comprising talking to students about work and the course on an ad hoc basis around their normal work. Charlotte felt unsure about what her role was really supposed to be, and had had no contact with the college apart from an initial letter.

Finally, there was one 'reactive mentor' in this group, who was also an employer, whose attitude to the EYSEFD explained her stance. She was happy to let her employee do the degree, but stressed that she was not particularly interested in it and did not see it as bringing particular value to the setting. As a result, she assumed a 'hands-off' role.

In some cases, 'reactive mentors' were happy and confident about the role they adopted. This was particularly true for the more qualified, such as head teachers, who believed that the approach was working well, and that EYSEFD employees were 'using' them as and when they were needed. Others, however, expressed dissatisfaction with the role. In particular, they talked about feeling guilty that they were not doing more, or dissatisfied that the role seemed to be so unclearly defined. A few questioned whether they were adding anything at all to the EYSEFD employee's experience of the degree saying, for example, that they felt like a '*mentor in name only*'.

The 'pastoral mentor'

This group conceptualised their role as being largely to provide pastoral support to the student, although they might also in some cases provide help with written work or in facilitating work-based learning. They were more proactive in providing this support than the 'reactive mentors' described above.

In one instance, a mentor adopting the largely pastoral role said that whilst she was signing off work and conducting observations, she had understood very clearly from the college that her primary purpose was to provide support to the student. She had interpreted this as meaning emotional support, and said that motivating the student to complete the degree and providing encouragement turned out to be a key part of her role.

In the other instances where the 'pastoral mentor' role was the primary one adopted, the mentors were also taking the EYSEFD. As a result, they regarded themselves more as supportive peers than mentors to the other EYSEFD employees in their workplaces, a role that several said was reciprocated for them by other students doing the EYSEFD. Indeed, in one case the mentor specifically said that because she was doing the EYSEFD as well, it was the college tutor, rather than herself, who signed off the other EYSEFD employee's work.

Sandra, the manager of an NNI nursery, was taking the EYSEFD along with four of her employees. She said that the other EYSEFD employees also 'informally' mentored her; they were all there to help each other out when they needed it. She did not sign off the EYSEFD employee's work. She said that because she was also doing the degree, she had agreed at the start of the course with the college that this would be the role of the college tutor.

The 'quality control' mentor

This group were distinct because, whilst they might also provide pastoral support and help with facilitating work-based learning, they also saw their role primarily as being to oversee the quality of the EYSEFD employee's work, by evidencing their work and in some cases making suggestions for improvements. Moreover, mentors in this group were normally proactive about doing so, for example they had set times for catching up with the EYSEFD employee, and tended to plan ahead in terms of when they were going to conduct observations and sign off work.

A few mentors in this group did not appear to be doing much more than evidencing work on a regular basis, for example regularly signing forms for the college to testify that particular tasks had been done. However, more often within this group mentors were playing a much fuller role in relation to quality control. Several of these mentors said that as well as actually testifying that work had taken place, they saw themselves as being there to adopt a constructively critical stance towards the EYSEFD employee's written work and work-based practice. For example, they wrote statements following observations outlining strengths and area for development, or wrote regular reports outlining areas of development.

This type of mentor also sometimes contacted college tutors where they and their student needed clarification on assignments. In addition, they also commonly saw it as their responsibility to comment on the EYSEFD employee's written work, and to keep up to date with reading so that they could point the EYSEFD employee to appropriate literature.

It was striking that in most cases mentors adopting this role - particularly the fuller role, which involved constructive criticism - were more qualified than the EYSEFD student and often had previous mentoring experience. They were also often in a 'line management' position in relation to the EYSEFD student, and therefore saw mentoring as a '*natural extension*' of the role they adopted in any case in relation to the EYSEFD employee's development. They tended therefore to be based in larger settings such as primary schools, or multi-agency settings, and to be qualified teachers.

Heidi, a qualified teacher, was head of nursery at an independent school, and mentor to the EYSEFD student, who was a nursery teacher. She regularly signed forms to witness that the employee had carried out certain work-based tasks, and also gave the employee constructive criticism about presentations and assignments. She felt that the information she had received from the college was poor, but said that it was 'natural' for her to have adopted this role, because she was the employee's line manager and had previous mentoring experience.

Marie, a qualified teacher and nursery leader in a state school was mentoring one of the nursery assistants. As part of her mentoring role she watched the student teach lessons and advised her on how she could improve. She also wrote formal observations at the end of each course year, and regular reports weighing up the employee's strengths and weaknesses. She had had a lot of contact with the college link tutor, who had given her detailed information on what the role involved. She also felt that, as the employee's line manager, this role suited her well.

There were a number of exceptions in the form of mentors from smaller settings who were not necessarily more qualified than the EYSEFD employee who also fell into this group. However, these mentors were much more likely to be evidencing alone, rather than adopting the fuller, more constructively critical stance towards the employee's work.

Some mentors in this group also said that they had been encouraged to adopt such a role through information they had received from the college, which clearly outlined

that their role should involve evidencing and monitoring, and which contained thorough instructions on how to fill out the forms.

Kirsty was a mentor working as the head of lower school in a private primary school. As well as providing emotional support to the EYSEFD employee, Michele, when she became 'stressed', she also filled out forms to say how well Michele had executed tasks, and what she could have done better. Kirsty said that she had received a very useful visit from the college tutor, where they had gone through what the role involved, and how to fill out the forms.

However, this was by no means always the case, with other mentors in this group feeling that the information that they had received from the college had been limited and unhelpful. In these instances they felt that what really helped them to perform the quality control role was its fit with their line management role, or previous experience.

3.5 Feelings about mentoring

This section describes feelings about mentoring and, where relevant, how they changed over time. In addition to information about mentoring, which has been covered in detail in Section 3.2, a number of additional factors also affected how mentors felt about their role, these were:

- prior mentoring experience;
- confidence in carrying out the role;
- their relationship with the student;
- their feelings about how rewarding it was to help a student;
- time / job responsibilities; and
- views about personal benefits of taking on the role.

3.5.1 Prior mentoring experience

Those who were currently mentoring students for other work-based courses or had mentored in the past typically felt positive about becoming an EYSEFD mentor. This was because they were already used to mentoring and were confident that they could perform well in the role. Where mentors had previously mentored a colleague without difficulties, they felt doing so again would not be problematic. Also, those that did not have experience of mentoring themselves, but had been mentored while doing work-based qualifications felt positive about mentoring because they knew what the role required.

However, as EYSEFDs progressed, some experienced mentors felt they had not contributed significantly and did not feel as positive about mentoring as they did at the outset. Where this was the case it tended to be because they had, over time, formed a negative impression of the EYSEFD in comparison to other qualifications they had mentored for, for example NQTs and NVQs. In particular, they tended to feel that these qualifications had involved very clearly defined tasks in comparison to the EYSEFD and were frustrated by the lack of a clear steer from the EYSEFD tutors about what they should be doing and when.

Maureen, an employer-mentor working as a pre-school leader had experience of mentoring staff doing NVQs and assumed mentoring for the EYSEFD would be similar to this, overseeing each unit of the course and acting more as a 'trainer'. However, she found that she had 'no clear guidelines' as to what the EYSEFD mentoring relationship should consist of and her student chose not to make use of her. She felt she had been required to do very little as a mentor and had not been a part of the process in the way she had been when an NVQ mentor.

3.5.2 Confidence

A further factor affecting mentors' feelings about the role was how confident they felt about carrying it out. This in turn was related to their experience of mentoring, the extent to which they considered themselves to be able teachers, highly skilled and experienced practitioners with specialist knowledge and whether or not they had trained as mentors. Some had completed the EYSEFD or were currently undertaking it, and as such, felt they were in a good position to be a mentor, as they understood exactly what the role required.

Confidence was particularly high amongst those working in primary schools. This was because mentors in these settings tended to have high levels of qualification and were typically more qualified than their students.

Where confidence in ability to mentor was low, key explanatory factors were a lack of qualifications, general work experience, prior experience of mentoring, lack of understanding of EYSEFD course content and how well supported they felt by the EYSEFD providing college.

3.5.3 Relationship with student

The nature of the mentor's relationship with their student could also affect how confident they felt about the role. In many cases, mentors said that they had a strong relationship with the student, which had been strengthened further as the EYSEFD progressed. In particular, a better relationship was fostered because student and mentor spent more time together. Through increased discussion they generally got to know each other more and better understand each other's working practices and attitudes, resulting in an increase in respect for each other's abilities. Good relationships were particularly evident where mentors and students worked in close proximity; this is borne out by the longitudinal qualitative student study, which found that positive contact between mentors and students was facilitating by physical proximity.¹⁸

However, there was also evidence that in certain circumstances the mentoring role could damage the professional relationship mentors had with their students. There were cases for example where mentors and students disagreed over the mentor's advice, or where students reportedly felt threatened by their constructive criticism. It

¹⁸ *Ibid*, Chapter 3.

seemed this was particularly likely to occur where the relationship between the mentor and the student had not been particularly strong or where the mentor was not someone who was more experienced or qualified than the student.

Abigail was the owner and manager of a private nursery and was acting as an employer-mentor for a number of EYSEFD students. While she found mentoring the majority of her students unproblematic, she had a 'couple of run-ins' with one student when she suggested her work was not of a high enough quality for the EYSEFD. Abigail described how her student was 'in tears' when she brought her work in and because she was upsetting her when she tried to give advice, mentoring negatively affected their relationship as employer and employee. In fact, Abigail contacted her college and asked them to find another mentor for this student.

3.5.4 Feelings about how rewarding it was to help an EYSEFD student

A further reason affecting how mentors felt about their role was how helpful and supportive they felt they were able to be to EYSEFD students.

Some mentors found it fulfilling to help a colleague develop their education and career. These mentors saw the role as an opportunity to help a colleague progress and watch them grow into a more competent practitioner. Passing on knowledge to a less experienced colleague could make mentors feel important and valued. Others found it rewarding to take the opportunity to mentor a student in the same way that someone had been kind enough to do for them earlier in their own careers.

However, some found that mentoring was not rewarding. This tended to be the case for mentors those who felt ill-informed and supported in the role, and as a result felt that they were not performing it as well as they might (see Section 3.4 above).

3.5.5 Time/job responsibilities

The extent to which mentors felt that they had adequate time to devote to the role was a further factor affecting whether they felt positively or negatively towards carrying out the role. This issue is covered in more detail in Chapter 5, which describes logistical issues around accommodating the EYSEFD in the workplace.

The longitudinal qualitative study of students found that students expressed reservations in particular about making what they perceived as 'additional' demands on more senior member of staff who were mentors, such as head teachers or deputy head teachers.¹⁹

Madeleine was a nursery teacher based in a Sure Start funded nursery. When approached to be a mentor she had been concerned about how the role would impinge on her work responsibilities. However, her employer did not mind Madeleine devoting work time to mentoring. Madeleine was also prepared to give up some of her personal time if this was necessary to mentor her student effectively.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, Chapter 3.

Greta, a mentor working as a teacher in an Early Years centre was reluctant to take on the role because of work related time pressures. As mentoring progressed she discovered the role was more concerned with quality control than pastoral support, and she felt it required more effort than she could comfortably manage.

3.5.6 Furthering own learning

Some mentors, regardless of level of professional experience regarded mentoring positively because they saw it as a way to further their own learning. They saw mentoring as a two-way process because the role kept them up-to-date with current practice and theory, making them re-evaluate and refresh their own practice. This served to keep their own professional performances honed.

A reception teacher at a state primary school, acting as mentor to two classroom assistants, said that she found involvement in the EYSEFD personally rewarding. It encouraged her to keep more up to date than she otherwise would have done with the government's thinking in relation to the Foundation Stage. In addition, she feels that she has benefited from being observed giving feedback, because she now feels better able to do it in a positive and developmental way.

3.5.7 Remuneration for role

While some mentors received remuneration for mentoring²⁰, this was not expected by any of the sample. Payment was not a factor that affected in mentors' feelings about the role.

3.6 Dual role of employer-mentor

Those employers who were also mentors were mixed in their views of this role. Some felt the two roles were complimentary, while others were concerned that they clashed somewhat. The extent to which this combined role was seen to function effectively or not was strongly related to the mentor role adopted by employer-mentors.

Where combining the employer and mentor roles was regarded positively it was because within the employment setting there was no real distinction between employers and mentors. Here, employers already adopted a support role as part of their regular working practices. In some cases, the EYSEFD mentoring role represented a formalising of an existing informal mentor role. Also, employer-mentors mentioned being able to mentor while also overseeing the needs of the employment setting, meaning they were able to facilitate smooth daily working and a successful EYSEFD experience by balancing the needs of both student and setting.

In addition, employer-mentors with close personal or working relationships with their staff found mentoring them easier to accommodate. They reported wanting to see

²⁰ Two mentors mentioned receiving remuneration for mentoring, one received £65 and the other £69.

their employees improve and to help them do so. This was facilitated because as the employer, they were in the same setting and frequently available to support the student.

However, busy employers and particularly those who felt the mentor role involved much of their time felt their lack of availability made it difficult for them to mentor effectively. Others felt that it was not appropriate for an employer to be a mentor too. Here, they were concerned that line management responsibilities had been blurred by mentoring, making it difficult to give their employee constructive feedback. Indeed, one employer-mentor became so concerned by the conflict of the two roles that she contacted the college tutor and requested that a different mentor be found for her student from outside the employment setting.

3.7 Chapter summary

People became mentors in varied ways, although they were typically invited by students to do so. Mentors were usually positive about taking on the role as they saw it as important for the student and a rewarding role for themselves.

The level and nature of information mentors received about the role varied significantly. Broadly speaking, low levels of information could lead to lack of confidence in the role and in the EYSEFD.

There was considerable diversity amongst mentors in terms of what they understood mentoring to comprise, and how they went about the role. Whilst some had regular contact with the EYSEFD employee, signed off their work-based learning, and adopted a constructively critical stance towards their practical and written work, others had very little contact with the employee and in some cases did not appear to be acting as witnesses that work had taken place.

The most proactive and confident mentors tended to be those working in larger settings, such as primary schools, who had prior experience of mentoring, and who occupied higher positions within organisations than the EYSEFD students, therefore seeing the role as an extension of their line management role. These mentors did not always feel the need for extensive information about the role.

The least confident and proactive mentors tended to be those working in smaller sessional care settings and nurseries who did not have prior experience of mentoring, and were not more qualified than the person they were mentoring. This was particularly the case if they also felt that they had been poorly informed by the college about the role.

In addition to levels of confidence, prior experience and the nature of the information they had received, mentors' feelings about the role were also affected by: their relationship with the student, and whether mentoring had a positive effect on the relationship; feelings about how rewarding it was to help a student; the amount of time they had available to devote to the role; and views about the personal benefits of taking on the role.

4 ACCOMMODATING EYSEFD STUDENTS

This chapter looks at how employers went about accommodating EYSEFD students in their settings, in relation to work based learning (WBL), mentoring, and students' attendance at college. It also explores employers' and mentors' views of the funding for cover provided by DfES and financial implications of accommodating the EYSEFD.

The chapter is based on the views of employer and mentors from across all of the settings included in the sample, although the views of employers are more prevalent in some respects because they were more involved in making arrangements to accommodate the EYSEFD.

4.1 Accommodation of work based learning (WBL) and mentoring

This section considers the different ways which employers approached the accommodation of students' WBL and mentoring and the key barriers and facilitators to this.

The WBL element of the EYSEFD is intended to offer students the opportunity to apply knowledge and understanding gained in the taught elements of the course in work setting. Respondents in this study described it as involving a range of aspects including the planning and delivery of activities or lessons, individual child assessments, or research relating to an issue relevant to the setting. Ongoing reflective practice as part of everyday work was also regarded as being part of WBL by employers who conceived it more widely.

Employers' approach to the accommodation of WBL closely related to their understanding of what WBL entailed, their responsibilities in relation to facilitating on-site learning, and their attitude towards the EYSEFD more widely.

4.1.1 *Ways in which WBL is accommodated*

There were three main ways in which settings accommodated WBL: by providing support in relation to WBL exercises, revising staffing arrangements to give students different experiences within the setting, and by giving students or their mentors time to undertake it.

The first type of accommodation related to supporting WBL exercises. Here employers and mentors were involved in supporting students in the planning of these activities or lessons, and observing their execution. They also tended to sign forms saying they had observed this activity, and in some cases offered either verbal or written feedback.

Where WBL was viewed more widely by settings, their involvement in accommodating it extended beyond offering support for discrete exercises. Here, employers or mentors were involved in discussing with students how best they could further their learning in the course of their everyday work within the setting.

Janice, a mentor, and Emma, a student, set targets in relation to the types of work Emma should try to get involved with as part of her ongoing WBL. They agreed that Emma should try to work more closely with special needs children, and observe a literacy and numeracy hour in the school's reception class. They did this because they felt that it would help in keeping their observations and tasks focused, and because it had been suggested in Janice's mentor handbook.

A second way in which WBL was accommodated in settings was by revising staffing allocations to help students obtain experience that was helpful to them. This sometimes required relatively limited alterations, such as the 're-jigging' of a timetable to make sure that staff were allocated to parts of the setting where they could undertake their WBL, and was possible because the students did not have specific responsibilities in relation to a group of children (for example room leader). Alterations were more substantial in other cases, where students were given new roles within their setting to support the development of skills or expertise which would be useful to the EYSEFD.

Susan was allowed by her employers to transfer from working in the after-school club to being a nursery teacher so that she could gain more exposure to foundation stage children, because this was a perceived gap in her experience. This move also contributed to the setting's forward strategy, which was to introduce early years practitioners into work with teachers.

A final way in which EYSEFD students were accommodated in settings was by employers or mentors making time allowances for the EYSEFD, for the planning and delivery of exercises, activities or lessons. The amount of time offered varied. In some cases employers or mentors did not view WBL as being very different from the student's everyday activity, and did not expect it to take a great deal of time. WBL was fitted in alongside students' responsibilities when assignments were set by the college.

WBL was expected to require more time where it was viewed as being different from every day practice. Mentors, and sometimes employers, appreciated that the planning of exercises or activities was time consuming, and offered students time out from work to do this, where possible.

Lynn, an employer-mentor, indicated that her EYSEFD student was allowed extra time to undertake planning for the EYSEFD, where necessary. The time required varied. Whilst the student was sometimes able to fit WBL activities into her regular day, they would make sure that she had a day available to undertake research each time an assignment was due.

4.1.2 Ways in which mentoring is accommodated

Chapter 3 discusses the different approaches that mentors took to supporting EYSEFD students. As it describes, there was variation in the way in which respondents understood the role and the manner in which they mentored their students. Their roles could broadly be typified as being 'reactive', 'pastoral' and

concerned with 'quality control'. The amount of time and re-organisation required to accommodate mentoring varied depending on these different approaches.

Accommodation of mentoring encompassed two broad tasks: making arrangements for mentoring meetings to take place; and for mentors to undertake observations or read assignments.

Mentoring meetings

The amount of time taken for mentoring meetings varied from a once a month to as regularly as a few hours or couple of times every week. Meetings tended to occur at the end of the working day, or in non-contact time, although there were examples of students and their mentors meeting outside of working hours. In exceptional cases, mentors and students appeared to have little, or any, contact. Meetings were arranged in advance by some mentors and students, and undertaken in time tabled slots. Where meetings were time tabled in advance, staff in some settings would go ahead with meetings regardless of whether they had specific issues to discuss. Others described using the slots only if there were specific pieces of work to discuss, but felt it was useful to have a pre-set slot nonetheless. Meetings between other student and mentors were ad hoc, and tended to be driven by students' needs.

The amount of time, and arrangements for meetings made by students and mentors did not necessarily remain the same over the course of the mentoring relationship. Practitioners would meet more frequently or for longer periods when assignments were due. As students were perceived as becoming more able, other mentors and students met less regularly.

Levels of satisfaction on the part of mentors with the amount of time available to them to meet with students varied. Mentors who found it relatively easy or straightforward to meet or keep up to date with their students were happy with accommodating the mentoring role. Mentors whose time was constrained, or viewed mentoring as needing more substantial time inputs sometimes expressed regret that they could not offer their students more time to help them in keeping up to date with files and assignments or be able to offer them more support on an ongoing basis. For more details, see Chapter 3.

Undertaking observations

Mentors, particularly those performing a 'quality control' function (See Chapter 3), also had to accommodate tasks such as including observing student practice and commenting constructively on it and commenting on their written work. Observations typically involved mentors taking time out from their everyday work.

4.1.3 Factors accounting for the way that WBL and mentoring was accommodated

There were a number of key factors affecting the way in which WBL and mentoring were accommodated in the settings, namely:

- perceptions of what WBL and mentoring entailed;

- employer attitudes towards WBL, and perceived fit with the setting;
- time;
- ease of arranging cover for WBL and mentoring;
- proximity and availability of the mentor;
- the EYSEFD students' responsibilities in the workplace;
- the students' personal qualities and needs, commitment to the setting;
- relationships with other members of staff; and
- how well the course was organised by the college.

These are discussed in more detail below.

Perceptions of what WBL and mentoring entailed

Perceptions of what WBL and mentoring involved varied considerably. In relation to WBL, perceptions ranged from employers who felt that it entailed students undertaking new roles or using their everyday work as a springboard for increased reflection and analysis to those who viewed WBL as being similar to what student did on a day-to-day basis anyway. In relation to mentoring, as Chapter 3 describes, whilst some mentors and employers understood that the role should involve proactive, regular contact with the EYSEFD employee, for example signing off their WBL and adopting a constructively critical stance towards their practical and written work, others regarded the role as being to provide support to students as and when they needed it, and had very little contact with the employee.

How demanding or time-consuming WBL and mentoring was perceived to be influenced how much employers and mentors felt they needed to do to accommodate it. For example, those who saw WBL and mentoring as building on and extending students' everyday roles set time aside for planning, undertaking discrete exercises, and writing up reports or observations. Where WBL and mentoring were regarded more minimally, employers and mentors were much less involved.

Employer and mentor understanding of WBL was often related to the quality of the information that they had received. A number of other factors were also relevant, including previous experience of delivering training, and qualifications and seniority in relation to the EYSEFD student - these are all discussed in detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

Employer attitudes towards WBL and perceived fit with the setting

A second factor affecting employers' accommodation of WBL was whether they perceived it as having any benefits. Chapter 5 describes in detail how employers across the range of settings included in the research often perceived WBL as having numerous benefits for example helping staff to develop their skills, reflectivity and quality of their practice. Where employers or mentors had experienced benefits relating to WBL, this strengthened their commitment to supporting EYSEFD students through their WBL.

However, there were cases where WBL was felt to be inconsistent with the demands of the setting. In some instances, moving students to different parts of the setting for WBL was felt to be disadvantageous for the setting because it would mean placing

them in situations for which they did not necessarily have the appropriate expertise; a particular concern if there was no-one to devote time to supervising them in a different role. There were also instances where employers felt that the unpredictability of work in the setting made it difficult to plan ahead for WBL, for example in nurseries or pre-schools with fluctuating numbers of children, and where having even just one member of staff off sick could pose real staffing difficulties. In addition, mentors sometimes felt that children's needs could sometimes be adversely affected by the demands of WBL, where staff were performing a different role from their usual one, or had divided attentions.

There were also employers who felt that their setting was unable to offer specific experiences which were supposed to be part of WBL, for example in information technology in settings such as smaller nurseries or playgroups which lacked the equipment, or settings with a particular ethos, for example Montessori nurseries, who felt that WBL activities did not always fit with their emphasis on child-centred learning.

Finally, as described in Chapter 5, there were also employers who said that WBL did not add much to the setting, often because they did not realise what it supposed to encompass. In these cases, employer involvement in accommodating WBL was unsurprisingly more limited.

Time

The time entailed in delivering WBL and mentoring was a further key issue identified. Students were described as needing time to plan and undertake exercises or write up observations of children, which cut into their working time, and sometimes required them to take time off from working with children. Mentors, where they were fulfilling a 'quality control' role, also required time to observe the student, and comment constructively on their work.

In some settings, EYSEFD students and mentors had had times of the day where they were not responsible for caring for children. Supportive employers allowed EYSEFD students to use these slots to undertake planning for WBL and assignments, and mentors to observe, comment, or aid with the planning. This could occur where mentors were working part-time and were willing to give up some of their free time to work with the student, or where mentors said they were able to use their non-contact time for mentoring.

However, finding time to for students to undertake exercises and observations and meet with mentors was reported as being particularly difficult in certain circumstances. The first was where colleges told students about assignments at short notice, thus inhibiting the students' and mentors' ability to plan ahead and fit WBL into their workloads. The second was where non-contact time was very limited for the student and/or mentor, which meant that planning for WBL and mentoring sessions tended to take place in what was described as '*snatched*' time. This was evident both in smaller settings such as nurseries and sessional care where mentors were in less senior positions and often working full time with the children, but also in larger settings such as primary schools where mentors occupied more senior roles

and could therefore have numerous responsibilities as well as mentoring impinging on their non-contact time.

Where mentors understood their role to be a proactive one, this situation was felt to be unsatisfactory, and a common request was for specific time for mentoring to be allowed in their workloads.

Ease of arranging cover for WBL and mentoring

An additional factor affecting employers' ability to accommodate WBL and mentoring was the availability of appropriate cover.

Employers were sometimes able to draw on staff from within the setting, former staff, or bank staff who provided regular cover, to cover for EYSEFD students or mentors whilst they were undertaking or, in the case of mentors, observing, WBL. These individuals were valued by employers because they were trusted, familiar to other staff and the children, and because they were familiar with how the setting was run.

However, there were also employers who indicated that this cover was not always easy to secure, and that it was difficult to have to arrange re-allocation of staff on a regular basis, particularly when they were needing to juggle other factors as well, such as sickness and staff annual leave. Cover for mentors seemed to be particularly difficult to secure in nurseries and pre-schools, where resources were often tight, and mentors were usually working full time with children.

An employer felt that when her EYSEFD employee was undertaking observations of children, she could not have an overview of the room (of which she was a leader) and it was therefore necessary to bring in other staff to cover the room. It was not possible to get internal cover at short notice and she did not feel that she could justify the expense of external cover. As a result the employer sometimes had to step in. She felt that this 'constant juggling act' meant that other staff had to be flexible and accommodating in relation to the changes.

The legal staff to children ratios - particularly relevant in settings taking children under three - could pose another barrier for employers in arranging cover, because this could mean it was particularly difficult to release staff where other cover was limited.

Proximity and availability of the mentor

Where mentors and EYSEFD students worked in the same part of the setting or in smaller settings, this tended to mean they had flexibility in terms of when they undertook observations or exercises. This was because they were often working closely together anyway, and could build these activities into their day to day work. Mentors in this situation could use their proximity to undertake continuous monitoring of student practice, feedback, and discussion.

A mentor in a primary school described undertaking WBL with her student on an ongoing basis, so that she reflected on things that happened in the nursery as part of WBL for the course. The mentor felt that this approach worked well, and was

disappointed when time constraints meant that the mentoring and WBL had to move to a more formal basis.

Conversely, where mentors and students were situated in different parts of a setting (or indeed, different settings) they could find it difficult to make arrangements to meet, because they did not share schedules or could not have ad hoc contact. Mentors mentioned personal commitments including familial responsibilities, or the fact that they were undertaking courses of their own, as making it difficult for them to be flexible about offering time for mentoring outside of their core working hours.

The working patterns of students and mentors were identified as being an additional facilitator. Where mentors were working part-time this was felt by some to offer them more flexibility in meeting with the student after their working hours had finished. However, in other cases, mentors were viewed as being less flexible where they worked part-time because they had fewer hours in which meeting was possible, and were unwilling or unable to use non-work time for meeting. Willingness to use non-work time tended to depend on the mentors' understanding of what the role comprised, their relationship with the EYSEFD student, and the level of a mentors' other commitments, both at work and in their personal life.

Mentors felt that the way that they and their student had arranged meetings further facilitated the accommodation of this relationship. Holding mentoring meetings at set times formalised the meetings, and helped to ensure they would actually happen. For others, treating meetings flexibility worked well, and allowed mentors and students to accommodate them where possible. Having meetings outside work was preferable for other mentors, who found this more relaxing than having them in work time.

EYSEFD students' responsibilities in the workplace

The types of responsibilities that the EYSEFD student had within the setting were an additional influencing factor in how easy it was for settings to accommodate WBL. It could be particularly difficult to accommodate WBL where students had full time responsibilities for children. Conversely, it was felt to be easier to accommodate staff who usually performed supporting roles, for example as a classroom assistant, in undertaking their WBL.

Students' personal qualities and commitment to the setting

An additional set of facilitators to accommodating WBL were related to the student, their experience and personal qualities. Where students were felt to be competent and able to work independently, this appeared to make employers confident that they would be capable of completing WBL successfully, and that they would take responsibility for doing it themselves. Familiarity with the way settings functioned and organisational priorities on the part of students were further facilitating factors identified by employers and mentors, who were reassured that WBL would not impact negatively on delivery within the setting.

Similarly, where students were perceived as being able and independent, mentors indicated that their needs were more targeted and felt that it was easy to

accommodate them. Where students were felt to have become more able over time this had eased the demands on their mentors. Conversely, where students were perceived as struggling on the EYSEFD this was reported as posing a considerable burden on employers and mentors. Where colleges were not perceived as having assessed students' abilities, or provided sufficient support, this compounded settings' resentment about the support needs of these students.

A final set of facilitating factors related to relationships within the setting. A repeated message from employers was that where there was a sense of reciprocity and mutual understanding between the student and their employer, this made it easier to discuss, make agreements on and deliver WBL. Good relationships between students and mentors were obviously identified as being important in facilitating the organisation, delivery and timing of WBL because they resulted in willingness and flexibility on both parts. Lastly, having supportive and flexible staff was identified as easing the demands placed on settings by WBL.

College organisation of the course

How well the EYSEFD was organised from colleges' end could also impact on how easy it was for employers to accommodate WBL. Late notification of deadlines for the completion of observations or assignments relating to WBL made it difficult for employers and mentors to accommodate it at a time that was convenient to them and the setting, and was also felt to put additional pressure on the college. Lack of clarity about what WBL required could also cause mentors to have to re-do observations of students or provide additional evidence, which was time consuming for them.

4.2 Accommodation of student's attendance at college and student assignments

The time required from settings to accommodate students' attendance at college varied depending on whether staff were aiming to complete the course on a full-time or part-time basis, the setting's distance from college, and the timing of college classes. Staff tended to have a half day off, a full day off, or early release from work to attend college sessions. Other students did not require time off work, because the college element of their course took place in the evening, on weekends, or during hours when they were not working. Students were sometimes offered additional regular time off in order to work on college assignments. In other cases time off was offered on an ad-hoc basis.

Settings approached the accommodation of students' attendance at college and student assignments in a range of different ways. The first type of approach entailed securing cover for staff whilst they were out of the setting. External cover was used by some settings where it was available, and they could afford it. Other settings relied on securing internal cover, and used a range of different types and seniority of staff to do this, with the employers themselves sometimes having to cover for the students. One employer was unwilling to use cover because they felt that parents might object to this, despite needing it.

A second approach on the part of smaller settings was to reduce the numbers of children they accepted on the days when the student was at college, to make up for the higher staff to child ratios resulting from the student absence.

A third solution to accommodating student's attendance at college of work on assignments was for them to alter the hours that they worked in the setting. One way in which this occurred was for staff to reduce their hours and pay so that had enough time to complete college work. Another was for staff to increase the number of hours they worked to make up for the time they spent at college. The spirit in which these solutions had been reached was not always clear from employers' accounts.

Emma, a nursery teacher, was attending college on Saturdays for the EYSEFD, and continued to work full-time, but was found this commitment too much in the first year of the course. She decided to reduce her hours to a four-day working week to allow her to complete her college work. Her employer was happy with this, and brought an internal member of staff in as cover.

Re-arranging timetables to accommodate students' attendance at college represented a final type of response. Here, part-time staff changed the days that they worked so that they could attend college in non-work time.

Accommodation of students' attendance at college was not necessary in other settings because they did not attend college in work time. More exceptionally, cover students undertook roles which were not viewed by employers as needing cover either because they did not have responsibilities for children, or because they performed peripatetic roles like speech therapy or outreach work. Similarly, some settings were accommodating placement students whose absence did not impact on staff ratios, for example.

Accommodation of college assignments

Settings generally appeared to view the completion of college assignment work as being something that students should undertake in non-work time. In exceptional cases, however, settings allowed students time to undertake assignments. In some instances this was built into the time off offered to students by multi-agency settings, who placed a high premium on the completion of the EYSEFD. In a private nursery students were allowed to work on assignments when the nursery was not busy, or where there were staff on site who could cover.

4.2.1 Barriers and facilitators to the accommodation of student attendance at college, and work assignments

Whilst employers were generally willing to allow their staff to take time off to attend college, and to a lesser degree, complete college work, the ease with which they were able to do this varied greatly, and depended on a number of factors listed below, and then discussed in more detail:

- employers' perceptions of the EYSEFD student;
- size of setting;
- numbers of EYSEFD students;

- ease of arranging cover for attendance at college;
- seniority of EYSEFD student;
- ease of accommodating student attendance at college on particular days of the week;
- perceptions of fairness in relation to other staff;
- perceptions of impact on children;
- quality of relationships within the setting; and
- perceptions of the EYSEFD more widely.

Where accommodating student attendance at college had been particularly burdensome, this could affect some employers' feelings about supporting future students through the EYSEFD.

Perception of staff member/relevance to staff's job

Employers' perceptions of the EYSEFD student influenced their willingness to make provision for their student's attendance at college, or give them time for assignments. Where students were viewed as being talented and committed to early years care and/or to the setting itself, employers were often willing to allow them to take time off to attend college, even where it was inconvenient to them because of the impact that it would have on the setting and the effort required to rearrange staffing or timetables. Conversely, where students were viewed as not being committed to the setting, or less able, this impacted negatively on employers' willingness to accommodate their absence from the settings by making logistical arrangements, or in subsidising cover.

An employer in a voluntary sessional care setting which was struggling financially had recently lost one of her two EYSEFD employees to a local primary school. She suspected that the other employee was also looking to leave the setting. As a result of this, she had stopped paying the students for the time they were at college, because she believed it was too big a sacrifice for the setting to make if they were not guaranteed to gain from it.

Size of the setting

The further factor related to the size of the setting. Smaller settings in particular reported having limited flexibility around releasing students to attend college because of their staff to child ratios. Being able to do this relied on the availability of affordable cover. Lack of flexibility in small settings was reported as sometimes being further reduced by staff sickness. In most instances, despite these difficulties employers in these settings were allowing their students to attend college, and coping as best they could, for example covering for the students themselves, or making short-term 'emergency' cover arrangements where necessary.

Number of EYSEFD students

The number of students undertaking the EYSEFD represented another potential barrier for employers. Where settings were accommodating several students, who needed to be released to attend college, this could impose a considerable logistical and financial burden on settings, and only tended to be possible where the setting

had access to a large training budget, or where the students were attending college outside of work time.

Ease of arranging cover for attendance at college

In some instances, employers said that arranging cover had not been difficult. This was for a range of reasons, for example they had access to internal cover or good quality affordable external cover which they could organise at short notice. Primary school employers in particular tended to have good resource to internal cover. Arranging cover was also felt to be easier where the EYSEFD students did not have direct responsibilities for the children - for example, they were classroom assistants in school. Finally, there were a number of settings where affordability of cover was not felt to be a concern, for example because they were profitable organisations with money to spare, such as private primary schools, or had a demarcated training budget from which they could draw the money (for more on finances, see section 4.3, below).

Other employers found it much harder to arrange suitable cover. There were several issues here. First, a number of employers said that they had found it difficult to secure what they regarded as good quality cover. This had meant using cover staff who they did not feel were as competent as the student - a situation which employers felt was not ideal, but justified by the fact that they were only using them for around half a day a week. In exceptional cases, employers in small settings reported using unqualified staff for cover.

The cost of external cover represented a further issue. For some settings, paying for cover was felt to be a burden that the setting was unable to bear without reducing EYSEFD students' salaries to take account of the amount of time they spent at college. Again, see section 4.3 below for more on finances.

Seniority of EYSEFD student

A factor affecting the ease with which employers could release staff was the qualifications gap left by their absence from the setting. The absence of senior staff from smaller settings, in particular, caused problems where this would mean the setting's legal obligation to have a certain level of staff on site was not being met. Again, whilst short term solutions had often been adopted in these cases, employers questioned the extent to which they would continue to apply these solutions in the future. For example, in some settings this had proved such a problem that the employer had stepped in themselves; whilst they were willing to do it for this particular EYSEFD student, they questioned whether they would be able to carry on doing so for other EYSEFD students in the future.

Ease of accommodating student absence on particular days of the week

The days or times when students needed to be released to attend college were identified as a further issue affecting ease of releasing staff. This was particularly the case when the college days clashed with the busiest days at the setting in terms of numbers of children - usually mid-week days. These employers still allowed the students to attend, but again questioned their likelihood of continuing to do so in the future. For example, one employer described '*dreading*' the day of the week when

her student, a room leader, attended college, because it put so much additional pressure on her. These employers requested that the college choose a more appropriate day for the college-based learning in future, for example Monday or Friday.

Conversely, there were other employers who said that their employee's college attendance fell on a day when the setting was not particularly busy, or where it was easy to arrange for cover for elements of the curriculum that fell on that day, because they did not require specific skills.

Perceptions of fairness in relation to other staff

In addition, the perceptions of fairness on the part of other staff could affect feelings about letting EYSEFD students take time off to attend college. For example, employers sometimes felt reluctant to offer EYSEFD students paid time off for college or study because they thought that other staff members who were undertaking different qualifications, or who were not studying, would perceive this as being unfair. Conversely, staff in other settings felt that this was not an issue because other staff understood the value of the EYSEFD and were supportive of their colleagues.

Perceptions of impact on children

In some instances, employers and mentors worried that the children might be confused or distressed by their usual worker being absent from the setting. Again, whilst this did not pose such a barrier as to prevent them from allowing the current EYSEFD student to attend college, there were employers who felt that this issue would make them think twice about supporting people through the EYSEFD in the future. In others however, employers were unconcerned about this, even feeling in some cases that a change of staff was good for the children because it stopped them from becoming too dependent on one person. The perceived quality of the cover was an issue affecting how employers felt in relation to this area.

Quality of relationships within the setting

Employers and mentors felt that good relationships between them and the staff were significant in supporting the negotiation of workable solutions. In addition, having supportive staff teams more widely was felt resulted in staff being more flexible and supportive of colleagues being released to attend college, or undertake college work.

Perceptions of EYSEFD more widely

A final influencing factor was employers' and mentors' perceptions of the EYSEFD (and training more widely). As with other aspects of accommodation, employers' willingness to release students to attend college was influenced by the extent to which they valued the EYSEFD and viewed it as benefiting the setting in the longer term. Where employers felt that the EYSEFD would support the development and progression of staff within the setting, there was a stronger willingness to be flexible about attendance at college, and offering time for the completion of assignments, for example. For more on this, see Chapters 2 and 5.

4.3 DfES Money for cover

At the time that this research was conducted, DfES was offering £500 per student per year to cover the time out from the setting that they took to attend college for the EYSEFD.

4.3.1 Awareness of DfES funding

Awareness and understanding of the DfES funding for cover varied. Whilst some employers had been told about the availability of this support by colleges, there was variation in awareness and understanding of the cover in other settings. Some employers were not sure how much the cover was worth, and referred to having received £300 or other amounts. Other employers indicated that they had not been aware of the availability of the DfES cover whilst their student was on the course, and found out about it too late, or through this research. In some cases this lack of awareness may be related to the fact that settings were not having to use cover because the students attended college in the evenings or at the weekends. Where this was not the case, however, employers were frustrated by not having been made aware of the availability of funding.

In exceptional cases, employers had applied for the cover funding, but reported not having received it, or having received it up to a year late. Another reported taking on a student after they had already begun the EYSEFD, and not being able to claim funding as a result. Here, they gave the student the option of either working more hours to cover the cost of funding, or having their pay reduced to make up for the time given to them to attend college.

Employers generally understood the funding as being intended to fund cover for students' attendance at college during working hours, and used the funding for this purpose. In one instance an employer also thought that were they to allow their student time off to work on assignments, they would be able to claim money for this. There were some exceptions amongst the employers in the sample. These included employers:

- whose students attended college at times when they would not have been working anyway and who did not claim the funding;
- who claimed the cover money, but rarely used cover for the student;
- who did not pay students for the time they were at college and who passed the funding over to the EYSEFD student, to help towards the expenses of their course; and
- who claimed the cover money, but did not need to use it because their students were not attending college during working hours, who passed the funding onto the students.

4.3.2 Satisfaction with DfES funding

There were three broad types of views on the sufficiency of DfES funding:

- settings who felt that the funding was sufficient;

- settings who did not feel that the funding was sufficient, but who had other sources of funding; and
- settings who did not feel that the funding was sufficient, and who did not have other sources of funding.

Those who felt that funding was sufficient

In a few cases, employers who claimed the funding offered by DfES felt it was sufficient. This tended to be the case where the student undertaking the EYSEFD was in a junior position - for example as junior nursery nurse - and their role was therefore inexpensive to cover. A second type of instance was where the EYSEFD student was only needing to take off a small number of hours a week to attend college; for example they stopped work two hours early each week to get to an early evening teaching session. It was also regarded as sufficient where employers were easily able to tap into internal cover.

Those who did not feel that the funding was sufficient, but who had other sources of funding

A second group felt that although the financial support available from DfES did not reflect the real cost of covering EYSEFD students, it was sufficient to their needs because they had access to other sources of funding. There were several types of employers who fell into the group. First were employers from better-off private primary schools, who felt that their budget surplus meant that they were well able to shoulder some expenses attached to staff training and development. This also applied to a number of nurseries in the sample - including better-off private nurseries, but also nurseries who were receiving subsidies from for example local colleges, or government schemes such as the Care to Learn scheme who felt again that they had sufficient money in their training budget to pay the extra for cover.

Second were head teachers of larger state primary schools, who said that their school's dedicated training budget could easily meet the extra amount needed to accommodate the EYSEFD students. There were also settings - including a local authority-funded nursery school and a state primary school - who said that they were receiving a dedicated sum of money from their local authority for supporting an EYSEFD employee.

Those who did not feel that the funding was sufficient, and who did not have other sources of funding

A final group of employers felt strongly that the funding that they claimed from DfES did not cover the real cost of releasing staff to attend college, or undertake assignments. They described the financial support they received as reflecting between a third to 75% of the cost of cover depending on the local cost of external cover, the amount of time staff were off, and their seniority.

Employers from these settings also sometimes felt that the funding was insufficient because it did not cover the cost of releasing students to undertake WBL activities. These employers were based in a range of settings, including nurseries with NNI funding who were worried about financial sustainability once their funding ran out, and private nurseries with more precarious financial structures. However, it was a

particular issue for voluntary pre-schools and playgroups which tended to have very limited financial resources at their disposal.

These employers had coped in a number of different ways. First, they sometimes used less experienced and less expensive cover staff to save money, despite acknowledging that this might have a negative impact on the service delivery within the setting. Second, there were settings in this category who had sought to raise money for the EYSEFD student through fund-raising. There were also employers in these categories who said that they had been unable to pay the student for the time that they attended college, and had used the money recuperated from their salary to meet cover costs. Finally, one employer - under pressure from the parents' committee - had introduced a system whereby the EYSEFD students made a contribution towards the cost of their cover themselves; this would then be re-paid to them if they were still in the setting a year after completion of the EYSEFD.

In some cases, employers from these settings expressed some resentment about the impact on their setting of supporting EYSEFD students, and raised doubts about whether they would continue to do so in the future, particularly if DfES funding for cover stopped altogether.

4.4 Accommodating study beyond the EYSEFD

A number of employers and mentors thought that their EYSEFD students were intending to continue with their study after achieving the EYSEFD. However, at the time of the fieldwork, there was a striking lack of clarity about this issue amongst many employers; in particular, they were not always certain whether they and the employee would receive money for this year, and how much time the employee would need to take off. There was also, as described in Chapter 2, lack of clarity in some cases about what qualification the employee would achieve after two years and then future years.

Where employers *were* aware that further study beyond the EYSEFD would not be funded and would involve perhaps more time off work, feelings about supporting the employee were mixed. Most were very clear that they would be unable to afford to fund the employee for future study, or pay for their time off work; in these situations, employers usually said that they expected the employee to go part-time. However, a very small number of employers - exclusively in the state primary school sector - were considering the possibility of supporting the EYSEFD students through the third year, feeling that their learning would continue to bring benefits to the settings, and ensure retention of good staff within the school.

In relation to continuing from the EYSEFD to qualified teacher status, there was again lack of clarity amongst a number of employers and mentors about how this happened, as described in Chapter 2. Where there was understanding, a number of primary school head teachers said that they hoped to be able to accommodate the students' teacher training within the school; in these instances, the employee was regarded as a valuable member of staff they wanted to keep, albeit in a different capacity. However, other primary schools said that they would be unlikely to have training vacancies at the right point in time, and that the student would need to move

on. This was also the case of course for settings such as nurseries and sessional care where the EYSEFD student had expressed a strong interest in going on to do teacher training.

4.5 Chapter summary

Employers' attitudes to accommodating the EYSEFD were closely related to their commitment to the EYSEFD, staff training more broadly and the individual member of staff, with those with a strong interest in any of the former tending to be more proactive and flexible in accommodating WBL, mentoring and student attendance at college.

The extent to which employers were able to accommodate WBL, mentoring and attendance at college with ease also depended on: employers' levels of understanding about what WBL and mentoring entailed; how easy it was to find time for the employee and mentor to take time out of their usual schedule for WBL and mentoring; the ease of arranging cover; how senior the EYSEFD student was in the workplace; decisions that had been made for other staff in the past around time off; and perceptions of the impact of staff time off on the children.

A further key factor was the extent to which employers were able to pay for cover when EYSEFD students attended college. In some cases, employers said that the DfES money met their needs; this was usually when the EYSEFD student was in a junior position, or only took a small amount of time off work. There were also employers who said they were easily able to pay the extra, for example from their training budgets, surplus income more generally, or because they were receiving additional funding to support the student, for example from the local authority.

However, there was also a significant group of employers from a range of settings, but particularly voluntary nurseries and playgroups, who were unable to pay easily for the extra cost of cover that they would have liked. These employers had to use less experienced cover staff, raise money through fund-raising, reduce the employees' salaries to take into the account the time they were off work or, in one exceptional case, ask the employees to help meet the costs of cover themselves.

Whilst employers in this sample were often strikingly willing to accommodate the EYSEFD in spite of logistical and financial difficulties, a number raised doubts about whether they would be able to continue to be able to do so in the future, particularly if they no longer received funding to help them out. This was especially the case for settings which faced financial constraints.

5 IMPACTS AND CAREER PROGRESSION

In this chapter, we turn to look at employers' and mentors' feelings about the impacts of having an EYSEFD student in the workplace. Specifically, impacts on the students' workplace skills and attitudes, on the setting more widely, and on parents and on children using the setting are explored. The chapter then turns to examine employers' and mentors' views about the impact of the EYSEFD on employees' career progression; in this section, different settings are examined in turn. Finally, the chapter looks at employers' views about supporting future employees through the EYSEFD, and their wider views about the current and future impact of the EYSEFD on their setting.

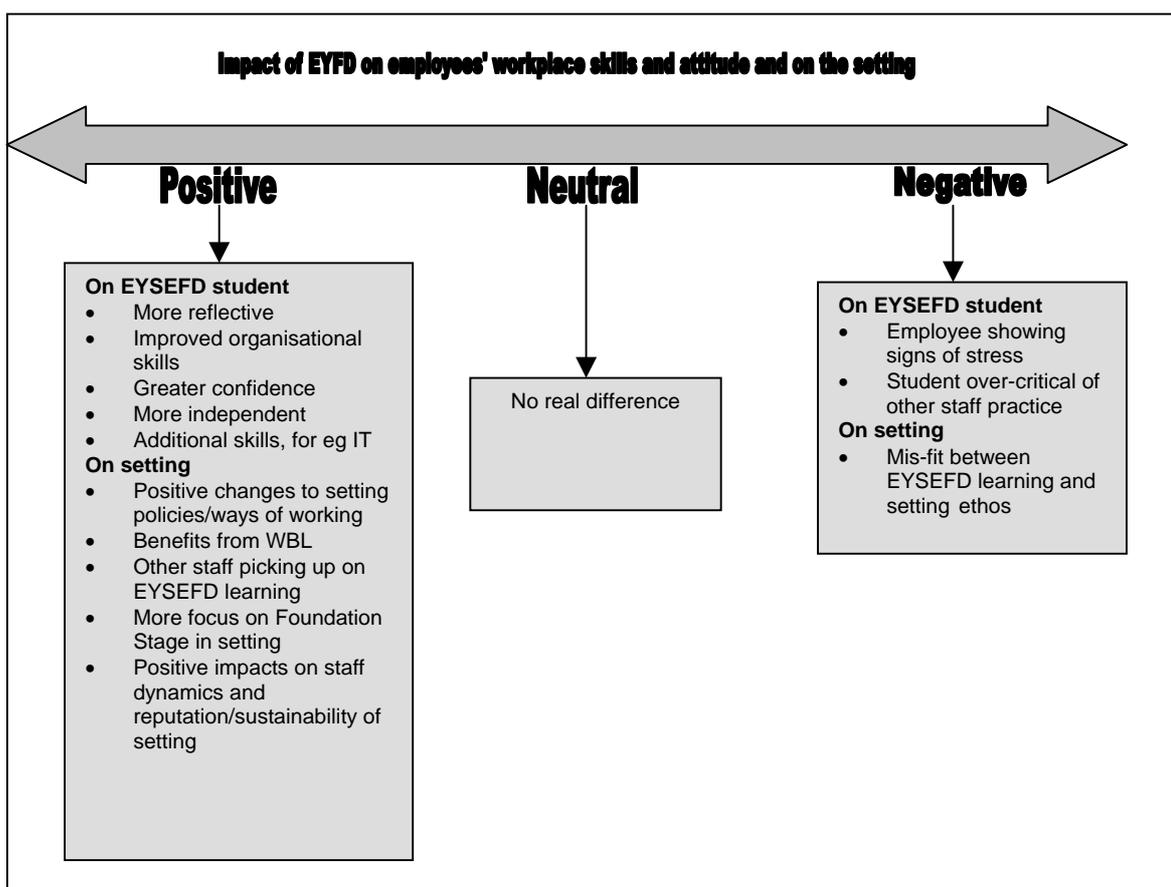
5.1 Impacts of EYSEFD on employees' workplace skills and attitude, and on setting more widely

This section covers employers' descriptions of the positive, neutral and negative impacts of the EYSEFD on employees' workplace skills and attitude and setting more widely. The section also considers which types of employers were most likely to talk about these impacts.

As a caveat to the sections on positive impacts, there were some instances where employers or mentors felt that it was difficult to separate out where the positive impact was solely related to the EYSEFD, as opposed to other factors. These other factors were natural staff improvement that they might have expected to take place over several months, or other courses that the student had been involved in, for example High Scope Accreditation, or Higher Level Teaching Assistant qualifications. Nevertheless, it was clear from the evidence that on the whole the EYSEFD was felt to have had a significantly positive impact on employees' skills and attitudes, and on the setting, and these are outlined in detail below.

The diagram overleaf illustrates the key impacts of the EYSEFD on the student, and on the setting, which employers and mentors talked about. These are then discussed in detail in the following sections.

Table 5.1 Diagram illustrating key impacts of EYSEFD on student and setting



5.1.1 Positive Impacts

Positive impact on employees' workplace skills and attitudes

Overwhelmingly, employers and mentors across the range of settings included in the research felt that the EYSEFD had had a positive impact on the employees within their setting. In particular, employees taking the degree were said to have matured, become more reflective about their practice, and to be generally more organised, confident and independent in the workplace. This chimes with findings from the longitudinal qualitative study of students, which found that EYSEFD students felt more confident and skilled in the workplace as result of taking the EYSEFD.²¹

These improvements were often felt to have had knock-on positive effects on the work that these employees carried out. In relation to reflective skills, employers often said that employees taking the EYSEFD had a greater understanding of, and were more thoughtful about, children's developmental and learning processes. This in turn meant that there had been significant improvements in the observations they carried out, the way they interacted with the children, and the activities they set them to do.

²¹ *Ibid*, Chapter 3 and Chapter 5.

Michele is a teaching assistant in a state primary school. Her head teacher feels that by doing the EYSEFD she has picked up a lot of skills around child development and learning. As a result, she is more patient with children when they have difficulties doing a task, and more imaginative in thinking about alternative ways to approach the task with them.

Improved organisational skills were a further positive impact cited; in this context, employees were said to demonstrate better planning skills as a result of their involvement in the degree, and to present written work, such as observations, in a more coherent and accessible way.

Greater confidence was also often felt to be a significant impact of the EYSEFD on employees. Several employers said in particular that they had noticed their employee contributing much more fully to staff meetings than they had done previously, and being more forthcoming in suggesting new approaches. This was particularly the case in settings where the employee's position was towards the bottom end of the hierarchy within a setting – for example, teaching assistant, nursery nurse – and where the employer felt that for this reason they had previously lacked the confidence to speak up when discussing issues with more senior staff.

Marie is a nursery class leader in a private school, and has been in the role for twenty years. In the past, Marie would not say anything in staff meetings when asked for her opinions. Since taking the EYSEFD, however, her head of pre-prep has noticed that she is confident about giving her opinions in the meetings and has used them to suggest introducing more child-initiated activities into the setting.

Greater independence was a further impact mentioned. For example, employers talked about students having become more confident about taking decisions on their own than they had been in the past. In some settings, this had led to the employer feeling that they could be more flexible about which tasks they were able to ask the student to take on and had asked them to take on extra roles. For more detail on this, see Section 5.4 below, which covers progression of employees taking the EYSEFD.

Finally, some employers talked about employees having learned useful IT skills as a result of their involvement in the EYSEFD. These were then applied in a positive way in the setting, for example, through use of laptops for presentations to staff, and whiteboards in lessons.

Positive impacts on the setting

In addition to the impacts on the EYSEFD employees' skills and attitude, a wide range of positive setting-related impacts was associated with having an employee take the EYSEFD.

First, a number of employers and mentors reported that employees taking the EYSEFD had instigated, and carried through, positive changes to practice or policy in the setting, inspired by what they had been taught on the EYSEFD. These changes

were felt to have enhanced delivery of the Foundation Stage in the setting. Examples included:

- introducing new activities for the children into the setting;
- revising timetables, for example by including more time for outside play, or to reduce the amount of time children spent sitting down in one place;
- updating settings' policies, for example around health and safety, communicating with parents, or social and emotional policy;
- introducing a staff mentoring scheme into the setting;
- involving parents more in children's learning, for example by inviting them to attend a setting-based cookery session with their children; and
- introducing a revised format for child assessment forms.

Ruth, an EYSEFD student who was a nursery nurse in pre-school based at a state primary, recommended that instead of some children starting in Reception and some in nursery in one particular year, they all start in Reception, with some going home at lunchtime. The school has now implemented this.

Jane, an outreach worker for a voluntary-run pre-school, suggested as a result of her work on the EYSEFD that someone man an 'information desk' for parents by the front entrance of the setting when they dropped their children off in the morning. The setting has now carried this out.

As part of her work-based learning, Chloe, a placement student in a Children's Centre, put together a booklet which is now a mainstay of the centre's social and emotional policy.

Second, several employers or mentors said specifically that the employee, often with the active involvement of the employer or the mentor, conducted their work-based learning in such a way that the setting as a whole would benefit. For example they introduced new activities which they shared with the rest of the staff, chose to focus on activities which fitted with the setting's objectives, for example developing policies for better communication with parents, or shared the results of child observations with other staff members.

A head teacher in a state primary school encouraged a teaching assistant doing the EYSEFD to do an observation of a child that the school had concerns about; the learning from this observation was used for the benefit of the setting as a whole, as well as for the employee's EYSEFD.

Third, related to this, employers and mentors also said that the employee's learning from the EYSEFD filtered down to other staff in the setting, and influenced their practice and learning positively. In some cases, this was said to happen in a formal way; for example through EYSEFD employees giving presentations on subjects that they had learned about, such as health and safety, behavioural management and conducting child assessments and observations. In other cases, employers felt that it happened through other staff observing EYSEFD students' practice, either formally or, more usually, in the course of their day to day work.

Polly, a first officer in a private nursery, recently ran a behavioural management course for other staff, which was 'brilliant'; the manager has not heard raised voices in the setting since. The manager believes that Polly learned a lot about behavioural management from the EYSEFD, and thinks that before the course, she would not have had the confidence to present to other staff.

Deena, a playgroup manager, recently did some work on the EYSEFD about how children learn. She shared her key learning with other members of staff, which was that children do not always absorb information straight away, because it takes time for it to filter through. The mentor believes this has had an impact on how other staff in the setting work with the children.

Less specifically, but nevertheless importantly, there were instances where employers and mentors felt the EYSEFD employee had introduced a more dynamic and reflective atmosphere into their setting, helping to keep it 'fresh and alive'. Some said that as a result of these changes, other members of staff had been encouraged to apply for, or express an interest in, the EYSEFD.

Also in relation to staff development, a number of employers and mentors talked about having picked up useful learning from the EYSEFD students themselves. They said, for example, that they had been brought up to date with the latest learning relating to the Foundation Stage, and been prompted, both through observing and being observed, to reflect more deeply on their practice. In addition, there were mentors who felt they had gained experience of giving constructive feedback, which could be used in relation to possible future mentoring roles, for example for NVQ students, PGCE students or Newly Qualified Teachers.

Fourth, a number of employees in primary schools felt that having an employee in the workplace studying the EYSEFD had encouraged them to accord more importance to the Foundation Stage specifically, by thinking more carefully about its status within the setting, and by emphasising its importance to other members of staff.

In September, a state primary school gave over a whole day to broadening and developing staff's knowledge of the Foundation Stage. The mentor believes that the head teacher was prompted to do this as a result of talking to, and observing, the three EYSEFD employees within the setting.

Fifth, in some cases having an employee taking the EYSEFD was felt to have had a positive impact on the reputation and sustainability of the setting. In relation to the former, there were cases, for example, where the EYSEFD student was felt to have contributed positively to OFSTED evaluations, or to have strengthened the setting's quality assurance application. There were also instances where the employer felt that having an EYSEFD student in the setting had helped to improve its reputation for quality care, which they hoped might, in turn, have a positive impact on the setting's sustainability by helping to attract and retain users.

A voluntary pre-school was very reliant on social service-commissioned places, and felt that their sustainability would be in question if they lost these places. The manager hoped that advertising the presence of an EYSEFD student in the setting to social services would encourage them to continue using the setting, thus ensuring an important stable flow of revenue.

The manager of a private nursery was concerned that they were losing too many three year-olds to school based pre-schools. They hoped that parents would be encouraged to keep their children within the setting if they learned that they would be working with someone with the EYSEFD.

Finally, a number of employers attributed having an EYSEFD student within the workplace as having a positive effect on staff dynamics and perceptions of each other's roles. There were primary school head teachers, for example, who felt that the increasing confidence of EYSEFD teaching assistants was lessening the perceived gap between them and teachers; they saw this as a positive thing, because it meant that the teaching assistants were more forthcoming in contributing ideas to the setting. In other settings too, employers and mentors talked about EYSEFD students' increased confidence leading to them being treated with greater respect by other staff, and being more likely to be listened to.

Importantly, the types of positive impact described above, both in relation to the student themselves and the setting more widely, were talked about by employers from the full range of settings included in the research. In addition, they were mentioned both by employers who felt that they had been able to accommodate the EYSEFD employee with relative ease through to those who had struggled to do so. However, what did distinguish the employers who talked about positive impacts was that they had taken an interest in the EYSEFD, and saw it as their responsibility to keep an eye on how the EYSEFD student was doing (see Chapter 2 for more detail on these employers). As this chapter describes, employers who took this stance ranged from primary school head teachers in large settings through to managers of small sessional care settings.

5.1.2 Neutral or negative impacts on employees' workplace skills and attitude and on setting

More rarely, employers said that participation in the EYSEFD seemed to have had little impact on their employee's practice and to the setting, because they had not seen any difference in their employee's day to day work. These tended to be the employers - again from a range of settings, as described in Chapter 2 - who took little interest in the EYSEFD from the start and who therefore had a limited role in relation to the degree. It was interesting in this respect that the mentors working for these employers were much more likely to talk about the positive impacts discussed in Section 5.1.1 above. This suggests that the employers who said they had seen few impacts were too far removed from the EYSEFD employee to be in a position to discern impacts. A related explanation is that they were not actively watching the employee, or talking to them or the mentor to find out what difference the EYSEFD was making to them.

A number of less positive impacts on the students' practice and attitudes or on the setting more widely were also mentioned by employers and mentors. Importantly though, these were almost always talked about by those who also felt that the EYSEFD had brought significant benefits to the student, and they did not tend to feel that the disadvantages outweighed the benefits.

First, a number of employers or mentors said that employees taking the EYSEFD had at times shown signs of stress as a result of the pressure of juggling home life, work and the EYSEFD. They said that this could sometimes impact on other staff, for example they had to put up with the EYSEFD employee being perhaps more short-tempered or less communicative than normal. In addition they said that other staff on occasions had to take on additional roles at short notice to help the EYSEFD employee out, such as when they had an assignment deadline approaching.

Second, some employers said that increased confidence on the part of the EYSEFD student could result in some difficult staff dynamics. For example, it was said that EYSEFD employees, because so immersed in theory, could easily become overly critical of other staff members' practice, without necessarily being able to be sufficiently constructive about how it could be done better. For the most part this was a situation that was felt to be manageable, with timely interventions from the employer or mentor. However, there were cases where EYSEFD employees were reported to have upset other members of staff by adopting a superior approach towards them. The longitudinal qualitative study of students also found that occasionally students reported other staff feeling threatened or challenged by them.²²

Michael was a supervisor at a playgroup in a small town. He worked with lots of experienced older women. The head of the playgroup felt that whilst the EYSEFD, positively, gave him belief in himself, and helped him improve his planning, he also began to act as though he no longer needed to ask anybody anything, which irritated older staff. For the most part they 'put up' with this however, because they were keen to see him progress.

Finally, there were a number of employers or mentors who said that at times there had seemed to be some mis-fit between what the employee was learning on the EYSEFD course, and applying in their work-based learning, and the ethos of the setting. In particular, some employers felt that the EYSEFD had a slight over-emphasis on creative play for Foundation Stage children, over more traditional skills such as reading and writing. Usually, this situation was negotiated and a half-way point was met; indeed, in the first case example below, the mentor felt that the employer had been positively influenced by the EYSEFD student into placing more value on creative play. However, there were also examples, like the second, where work-based learning activities that did not fit with the ethos were not supported in the setting.

Silvie, a kindergarten leader in a private school, began to implement some changes as a result of her involvement in the EYSEFD which were at first received 'shakily' by

²² *Ibid*, Chapter 3.

the head, who had always been 'firmly' into the three 'Rs'. For example, she instigated activities that emphasised learning through creative play, such as jelly and sand trays. However, the mentor feels that they have now reached a good balance, and that the EYSEFD employee had achieved some positive changes in the school in this respect.

A peripatetic mentor of an EYSEFD student working in a Montessori nursery said that the adult-led role play that the student wanted to introduce as an activity was not accepted by the nursery manager, due to the priority placed in this setting on child-led learning.

5.2 Other impacts – parents and children

5.2.1 Impacts on parents

A number of respondents were asked specifically about whether they felt that having an EYSEFD student in the workplace had positive effects in terms of parents' feelings about the quality of care in the setting. In some cases, the impact in this respect was felt to be neutral. The feeling was that parents were not really familiar with Early Years qualifications, and instead judged a setting by their children's happiness, and how confident they felt in the staff, which was based on regular interaction with them.

However, there were a number of settings, including primary schools, nurseries and play groups, who expressed a hope that the qualification would signal to parents that they were a professional setting which was prepared to offer more than the standard NVQ 3 qualified staff to children in the Foundation Stage. As noted above, Section 5.1.1, it was hoped in some instances that this would have positive knock-on effect on the setting's reputation and therefore in some instances financial sustainability. A number of settings had chosen specifically to advertise the presence of an EYSEFD student in the booklets they produced for parents.

5.2.2 Impacts on children

Often, it was felt to be difficult to pinpoint exactly how children were benefiting from working with an EYSEFD student, although employers and mentors commonly felt that all of the positive impacts outlined in Section 5.1.1 impacted indirectly on the children, in that they were receiving better quality care.

However, where employers and mentors described positive impacts on children specifically, these tended to centre on the introduction of a wider variety of activities, such as nature walks, sand and water trays or outdoor play more generally, or specific toys designed for children with special educational needs.

As with impacts on student practice and setting, a handful of employers felt that impacts on the children were not discernible; as they saw it, the employee was already working very well with children, and had not changed their practice as a result of the EYSEFD. Again, the employers who felt this tended to be those who

had a limited role in relation to the EYSEFD, and who were not observing the EYSEFD student at close hand.

Finally, there were also some employers and mentors who expressed concern that accommodating an EYSEFD student could also have some more detrimental impacts for the children. This was particularly the case where facilitating the employee's attendance at college meant that the children were out of necessity being taught by a range of difference cover staff, or a person who was perceived by the employer to be less good with the children than the EYSEFD employee. Conversely, however, where employers were happy with the quality of the cover, this could also be seen as advantageous for the children, because they were being exposed to a wider variety of teaching techniques and ideas. Importantly, there were no instances where employees felt that the disadvantages for the children of having to employ cover staff outweighed the gains to the setting which are outlined in Section 5.1.1 above.

5.3 Career progression of EYSEFD students

This section considers the extent to which employers felt able, and willing, to facilitate the career progression of employees within their settings who had completed or who were currently undertaking, the EYSEFD. First, the types of progression experienced by EYSEFD students in primary schools, nurseries and sessional care settings are described. The section then describes the main barriers to career progression of EYSEFD employees described by employers in this research.

The findings should be read in the context of those from the longitudinal qualitative study of students, which found that over time students' expectations that the EYSEFD would itself lead to promotion and increased pay had waned, perhaps as a consequence of colleges' promotion of the course as a route into teaching and the lack of information regarding employment opportunities from the EYSEFD, for example SP status.²³

The key facilitators and barriers to career progression of EYSEFD students, and the main settings in which they applied, are summed up in the table below.

²³ *Ibid*, Chapter 5.

Table 5.3 Key facilitators and barriers to accommodation of career progression of EYSEFD employees

KEY FACILITATORS	KEY BARRIERS
scope for role diversification	no appropriate positions to progress EYSEFD staff into
<i>some primary schools</i>	<i>some nurseries, sessional care</i>
imminent vacancies higher up in setting	recognition of EYSEFD = negative impact on staff dynamics
<i>larger nurseries, multi-agency settings</i>	<i>relevant to all settings</i>
ability to afford pay rise	inability to award pay rise:
<i>affluent nurseries, private schools</i>	- can't afford – <i>some nurseries and all sessional care</i>
	- not recognised by official pay scales – <i>relevant to all settings</i>

5.3.1 Type of career progression experienced by EYSEFD students

Primary schools

EYSEFD employees in primary schools had experienced a number of types of career progression.

First, in some primary schools EYSEFD employees had been given additional roles as a result of the improvement to their practice attributed to the EYSEFD. Examples included them taking on roles such as Special Educational Needs co-ordinator, health and safety officer and ICT co-ordinator.

There were also instances where the EYSEFD student had achieved Higher Level Teaching Assistant status during the period when they had been studying for the EYSEFD, which permitted them to carry out whole class teaching duties whilst teachers were out of the classroom. Where this was the case, head teachers tended to regard the EYSEFD as having increased the employee's confidence and skills sufficiently for them to have been able to put in a successful application; it is interesting that the longitudinal qualitative study of students found however that students were reluctant to attribute promotion to HLTA to the EYSEFD.²⁴

²⁴ *Ibid*, Chapter 5.

Kate had been working as a teaching assistant for five years. She has recently gone to gain Higher Level Teaching Assistant status. The employer believes that the EYSEFD spurred her to seek this title, because she had already done much of what she had to do to meet the standards through the EYSEFD. As of next year, the head teacher envisages using Kate to cover for teachers during their planning, preparation and assessment time, and that she will receive a higher salary as a result.

In some cases, pay rises accompanied these changing roles. In two primary schools, for example, head teachers had moved the EYSEFD employee up the pay scale from H3 to H4 as they took on additional responsibilities. Although less formalised, there were also examples of EYSEFD students being awarded pay rises in private primary schools to recognise their enhanced learning and skills.

Job-titles were also in some instances revised as a result of the student completing the EYSEFD. In one state primary school, for example, pre-school staff had been accorded the title of 'Early Years specialists'.

It was striking that state primary schools in this sample appeared to have the most scope to recognise the EYSEFD by expanding or diversifying an employee's role. A key reason for this seemed to be that they were relatively large settings, with numerous responsibilities available over and above standard job titles, for example ICT co-ordinator. A further reason was that in these settings headteachers were alert to the government drive to upskill classroom assistants in order for them to provide cover for teachers, and keen to use the EYSEFD to help them to do this.

Nurseries

There were no examples in the sample of EYSEFD employees working in nurseries who had as yet been promoted as a result of their undertaking or completing the EYSEFD (barriers to promotion and progression are covered in 5.3.2, below). However, there were a number of nurseries in the sample, both private, local authority and voluntary-sector funded, where the employers felt that promotion of EYSEFD students was likely to happen in the future, when vacancies occurred at a higher level in the organisation.

Settings that were particularly conducive to this happening were those where managers or deputy managers were contemplating leaving their role for another, or retiring, and anticipated that the EYSEFD employee would step into their shoes. In addition, larger settings, which had a number of different job titles and salary scales, gave the impression of being able to accommodate the progression of EYSEFD students. This also applied to nurseries which were part of a larger chain, where employers felt that whilst promotion might not occur within the employee's current setting, opportunities were likely to occur in the organisation more widely.

The manager of a Children's Centre said that whilst there would be no automatic promotion for the employee taking the EYSEFD, internal promotions within the setting were relatively common, and the EYSEFD would stand this employee in good stead to achieve one.

In relation to pay rises, a number of nursery managers said that they were intending to award the EYSEFD employee a pay rise at the end of the their studies. This tended to occur in settings which were making a profit and who could therefore afford to do so.

Lisa is head of the baby room in an affluent private nursery. The manager gave Lisa a better pay rise than other senior staff in the recent pay review, in recognition of the fact she was doing the EYSEFD.

5.3.2 Sessional care

Sessional care settings were those that appeared least able to accommodate progression of EYSEFD students, and the described in 5.5.2 below. There were no examples in this sample of EYSEFD employees having been awarded different job titles, or pay rises, as a result of their participation in the EYSEFD.

5.4 Career progression – key barriers

A number of barriers to the progression of staff with EYSEFD were also raised across all of the different settings included in the research.

The first barrier, which applied to a number of school based pre-schools, nurseries and sessional care settings in the sample, was a lack of appropriate positions into which to progress EYSEFD staff. This was particularly the case for smaller settings where opportunities for diversification or promotion were limited, and those where more senior positions were already occupied. In relation to this barrier there were several cases in the sample – particularly, not exclusively, sessional care settings – where the employee taking the EYSEFD already held the highest position within their setting.

The head of pre-prep in a private school said that because the EYSEFD employee is already room leader, and at the top of the unqualified teacher salary, the school will be unable to recognise her gaining the EYSEFD.

Second, in some cases it was felt by employers that even where progression was a possibility, recognising the EYSEFD by a promotion or salary rise would have a negative impact on staff dynamics, by upsetting other members of staff who were equally talented and hard-working. This was particularly the case when these other members of staff were older and more experienced.

The head teacher of a private primary school said that she would not recognise the nursery teacher's achievement of the EYSEFD by a change in job title. This was because she felt that by doing this she would be implicitly undermining other nursery teachers who were equally good at their jobs, but who had not completed the EYSEFD.

A third barrier was the inability of some employers across all of the settings included in the research to recognise the EYSEFD with a pay rise. This was particularly true for voluntary-run settings such as nurseries and sessional care groups where fund-raising was often necessary even for the setting to break even. However, there were also private nurseries and nurseries receiving NNI funding where the managers said that finances were precarious, and pay rises difficult. A further barrier in relation to pay rises, which applied to settings which received funding from local education authorities or local authority children's departments, was lack of recognition of the EYSEFD on the official pay scales for the setting, decided by the funding body.

The manager of a borough council nursery receiving local authority and NNI funding, said that her line manager at the authority was not aware of the EYSEFD and was therefore unlikely to authorise a pay rise for her, or for her other four staff who were taking the EYSEFD.

Finally, there were also cases - again across all of the settings included in the sample - where employers said that they did not want to award EYSEFD employees a promotion or pay rise because they did not regard the EYSEFD as bringing significant benefits to the settings. This feeling tended to occur again amongst those employers who took a more uninvolved stance towards the EYSEFD (as described in Chapter 2) and also in some cases in settings where the employee was fully expected to leave after completing the EYSEFD.

5.4.1 The EYSEFD and staff retention

Employers who said that their EYSEFD employees had taken the EYSEFD with the intention of going on to do teacher training either tended to have lost their EYSEFD employees to schools with classroom assistant vacancies part way through the EYSEFD, or were expecting to lose them to schools following completion of the EYSEFD or third year of their degree. The exceptions were a handful of primary schools in the sample whose head teachers said that they might be able to provide teacher-training vacancies themselves.

There were also cases of employers who had lost, or were expecting to lose, EYSEFD employees who were intending to stop at the EYSEFD, rather than go on to convert it to a degree. They had gone, or were intending to go, to settings where they would occupy higher positions, or which were more able to recognise their achievement of the EYSEFD. Examples of posts they had left for, or aspired to leave for included manager or deputy manager posts, advisory roles within the local authority, or roles within multi-agency settings such as Children's Centres.

Conversely, however, there were also cases where employers were not expecting to lose their employees on completion of the EYSEFD, including, in some cases, settings which were not able to recognise it with a pay rise or change in job title. Two main reasons were given for this. First, employers said that the students had not taken the EYSEFD to progress, but for their own self-esteem, and as a validation of their existing skills. It was referred to by one employer in this context as a '*feather in the cap*'. Second, there were a number of cases where employers felt that their employees had strong personal reasons for wanting to remain in the setting

in spite of its inability to recognise the EYSEFD. For example, the location was convenient, it fitted in with their childcare needs, or simply they were extremely happy and settled there, and wanted to remain in the post until retirement.

Employers who had lost, or were anticipating losing, EYSEFD employees to other settings displayed various feelings about the worth of having accommodated the employee through the EYSEFD. For the most part, it was striking that these employers remained positive about the experience. This was for one or several of the following reasons: they had not lost out financially in supporting the student; cover had been relatively easy to arrange (see Chapter 5); they felt that the setting had gained significant benefits from the EYSEFD (see this chapter, Section 1.1.1); or they had strong, personal reasons for wanting to support their employee through the EYSEFD and enhance their prospects for career development.

Conversely, the small number of cases where employers did express resentment at losing, or the prospect of losing an EYSEFD employee or employees part way through or at the end of the course tended to have one or more usually both of the following characteristics. First, accommodating the EYSEFD had been such a financial or logistical struggle that it was only felt to have been worth their while if they kept the employee. Second, the employer was relatively uninvolved and uninformed about the EYSEFD, and therefore less apparently cognisant of the benefits than other employers in the sample.

5.5 Feelings about accommodation of EYSEFD in the future

Employers' feelings about whether they would continue to support EYSEFD students in their workplaces varied.

A number were very positive about the prospect of having other future employees take the EYSEFD, and indeed in some cases had already agreed to employees signing up for the qualification. These employers were based in the range of settings included in the research, but were distinctive for the most part for being employers who had not experienced difficulties in accommodating the EYSEFD. For example, the student was not paid for the time they took off, cover had been relatively easy to arrange, the student was attending college in their own time, or there were no financial difficulties in accommodating student attendance at the college.

However, this group also included a number of employers who felt that the EYSEFD *had* been to some extent a burden to accommodate. For example, they said money for cover had had to come out the organisation's budget or that cover had been difficult to arrange. Nevertheless, they felt that having an EYSEFD student in the setting had brought considerable benefits to their organisation, or felt a strong personal commitment to advancing the qualifications and career prospects of employees within the Early Years sector.

The headteacher of a local authority funded pre-school had covered herself for the EYSEFD employee's attendance at college, and felt that the setting had lost out financially. Nevertheless, even though she expected this employee to leave to

pursue teacher training she felt that she would try to support future staff through the degree again if they had the 'interest and enthusiasm' to do it.

However, whilst in a number of cases commitment to supporting future employees through the EYSEFD was expressed unreservedly, more often employers felt that whilst they would certainly consider having other EYSEFD students in the workplace, one, or several of the following would need to apply. First, some said that there would be limits to the *number* of employees taking courses they could support at any one time. This feeling tended to be expressed by employers who had had difficulties arranging cover, or who felt that there were financial constraints to the number of employees they could support through training at any one time.

Second, there were also employers who felt that accommodating EYSEFD students in the future would only be possible if they discontinued their current policy of paying the employee for the time they were at college, particularly if DfES cover money ceased to be supplied. Employers who expressed this view were based in settings where money was limited, or where reductions in the amount of money available for training were said to be imminent.

Third, there was a feeling amongst some employers that a key condition of their continued support of EYSEFD students was evidence that colleges were organising the courses more professionally. This was particularly the case for employers whose employees had reportedly had negative experiences of the organisation of the course, or employers (described in Chapter 2) who had felt strongly dissatisfied with the level of communication between the college and the employment setting. In particular, these employers wanted more communication between the college and the employment setting, and, through this, a greater appreciation from the college of the sacrifices they had made to accommodate the student.

Related to this, there was also some feeling that in order to encourage employers to support EYSEFD students in the future, more clarity was needed about what the qualification means in terms of career progression and salaries.

Finally, there were employers who felt that they would only support future EYSEFD students if they could arrange with the student a contract whereby they would agree to stay in the setting a certain amount of time after completion of the degree. These employers tended to be those who felt that they had currently lost out through supporting employees through the EYSEFD because they had made financial or logistical sacrifices only for the employee then to leave to pursue other opportunities.

The manager of a voluntary-run pre-school had agreed to support three students through the EYSEFD, but had been upset that one left part way through the EYSEFD, and another was intending to leave prior to completion. She felt that the setting had supported them at great financial sacrifice, and that in the future, employees should be made to sign a contract agreeing to stay for a year after completion of the EYSEFD.

As a result of these caveats there were also employers who felt that if they took on future EYSEFD students they might be reluctant to commit at the beginning to

supporting them for two years, and instead would like their participation in the EYSEFD reviewed on a termly basis.

5.6 Employers' views about the impact of the EYSEFD on their setting more widely

This final section in the chapter explores employers' views about the current and likely future impacts of the EYSEFD for their sector more widely.

5.6.1 Primary schools

One view expressed by employers in primary schools was that the EYSEFD supported the up-skilling of teaching support staff, in line with the general re-modelling of this profession which, for example, would soon lead to support staff doing more cover for teachers. It was also seen by some employers in this profession as an alternative route to entering the teaching profession. On the whole, opinions about these developments were positive. It was felt, for example that offering teaching assistants the chance to up-skill was good for their self-esteem, and for the school, which could make use of their qualification by diversifying their tasks and using them to cover for teachers. In addition, giving talented people an opportunity to become qualified teachers without having to give up their employment was commonly felt to be a laudatory result of the EYSEFD.

However, a number of concerns were also expressed in relation to the impact of the EYSEFD in schools. First, a number of mentors, who were often classroom teachers, were worried that classroom assistants with the EYSEFD could be taken advantage of by being asked to take on greater responsibilities, for example leading whole classes for short periods in the teacher's absence, without being sufficiently remunerated. This was felt to be a particular concern given what they regarded as the current confusion over what the qualification actually meant in terms of role and pay scales. There was also some concern amongst teachers that the EYSEFD was a means of '*getting teachers on the cheap*'. This view tended to be expressed by mentors who harboured doubts about the quality of the degree, based on their own experiences of contact with the college (see Chapter 3) and who were therefore worried that the training was insufficiently rigorous or well-organised to produce well-qualified teachers.

5.6.2 Nurseries and sessional care settings

A key positive of the EYSEFD as far as nursery employers was concerned was that, in the long term, it would raise the status of early years workers and hopefully therefore result in better remuneration for the work. The government's Children's Centres drive was felt to tie in with this, as it was understood by some that NVQ level 4 or the EYSEFD were required for the higher positions within these settings. Indeed, one Children's Centre manager said that the EYSEFD seemed perfectly attuned to the multi-agency demands of the setting.

Similarly, there were managers in sessional care settings who felt that the more that settings had an EYSEFD qualified worker in place, the better their reputation for

providing high quality childcare and education would become. In particular, hope was expressed that the EYSEFD would help pre-schools to be seen as being on a par with nurseries, and that parents would see them as being staffed by able professionals rather than just *'mums helping out'*.

This said, there was also some real concern amongst managers in these settings that the EYSEFD, as it stood, was a rather ambiguous qualification, which currently seemed to be accorded no formal recognition in terms of job title, and whose award was difficult to accommodate in these settings. Because of this, there was a feeling that people in these settings undertaking the EYSEFD were working at it *'purely for the love of it'* rather than for any concrete reward. It was felt that this was a situation unlikely to be tolerated in other sectors, particularly less female-dominated ones. A further, rather different, concern was that the EYSEFD might come to be seen as the *'norm'* for those in higher-up positions within nurseries and sessional care settings, thereby disadvantaging those who were excellent with the children, but who perhaps lacked the time or academic ability to complete the EYSEFD.

Finally, a number of employers expressed concern that going on to achieve qualified teacher status was too often regarded as the key benefit of the EYSEFD. Their feeling was that if this was seen as the *raison d'être* of the EYSEFD, Early Years settings would increasingly act as mere training grounds for EYSEFD students, without then reaping the benefits. Instead, they felt that the EYSEFD should be able to open doors for students *within* the setting, so that their expertise would be retained. In this respect, they said, for example, that they would like to see job adverts for local authority or government-funded Early Years settings which specifically requested candidates with the EYSEFD, and with a salary that recognised the extra training they had undergone.

5.7 Chapter summary

Employers and mentors across the range of settings included in the research felt that the EYSEFD had had a positive impact on the employee taking the qualification and on the setting more widely. These included greater reflective and organisational skills, improved confidence and more independent thinking on the part of the employee. In relation to the setting, key positive impacts included the EYSEFD employee having instigated useful changes to policy or practice and other staff having picked up learning from the EYSEFD employee. Other benefits mentioned were the setting being encouraged to pay more attention to the Foundation Stage, and positive impacts on the reputation and the sustainability of the setting.

Those settings which felt most able to recognise the EYSEFD with a promotion or pay rise or both were those which had scope for role diversification - notably state primary schools - and settings with a range of different job titles and salary scales such as large nurseries and multi-agency settings. Key barriers to recognising the EYSEFD were felt to be lack of positions into which to progress EYSEFD employees, inability to afford a pay rise, and lack of recognition of the EYSEFD on the setting's pay scales.

Whilst some employers expected their EYSEFD employees to stay on after achieving the qualification, others said that they anticipated losing them to school-based roles, local authorities, multi-agency settings, or higher up positions in similar organisations. For the most part, employers who had or were expecting to lose EYSEFD employees were nevertheless positive about the experience. This tended to be for one or several of the following reasons: they had found it relatively easy to accommodate financially or logistically; they believed the setting had experienced significant benefits; they had strong personal reasons for wanting to support the employee in their career development.

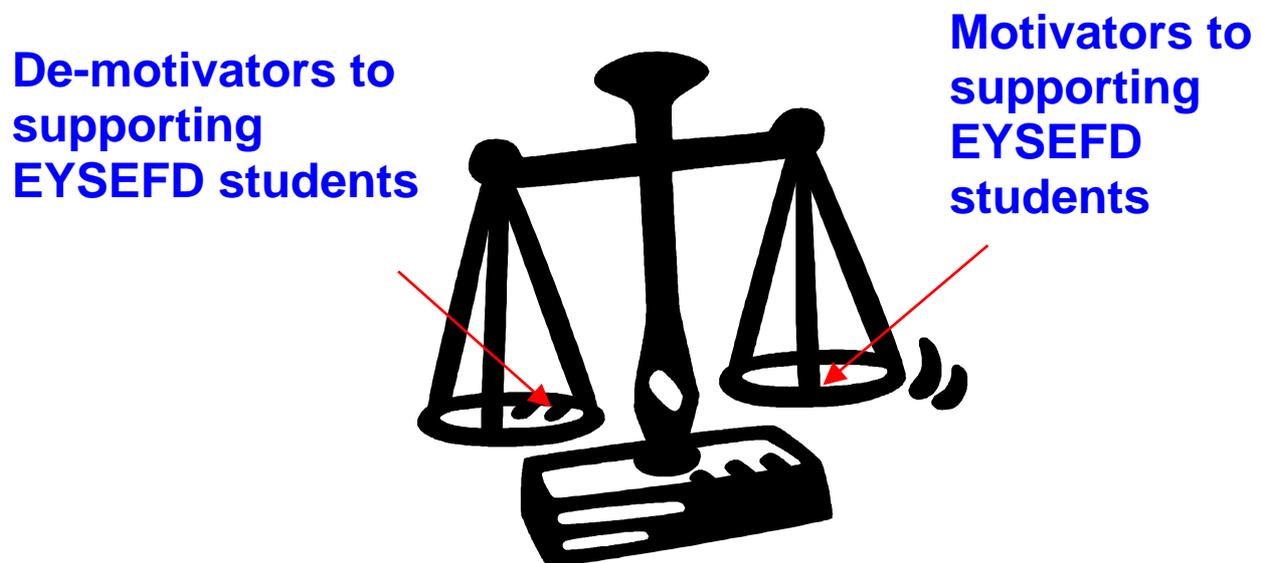
Nevertheless, many employers felt that in order for them to accommodate further EYSEFD students in the future they would need to set a limit on the number they could accommodate at any one time, and in some cases might need to stop paying for cover. Some employers also said that in order to ensure their continued support, colleges needed to show more professionalism in terms of the organisation of the course and their communication with the employer and mentor. Finally, there was also a common feeling that greater clarity was needed about what the qualification meant in terms of career progression.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has explored the experiences of employers and mentors in early years employment settings of accommodating EYSEFD students on site. This final chapter seeks, firstly, to outline key conclusions based on the findings of this report. Secondly, it outlines a set of recommendations made by employers and mentors relating to the design and the delivery of the EYSEFD.

6.1 Conclusions

This report has described how employers experienced a range of barriers and motivators to supporting EYSEFD students. These can be conceptualised as factors which fell on opposite sides of a set of scales; the heavier the weight on one side or another, the more or less positive employers felt about accommodating the EYSEFD.



The key 'de-motivators' to accommodating the EYSEFD were:

- a lack of information and contact with the college about the EYSEFD, including about its potential benefits to the setting;
- lack of information from colleges about the role of employers and mentors in facilitating the work-based part of the EYSEFD and supporting the student;
- logistical and financial difficulties in accommodating WBL, mentoring and student attendance at college;
- lack of confidence in the quality of the EYSEFD, based on the perception that potential students, the setting and/or the WBL are poorly assessed;
- lack of awareness or appreciation amongst employers of the benefits that having an EYSEFD student in the workplace could bring to the setting; and
- lack of progression opportunities within the setting.

Conversely, key 'motivators' to accommodating the EYSEFD were:

- a strong commitment on the part of the employer to staff training generally, early years qualifications specifically, or to the career development of the individual employee;
- the ability to accommodate the EYSEFD logistically and financially;
- confidence in the degree strengthened by good information from the college and regular tutor visits to the workplace;
- the perception that having an employee studying for the EYSEFD brings significant benefits to the employees' practice and the workplace more generally; and
- the existence of progression opportunities within the setting for employees who completed the EYSEFD.

This research has demonstrated that these 'motivators' and 'de-motivators' have different weights. Particularly 'heavy' factors currently are employers' commitment to staff training and development both generally and in relation to the early years and commitment to the career development of individual employees. As has been demonstrated, these factors can be so strong that they lead employers to go to great lengths to accommodate the EYSEFD even where some of the 'de-motivators' are also strongly present, such as lack of information from and contact with the college, logistical and/or financial difficulties in accommodating the EYSEFD and lack of progression routes within the setting. This particularly the case where employers feel their employee has unfulfilled potential, and are keen to help them to realise it.

However, employer accounts also suggest that there will be a time-limit to the extent to which the 'motivators' will outweigh the 'de-motivators', particularly in settings where accommodation of the EYSEFD is a significant financial and logistical burden. This seems to be particularly the case for settings such as nurseries and sessional care providers which lack a sound financial structure, and those - often smaller nurseries and sessional care settings - where employers expect to lose the employee after their completion of the EYSEFD.

A particular fear in these settings in relation to the EYSEFD is that they will be increasingly viewed as cheap '*training grounds*' for EYSEFD students, who then go on to leave the setting once they have achieved the degree. A further concern - expressed by employers across settings - is that if the EYSEFD comes to be seen primarily as a route into teacher training, the early years sector will lose out on the expertise the EYSEFD confers.

The research suggests that employers would benefit from more 'appreciation' of their role in supporting the EYSEFD than they are currently receiving. In particular, it seems that more information and support from the college is necessary. It also seems evident that cutting or reducing the funding²⁵ employers receive to pay for cover risks giving the opposite message, and tipping employers who already face

²⁵ The Surestart Unit is funding the EYSEFD for the current academic year 2005-6. Funding has not yet been secured for the academic year 2006-7.

significant 'de-motivators' to towards a reluctance to continue supporting the EYSEFD.

More positively, this research has described how there are also a range of settings where the 'motivators' are particularly evident. State primary schools and better-off private nurseries and schools seem the most able to accommodate the EYSEFD logistically and financially. State primary schools and larger nursery and multi-agency settings can offer the most opportunities for career progression, and are therefore typically the least worried about losing EYSEFD qualified staff and the most likely to feel that the setting can benefit directly in the longer term.

This research has also demonstrated that, within the sector, the EYSEFD is viewed as having different 'uses' depending on the setting. In primary schools it can facilitate upwards movements within the setting, for example by facilitating EYSEFD students taking on additional roles, or progressing onwards to HLTA or even teacher status. In multi-agency settings, it can meet the need for staff with higher level qualifications who have been trained specifically in multi-agency work in the early years field. Conversely, in nurseries and sessional care settings, it has fewer specific uses; whilst employers welcome the positive impacts on staff practice, it is often the case that in order to reap benefits of the EYSEFD in terms of improved status and pay, they feel that students completing the EYSEFD need to move on to other settings.

One factor that interestingly does not seem to register on the scales is employers' past experience of supporting work-based qualifications; that is, it does not seem to be the case that the more experience an employer has of work-based qualifications, the more likely they are to feel positively about the EYSEFD. This seems to be because the EYSEFD is perceived as being so different to other qualifications in terms of its level, the amount of college attendance required, and the seemingly much wider brief around WBL. This underlines the need for good quality, continuous information and contact between the work places and the college in relation to the EYSEFD.

Three other key findings are important to emphasise:

- **variations in WBL experiences:** this report has demonstrated that there is currently real inconsistency in the way WBL is being experienced. In some employment settings, it is regarded as distinct from an employees' day to day work, and special arrangements are made. In others, it is regarded as part of an employee's normal work. Furthermore, there are also significant variations in the monitoring of WBL. Whilst in some instances, mentors and/or employers are taking an active role in constructively criticising practice, in other cases they are merely 'signing off' or not doing this at all. Whilst there is evidence in some settings of college involvement in observing WBL, in others college tutors have been uninvolved in this process.
- **variations in mentoring models:** the report has also shown that the type of support EYSEFD students are receiving from their mentors varies hugely, from proactive mentors who get involved in constructive criticism and personal

development to, at the other extreme, mentors who have barely any contact with the EYSEFD student at all.

- **student-dependent communication:** finally, the report shows that the EYSEFD students themselves are often the linchpin of communications between the work setting and the college; this can work to varying degrees of success, but can be seen as inappropriately informal by employers given the high level of the qualification.

The implication of these findings is that the experiences offered to EYSEFD students in the workplace differ greatly depending on their employment setting, how proactive the college is in communicating with the employer, and the levels of interest in, and the ways of conceptualising, the EYSEFD by employers and mentors.

Recommendations in relation to these issues are outlined in section 6.2, below.

6.2 Recommendations

This section outlines suggestions for key ways in which the certain elements of the EYSEFD could be improved. The suggested improvements outlined here are primarily based on explicit suggestions made by employers and mentors, but some are also inferred from the main findings. The source of different recommendations is made clear throughout the section.

6.2.1 *Communication between colleges and settings*

A recurring message from the settings included in this research was that employers and mentors did not feel that existing communication between employment settings, EYSEFD students and colleges was sufficient. Respondents referred to the communication 'triangle' between employer, mentor and tutor described in literature on the EYSEFD as being potentially valuable, but did not think it worked in practice. As has been apparent throughout this report, implications of limited information were a lack of clarity about: the roles of both employers and mentors; what WBL was meant to entail; and how the course was being delivered by colleges. It also sometimes resulted in employers or mentors not supporting EYSEFD as actively as they could, or feeling that their efforts were not appreciated by colleges.

The findings suggest that the level, format, and clarity of information shared between settings and colleges needed to be improved on an early and ongoing basis. Employers and mentors made a number of suggestions about how this could be best achieved:

- they should have more, and clearer information about the EYSEFD in the early stages of their involvement with it. Specifically, they felt that they would have benefited from more information on the roles of both employers and mentors in relation to students, what was required in relation to WBL, the timing of assignments and information about the running of the courses at college. Introductory and ongoing meetings between the college and setting were suggested. Clear and easily accessible information on the degree (for example,

'summary sheets') were also identified as a possible means of disseminating information.

- Colleges should make an identified contact person available to the settings, so that it was easier for them to know who to contact in the event of any difficulties relation to the degree; there was evidence that this had currently happened in some cases but not others.
- College tutors should make regular visits to settings, not only to check on student's progress, but also so that they could field any enquiries from the employer or mentor about how the student was doing, and how they could further support them in the workplace, particularly in relation to WBL.

There is a strong corroboration between these findings and the findings from the student report; in particular, students were keen for there to be a set-up meeting between the employer, tutor, mentor and student to clarify roles, discuss the value of EYSEFD and establish links for the duration of the course²⁶. This was also something which employers and mentors also felt they would find useful.

6.2.2 Support for mentors

Mentors played a key role in supporting EYSEFD students, accommodating them in the workplace, and in some cases acting as a bridge between work settings and colleges. As the student report highlights, mentors were viewed by students as providing a critical form of support. However, evidence from both the employer and student reports²⁷ suggests that there was a lack of consistency in the way in which support was provided. Employers and mentors made a number of recommendations in relation to how mentors could be better supported in this role:

- There should be more clarity about the role of a mentor. This would give them more confidence about undertaking their roles, and allow them to be more proactive in supporting students.
- Training should be provided to mentors in relation to how best to support adults entering further education, for example, supporting independent learning.
- College tutors should visit the setting to observe mentoring practice, and discuss with mentors their role, and any problems or concerns they had.
- The college should facilitate periodic mentor meetings or mentor networks. This would allow mentors to discuss their experiences, identify best practice, and feed back their experiences to the college with whom they were working. This was currently happening in some areas, with mixed success, a key problem being short notice for the meetings. Mentors generally felt that they would like to be notified of meetings at least a month in advance.
- Mentors should be given termly feedback forms to fill in and return to the college. This would allow them to bring any issues to the college's attention.
- Mentoring could be undertaken by staff from the college rather than the setting.
- Mentoring should be quality assured by the colleges, for example through observation of mentoring sessions.

²⁶ *Ibid*, Chapter 7.

²⁷ *Ibid*, Chapter 7.

6.2.3 Content and format of the EYSEFD

As the report describes, levels of understanding of the content and format of the EYSEFD varied. Lack of contact with colleges meant that settings had often received limited information in this respect. Employers and mentors made a number of recommendations relating to the content of the EYSEFD, and information provided to students:

- Messages on the content of the EYSEFD were not consistent, however some employers and mentors felt that there could be more emphasis on some aspects of the course coverage for example, more on caring for, and teaching, developmentally delayed children or more emphasis on equal opportunities.
- Employers and mentors sometimes viewed the level of guidance on books, literature and other information sources unfavourably compared to other courses and qualifications, and felt that students could be offered more support in this respect.
- Finally, there were instances where employers and mentors felt that their EYSEFD employees were given very little notification about forthcoming assignments, or that there was a lack of clarity in the information they were given about how to approach the assignment, and what its aims were. They felt that this information should be better organised, and distributed in sufficient time to allow students to plan ahead in terms of time.

In other instances, employers and mentors had seen students struggle with the course, or particular aspects of it, and made a second set of recommendations related to the targeting of the course:

- Better targeting of the course and more clarity about who it is aimed at. Employers generally felt that the EYSEFD was intended for experienced practitioners and that where students did not have substantial grounding in early years practice, they should be encouraged to gain work experience before undertaking it.
- Tailoring course assignments to the ability and experience of the EYSEFD's target group. Early assignments in particular were observed by employers to have caused substantial anxiety because they were very difficult from the start, whereas they felt a more gradual approach would have been more appropriate.

6.2.4 Assessment and quality assurance

The assessment and quality assurance of students' progress was raised as being an issue for some employers and mentors. Where they felt that assessment and quality assurance had not been sufficiently rigorous, this could impact negatively on their perceptions of the EYSEFD because they perceived it as being insufficiently demanding or consistently delivered. These findings are echoed by the student report, which also suggests that WBL assessments were not being carried out in a consistent manner. A range of recommendations were made in this respect:

- an initial assessment of the work setting to determine whether it is sufficiently well equipped to deliver WBL.
- Support for mentors in relation to filling out evidence and observation forms.

- More visits from the college to assess the work of EYSEFD students in the workplace.
- More information, consistency and transparency of assessment across different early years settings.

6.2.5 Funding the EYSEFD

As the report outlines, awareness of the funding available for covering EYSEFD students varied, with some employers not being aware of the availability of cover. Some employers also reported have applied for the cover, but not having received it. The amount of cover available met with a mixed response from settings, but employers tended to feel that it did not accurately reflect the cost of covering the EYSEFD employee's attendance at college and, in some cases, their WBL. Recommendations included:

- Levels of funding which more accurately reflected the cost of obtaining cover for students' attendance at college, and completion of WBL and/or assignments. Employers sometimes also suggested that the amount of cover offered should be calculated on means-tested basis, to ensure that settings with more precarious financial situations were not excluded from supporting EYSEFD students, and to ensure that the better-off settings were not claiming for money they did not need.
- Additional funding to reflect the cost of obtaining cover for mentors.
- Extending the funding for student fees to cover the conversion of the EYSEFD into a BA.
- Improving the functioning of the funding system to make it more timely and efficient in making payments to both settings and students.

6.2.6 Promotion of the degree and progression routes for students

The promotion of the potential benefits, and progression routes associated with the completion of the EYSEFD were identified as being a key area for improvement by employers and mentors. This echoes recommendations made in the EYSEFD students report²⁸. These included the provision of careers advice and facilitation of onwards progression by colleges. Key recommendations in this respect included:

- Promotion of the benefits of supporting students in the completion of the EYSEFD to employers.
- Increased clarity about the possible progression routes associated with the completion of the EYSEFD.

A final, repeated message, related to employer and mentors dissatisfaction with levels of pay available in the early years sector more widely. For some, the current situation limited the value of completing the EYSEFD and gaining Senior Practitioner status, because they felt that many settings would be unable to recognise their employee's achievement in gaining it. This led some to call for financial support for Early Years settings to help them to retain employees who have built up an expertise

²⁸ *Ibid*, Chapter 7.

in the Early Years though the EYSEFD, who might otherwise leave because of lack of opportunities for progression or pay rises within their setting.

APPENDICES

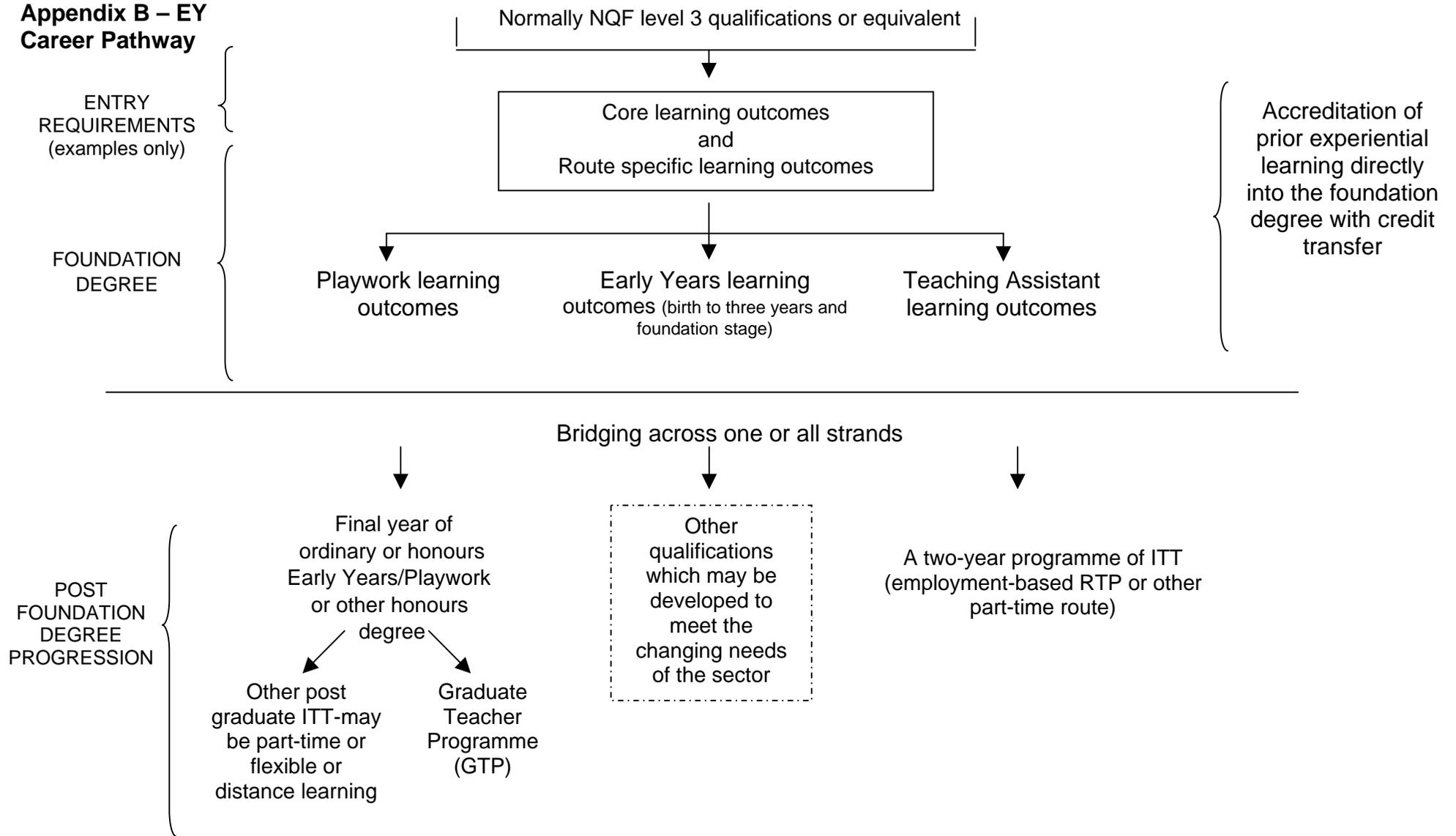
Appendix A – Qualifications Framework

Qualifications Framework

(Adapted from website – www.qca.org.uk/nq/framework)

Level of qualification	General qualifications	Vocationally-related qualifications	Occupational qualifications
5	Higher level qualifications		NVQ Level 5
4	BTEC Higher Nationals (Foundation Degrees within Level 4)		NVQ Level 4
3	A levels	Advanced NVQ	NVQ Level 3
2	GCSE grade A*-C	Intermediate NVQ	NVQ Level 2
1	GCSE grade D-G	Foundation NVQ	NVQ Level 1

Appendix B – EY Career Pathway



Appendix C – Topic Guides

Note that for the fieldwork, three separate topic guides were used: an employer topic guide; a mentor topic guide; and an employer-mentor topic guide. Only the first two have been included here, because the latter was an amalgam of these two.

P6118 – Evaluation of the Early Years Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degree – study amongst employers and mentors

EMPLOYER TOPIC GUIDE – MAY 2005

Note: Participating respondents will have been sent an introductory letter explaining how the overall evaluation is being conducted, and how this discussion will contribute. The letter will set out the main areas that will be included in the discussion, so that people have a chance to think about the issues in advance, or raise them with colleagues who may be interested.

The key objectives are to explore:

- Experiences of becoming involved in the EYSEFD
- The nature of WBL and mentoring – *adequacy of initial information, setting up, what comprises, nature of their role, benefits and drawbacks*
- The impact of accommodating EYSEFD students on the workplace
- Relationships with the HEI/college – nature of, and satisfaction with
- Views about the impact of EYSEFD on their organisation and the sector more widely
- Suggestions for improvements to employer involvement with EYSEFD

- Remind about the study and its aims
- Confirm independence of NatCen from the DfES
- Remind topics to be covered
- Remind about confidentiality, and how material will be used
- Invite questions
- Seek permission for use of tape recorder.

BACKGROUND – ROLE AND ORGANISATION

- **Job title**
- **Role in organisation and responsibilities**
- **Type of employment setting**
 - size – number of employees and children, ages of children
 - type of activities provided, i.e. statutory mainstream education, EYE, childcare – if childcare, hours offered, how many weeks of year
 - status (i.e. private, voluntary, LA-provider, for profit, not for profit)
 - parent profile and fee structured (subsidised/ non-subsidised places)
- **Employees within organisation:**

- number of employees
 - qualifications and experience of employees
 - **EYSEFD students:**
 - number of EYSEFD students in organisation
 - job title/role of EYSEFD students
 - student background (broad age, familial responsibilities etc that may impact on experience of EYSEFD)
 - motivations for undertaking EYSEFD
 - any EYSEFD specialism
 - whether EYSEFD students are employees of the organisation/placement students
 - *if employees* – length of service, perceived reason for taking EYSEFD
 - *if placement students* – type of employment settings for student work places, link between own organisation and employment settings (*if relevant*)
 - **Employing students (*where relevant*)**
 - How numbers were decided
 - Whether students had already been employees
 - If not, degree of screening of potential students necessary
-

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- **Staff development – importance attached to staff development by them and by their staff, strategies in place**
 - **Details of involvement with EY courses and training (other than EYSEFD):**
 - nature of involvement (i.e. providing work placements/mentors)
 - other (i.e. non FD) training attended/provided for staff
 - views of the value of these courses
 - impact of these courses on staff recruitment and retention
 - impact of involvement in previous courses on decision to become involved with EYSEFD
 - **Training gaps, staff recruitment and retention**
 - any gaps in training available (i.e where to go after NVQ L3)
 - skill gaps amongst staff, how best addressed
 - any recruitment/retention issues experienced, role of staff development/training in addressing these issues
 - views on how well EYSEFD will address these issues
-

BECOMING INVOLVED IN THE EYSEFD AND INITIAL VIEWS ABOUT THE EYSEFD

- **When first heard about EYSEFD**
 - Source of information (student, HEI/college)
 - Nature of information about what course would involve for them/the student - *what form the information took, what they were told*
 - Levels of satisfaction with timing of and nature of information
 - Any gaps in information given (with hindsight)
 - Initial reactions to EYSEFD: perceptions of worth within EY sector (for students/employers, compared to other courses)

- **Nature of communication with student and HEI/college about course**
 - Whether discussed course with student prior to application, nature of discussion
 - Nature, if any, of contact with HEI/college – *how this was instigated, views about methods of promotion and information*
 - Any enquiries from HEI/college or student regarding the suitability of the employment setting for learning
 - Negotiation of involvement of employer: *who was involved, what happened*
 - Whether asked to sign an agreement of commitment to provide relevant support

- **Initial understanding of what the course would require of the student/for them**
 - Purpose of course, areas covered
 - Time commitment to course required by students
 - Commitment required from them in terms of supporting the student (time, resources)
 - WBL element of course
 - Mentoring
 - Financial implications of involvement – *i.e. rearranging timetables/supply cover for students*

- **Early feelings about involvement, any doubts/concerns, and how these could have been resolved**

- **Key motivations for involvement in EYSEFD**
 - Meeting need for current employees
 - Considered key development within EYSEFD sector

- Desire to have students on work placements
 - Other motivations – financial/political Perceived advantages
-

EXPERIENCES OF EYSEFD

- **Course content and structure**

- Knowledge about course content and structure – *any gaps in knowledge/information needs*
- Views about balance between theory/WBL
- Perceived relevance of course to their specific workplace setting

- **Initial understanding of WBL element of course**

- Nature of discussion between them, the student and the HEI/college tutor about what WBL would comprise, levels of satisfaction with discussion
- Information/training received by them around facilitating WBL – *views about*
- Involvement in planning employee's WBL (i.e. extent to which employee's WBL schedule was something that they had a say in), *feelings about levels of involvement*
- Understanding about what WBL would require for student
- Understanding of their responsibilities in terms of students' WBL (*i.e. did they expect to have a facilitating, or assessment role, or both*)
- Early views about WBL – *benefits, any early concerns*

- **Experiences of WBL**

- What WBL comprises in practice, actual tasks carried out by students (*prompt for portfolios of evidence, observations of student at work, logging of mentor meetings, demonstration of reflective practice, providing advice/support around assignments*)
- Whether incorporated into employee's 'normal' working day/whether undertaken in more 'formal' manner, views about
- Amount of time spent by student on WBL – *views about*
- Their role in supporting WBL - key activities (*for example, supervisory role, pastoral care, setting up mentoring, re-jigging staff timetables, providing information, commenting on work*)
- Ease of accommodating WBL – *any problems*
- Any tensions between student's paid work/WBL requirements - *prompt for specifics*
- Views about WBL – *benefits, drawbacks*

- Contact with HEI/college around WBL – *nature of, satisfaction with*
 - *If student is employee* – advantages/disadvantages of carrying out WBL in workplace
 - *If student is placement student* - advantages/disadvantages of carrying out WBL in placement setting
 - Views on nature and scope of educational experiences available to students for WBL (*i.e. age of children, whether have SEN etc*)
- **Setting up mentoring system**
 - Details of mentoring systems set up for other courses – *i.e. teacher training*
 - Details of student mentor
 - Initial understanding of what mentoring role involves
 - Information/training received by them, the student and the mentor re their role – views about
 - Identification of suitable individuals to become mentors – *extent to which they/the mentors were involved with decision, satisfaction with process*
 - Ease of finding suitably qualified mentor
 - Training/remuneration for mentors – *details of, views about*
 - Monitoring of mentors and students – *involvement with, contact with HEI/college over monitoring*
- **Experiences of mentoring system**
 - What mentoring comprises in practice (*prompt for details of specific tasks carried out by mentor and their more general role, i.e. providing advice and support*)
 - Amount of time spent by mentor on mentoring, views about
 - Their [employer's] role in supporting mentoring - *key activities*
 - Ease of accommodating mentoring – *any problems*
 - Views about mentoring – *benefits, drawbacks*
 - Contact with HEI/college around mentoring – *nature of, satisfaction with*
 - Involvement in quality control/assessment of mentoring – *satisfaction with*
- **Nature of ongoing relationship between employer, HEI/college tutor and mentor**
 - Visits from HEI/college tutors to the employment setting – *views about timing, relevance, usefulness*
 - Visits of employer to the HEI/college for any meetings – *whether one-off/regular, views about relevance and usefulness*
 - Any training sessions attended - *if did, views about, if not, ask whether would have found this helpful and what they would have liked to be told*

- Overall views of support offered by HEI/college – *how useful and relevant, extent to which felt as though they [as employers] were being assessed, views about*
 - Whether have met other mentors/employers – *where, who organised by, views about helpfulness and relevance*
 - Key unmet needs in terms of support from HEI/college
- **Assessment and quality control of employers, mentors and students**
 - Monitoring of employers and mentors – whether carried out, who by, views about
 - How students' WBL is assessed
 - Involvement in quality control/assessment of students
 - Views about effectiveness of assessment, any difficulties/concerns and how overcome
- **Facilitators/constraints to accommodating EYSEFD student**
 - Time commitment required by WBL/mentoring
 - Managing student attendance at HEI/college - *how managed, whether needed to arrange internal/external cover, whether employee required to 'make up' hours*
 - Managing mentor attendance at training, *where relevant*
 - *If arranged cover* - awareness of DfES money to cover supply/mentoring, experiences of accessing, views about
 - Views of other DfES support arrangements for students (childcare grant, £500 a year bursary, loan of laptop and printer, fee waiver) – *impact on student and workplace*
 - Financial implications of accommodating EYSEFD student/s
 - Impact on other staff of accommodating EYSEFD student/s
-

VALUE AND IMPACT OF EYSEFD

- **Perceived value of EYSEFD to employers**
- **Perceived impact of EYSEFD on quality of employee's performance and practice** - *explore which element they feel has had the biggest impact and why (i.e. WBL, mentoring, theory)*
- **Impact of EYSEFD (discuss impact within their organisation and the sector more widely)**
 - Impact of EYSEFD on employee role, career expectations and pay - *i.e. whether expected to stay in current role, use as stepping stone to BA, take on more senior role*

- Impact on organisations working practices more generally- *i.e. do student's participation in WBL activities have a wider impact on group settings e.g. in generating enthusiasm*
 - Impact on children- *i.e. are there any different/ additional outcomes for the children EYSEFD students look after or teach (in terms of activities offered, type of care received?)*
 - Anticipated impact on staff turnover
 - Career progression for Senior Practitioners (*i.e. extent to which appropriate paths are available within existing employment settings*)
 - What career progression might entail (*i.e. promotion, greater responsibility, higher pay*)
 - Ease of accommodating career progression within their organisation/the sector more widely – *barriers, facilitators*
 - Enhancement of service delivery as result of EYSEFD training
-

THE FUTURE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

- **Expectations of development of EYSEFD within their employment setting**
 - Plans for future involvement (*i.e. supporting current employees through the degree, taking on workplace students*)
 - Views about impact of involvement with EYSEFD on recruitment and retention of staff
 - Any links between future developments in employment setting and EYSEFD (*i.e. expansions, provision of different services, legal requirements around staff/child ratios*)
- **Overall reactions to accommodating EYSEFD - what works well/less well and why**
- **Views about which type of student/employer setting the EYSEFD works well and less well for**
- **Key examples of best practice/lessons learned**
- **Suggestions for improving involvement of employers in EYSEFD – *explore spontaneous views and then prompt for:***
 - Adequacy of information provided about the course and levels /nature of involvement from the student/them/the mentor
 - WBL – information about, nature, time required, their role
 - Mentoring
 - Nature of relationship with HEI/college
 - Support available to employers and mentors from HEI/college and DfES

- Course content and structure

THANK AND CLOSE

P6118 – Evaluation of the Early Years Sector-Endorsed Foundation Degree – study amongst employers and mentors

MENTOR TOPIC GUIDE - JANUARY 2005

Note: Participating respondents will have been sent an introductory letter explaining how the overall evaluation is being conducted, and how this discussion will contribute. The letter will set out the main areas that will be included in the discussion, so that people have a chance to think about the issues in advance, or raise them with colleagues who may be interested.

The key objectives are to explore:

- **Experiences of becoming a mentor**
- **Experiences of mentoring – what mentoring comprises, help/support received/ease of accommodating, benefits/drawbacks of role**
- **Relationships with HEI/college**
- **Views about impact of EYSEFD on sector**
- **Suggestions for improvements to mentor role within EYSEFD**

- Remind about the study and its aims
- Confirm independence of NatCen from the DfES
- Remind topics to be covered
- Remind about confidentiality, and how material will be used
- Invite questions
- Seek permission for use of tape recorder.

BACKGROUND

- **Job title**
- **Type of employment setting**
 - size – number of employees and children, ages of children
 - type of activities provided, i.e. statutory mainstream education, EYE, childcare – if childcare, hours offered, how many weeks of year
 - status (i.e. private, voluntary, LA-provider, for profit, not for profit)
 - parent profile and fee structured (subsidised/ non-subsidised places)
- **Role in organisation and responsibilities**
- **Professional qualifications**

- **Employees within organisation:**
 - number of employees
 - qualifications and experience of employees

- **EYSEFD students:**
 - number of EYSEFD students in organisation
 - job title/role of EYSEFD students
 - student background (broad age, familial responsibilities etc that may impact on experience of EYSEFD)
 - motivations for undertaking EYSEFD
 - any EYSEFD specialism
 - whether EYSEFD students are employees of the organisation/placement students
 - *if employees* – length of service, perceived reason for taking EYSEFD
 - *if placement students* – type of employment settings for student work places, link between own organisation and employment settings (*if relevant*)
 - Details of who they are mentoring – *job title, whether external or internal, if internal length of time in organisation, professional relationship of mentor to student (e.g. line manager, etc*

- **Details of prior involvement with EY courses and training other than EYSEFD):**
 - nature of involvement (*i.e. as student, as mentor*)
 - views of the value of these courses and their role
 - perceived impact of these courses on staff recruitment and retention in their organisations
 - any gaps experienced in training available (*i.e. where to go after NVQL3*)
 - skills gaps amongst staff, how best addressed
 - impact of involvement in prior courses on involvement with EYSEFD

BECOMING A MENTOR AND INITIAL VIEWS ABOUT THE EYSEFD AND MENTORING

- **When first heard about EYSEFD and mentoring role**
 - Source of information (student, HEI/college, manager)
 - Nature of information about what course would involve for them/the student - *what form the information took, what they were told*
 - Levels of satisfaction with timing of and nature of information about mentoring role

- Any gaps in information given (with hindsight)
 - Initial reactions to EYSEFD: perceptions of worth within EY sector (for students/employers, compared to other courses)
 - **Nature of communication with student, HEI/college and employer about course**
 - Nature of communication between them (as mentor) and the student, HEI/college and employer about what WBL and mentoring would comprise
 - levels of satisfaction with discussion
 - any gaps
 - Whether interviewed by HEI/college, if so, views about
 - Whether asked to sign an agreement of commitment to provide relevant support
 - Whether received initial training from HEI/college, if so, views about
 - Views about adequacy of early contact with HEI/college in terms of nature and level of information given/training
 - **Initial understanding of mentoring and WBL**
 - Understanding of purpose/content of EYSEFD course, and role of mentoring/WBL
 - Understanding of their responsibilities in terms of mentoring student (*i.e. did they expect to have a facilitating, or assessment role, or both*)
 - Understanding of time commitment required
 - Understanding of arrangements for cover (where relevant)
 - **Becoming a mentor –process and motivations**
 - Process of identifying them as suitable mentor
 - Motivation for mentoring – *extent to which seen as voluntary/compulsory*
 - Understanding of criteria for selection
 - **Early feelings about involvement – any doubts/concerns and how these could have been resolved**
-

EXPERIENCES OF MENTORING

- **Setting up mentoring role**
 - Details of mentoring system set up within their organisation for other courses
 - How mentoring role established in early days
 - Role of HEI/college, student, employer and mentor in setting up mentoring role, establishing student and mentor tasks

- Whether attended further HEI/college meetings or training on role of mentor prior to taking up task – *if did views about, if not, ask whether would have found this helpful and what they would have liked to be told*
- **Experiences of mentoring and WBL**
 - What mentoring comprises in practice, tasks they carry out (*prompt for specific tasks as well as details of their more general role, i.e. providing advice and support*)
 - How mentoring incorporated into working day – *i.e. whether comprises ‘extra’ tasks, or activities that would have happened any way, whether meetings between mentor and student take place during working hours, or free time (i.e. lunch breaks)*
 - Regularity of meetings between student and mentor
 - Views about sufficiency of contact between mentor and student
 - Extent to which tasks carried out/amount of time spent on mentoring fits with early expectations
 - *If student is employee* – advantages/disadvantages of carrying out WBL and mentoring in workplace
 - *If they are mentor to a placement student* – advantages/disadvantages of set up
 - Views on nature and scope of educational experiences available to students in their workplace setting (*i.e. age of children, whether have SEN etc*)
 - Views about giving positive/negative feedback
 - Impact of mentoring relationship on them and student – *benefits, drawbacks*
 - Impact of mentoring on their own (mentor’s) professional development
- **Assessment and quality control of mentors/students**
 - Monitoring of mentors – *whether carried out, who by, views about*
 - Involvement in quality control/assessment of student’s WBL – *satisfaction with*
 - Impact of involvement in quality assessment on relationship between mentor and student
- **Nature of ongoing relationship between mentor and HEI/college /other mentors**
 - Visits from HEI/college tutors to the employment setting – *views about timing, relevance, usefulness*
 - Visits of mentor to the HEI/college for any meetings – *whether one-off/regular, views about relevance and usefulness*
 - Any training sessions attended since taking up mentoring role - *if did views about, if not, ask whether would have found this helpful and what they would have liked to be told*

- Overall views of support offered by HEI/college – *how useful and relevant, extent to which felt like they were being assessed, views about*
 - Whether have met other mentors – *where, who organised by, views about helpfulness and relevance*
 - Key unmet needs in terms of support from HEI/college/employer
- **Facilitators/constraints to accommodating mentoring**
 - Time commitment required by mentoring role, and ease of fitting into current workload, any problems and how overcome
 - Any tensions between their paid role and their mentoring requirements - *prompt for specifics*
 - Whether employer has arranged cover for them to cover mentoring role – *views about, adequacy of*
 - Awareness of DfES money for supply cover/mentoring - *views about adequacy*
 - Adequacy of the DfES support arrangements for students (childcare grant, £500 a year bursary, loan of laptop and printer, fee waiver) – *impact on student and workplace*
 - Impact on other staff of accommodating EYSEFD student and mentoring role
-

REFLECTIONS ON MENTORING AND EYSEFD

- **Views about mentoring**
 - Overall views on how well working
 - Benefits/drawbacks
 - Views on what ideal relationship between student/mentor should be
 - Extent to which their relationship matches this ideal – *facilitators/constraints to meeting ideal*
- **Perceived value of EYSEFD to employers**
- **Perceived impact of EYSEFD on quality of employee's performance and practice** - *explore which element they feel has had the biggest impact and why (i.e. WBL, mentoring, theory)*
- **Impact of EYSEFD (discuss impact within their organisation and the sector more widely)**
 - Impact of EYSEFD on employee role, career expectations and pay - *i.e. whether expected to stay in current role, use as stepping stone to BA, take on more senior role*

- Impact on organisations working practices more generally- *i.e. does student's participation in WBL activities have a wider impact on groups settings e.g. in generating enthusiasm*
 - Impact on children- *i.e. are there any different/ additional outcomes for the children EYSEFD students look after or teach (in terms of activities offered, type of care received?)*
 - Anticipated impact on staff turnover
 - Career progression for Senior Practitioners (*i.e. extent to which appropriate paths are available within existing employment settings*)
 - What career progression might entail (*i.e. promotion, greater responsibility, higher pay*)
 - Ease of accommodating career progression within their organisation/the sector more widely – *barriers, facilitators*
 - Enhancement of service delivery as result of EYSEFD training
-

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

- **Overall reactions to EYSEFD and mentoring role - what works well/less well and why**
- **Views about which type of student/employer setting the EYSEFD works well and less well for**
- **Key examples of best practice/lessons learned**
- **Suggestions for improving involvement of mentors in EYSEFD – *explore spontaneous views and then prompt for:***
 - Adequacy of information provided about the course and levels /nature of involvement from the student/them/the mentor
 - Nature of mentoring role
 - Nature of relationship with HEI/college
 - Support available to employers and mentors
 - Course content and structure

THANK AND CLOSE

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Online: www.dfespublications.gov.uk

© National Centre for Social Research 2006

Produced by the Department for Education and Skills

ISBN 1 84478 737 0
Ref No: RR752
www.dfes.go.uk/research