

CSN POLICY BRIEFING

Foundations for quality: The Independent Review of Early Education and Childcare Qualifications (The Nutbrown Review)

Date 9 August 2012
Author Zoë Ollerenshaw
LGiU/CSN Associate

Summary

The Nutbrown review [Foundations for quality - The independent review of early education](#) recommends that to ensure that every early education and childcare setting offers high quality education and care, the level 3 qualification for staff should be remodelled and made more rigorous, and that the all qualified staff in the sector should have a minimum level 3 qualification. Furthermore, the sector needs more qualified teachers with specialist early years knowledge to lead professional practice in early education and childcare settings.

Overview

In the final report of her review of early childcare qualifications, Professor Cathy Nutbrown lays out her vision for early education and childcare, where

- every child is able to experience high quality care and education, irrespective of the setting they attend,
- the importance of childhood is understood, respected and valued, and
- the workforce has a strong professional identity, led by well-qualified early years practitioners.

To achieve this vision requires an increase in the number of qualified specialist teachers to lead practice in settings, supported by an effective team of early years practitioners, with a minimum, rigorous, level 3 qualification.

Briefing in full

A new vision for the early years workforce

With clear evidence showing that high quality early education can have a strong positive influence on a child's development and narrow the attainment gap between economically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged children, the Government is investing heavily in early years education and care. However, alongside increasing access for disadvantaged children, it is also important to ensure that the early education and care is of the highest possible quality, with talented practitioners with the appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes to support young children's learning and development through exploration and play, and to work with families.

CSN POLICY BRIEFING

Qualifications are key to the 'quality' of staff: highly qualified teams of early years practitioners are more effective in developing children's skills than lesser qualified practitioners. Research has shown that those with higher level qualifications - graduate leaders and qualified teachers – have the greatest impact, both in terms of curriculum and pedagogical leadership, and in terms of measurable improvements in children's outcomes in early literacy, social development, mathematics and science.

The challenge is how best to ensure that the qualifications system is as effective as it can be in developing the necessary blend of skills, knowledge and understanding, to enable early years practitioners to provide excellent early education and care.

A clear, rigorous system of qualifications

Recent increases in the number of people with 'full and relevant' qualifications and the introduction of the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) have led to an increased sense of professionalism in some parts of the sector. However, the current qualifications picture - with many hundreds of qualifications - is confusing, often fails to help people progress in their careers, and has led to a decline in confidence in early years qualifications amongst employers and potential students.

Reform is necessary: the sector needs a clear and effective system of qualifications which would ensure that all students were well prepared to enter the profession and to progress within it. This would benefit students, practitioners and employers and additionally, it would have a positive impact on how people perceive the early years sector.

The fundamental elements of early years qualifications should include a thorough understanding of child development and play, coupled with an understanding of how it can be applied most effectively. Practitioners need to bring both care and education together to provide the very best experience for every child. Qualified early years practitioners should have specific knowledge of language development, special educational needs and disability, and the importance of play within a child's learning and development, alongside the non-negotiable areas of safeguarding and child protection, health and safety, nutrition, basic first aid, understanding legal frameworks and obligations, and inclusion and diversity. In achieving qualified status, early years practitioners should develop the core skills of observation and assessment, experience practice in a variety of settings, and learn how to work effectively with families. The report suggests that for someone new to the sector, a level 3 course would probably require the equivalent of 2 years full time study. This model level 3 qualification would ensure that those achieving it would have the best chance of gaining the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to be effective when they first enter and continue on their career in the early years.

The report argues that a single model qualification, which would ensure consistency and confidence, would be too restrictive. The ideal approach - that allows for consistency of content and pedagogical processes but which allows flexibility - is to make better use the current system of 'full and relevant' criteria, amended to reflect the new model and maintained by the Teaching Agency, to define all new qualifications, which would also act as a check on the proliferation of new qualifications.

CSN POLICY BRIEFING

The report notes that it would not be practical to apply the new 'full and relevant' criteria retrospectively and staff qualified before the new arrangements are implemented should not be disadvantaged. An analogy is the introduction of the graduate teacher training routes introduced in the 1970s, when staff with non-graduate Certificates of Education retained their Qualified Teacher Status.

Furthermore, the report recommends that by 2022, all fully qualified staff in settings where the Early Years Foundation Stage is being followed (including childminders) should have a minimum level 3, in line with the recommendation from Dame Clare Tickell in her review of the EYFS. The change needs to be implemented in stages: from September 2013 a minimum of 50% of staff in group settings should have a 'full and relevant' level 3 qualification, moving to 70% by September 2015.

Starting out in the early years workforce: entry and initial training

The early years and childcare workforce needs to recruit the best people and give them a high standard of training and support. The report notes that recruiting good practitioners is difficult, indicating that the sector does not have the status in society that it deserves. The challenge is to raise expectations and make early education and childcare a more attractive sector to work in.

The report recommends that entry requirements need to be made more stringent, which would benefit the children as well as raising the expectations of the workforce. Currently, except for higher levels, there are no requirements for practitioners to hold qualifications in either English or mathematics, despite the importance of the early years setting in introducing children to mathematical concepts and early literacy skills, and the importance of communication with families. The report recommends that entrants to level 3 qualifications should already hold level 2 qualifications in English and Mathematics, but not necessarily at GCSE level.

Furthermore, it is essential that the quality of training is at a high level. The quality of tuition varies: some tutors lack early years knowledge, experience and awareness of current developments and some tutors are teaching courses at the same level to which they themselves are qualified. The report recommends that tutors should be qualified at a higher level than the course they are teaching, and should have relevant and practical knowledge of the early years field, through engagement in CPD and have recent early years practical experience.

Finally, the report emphasises the importance of a variety of placements, in settings which are themselves effective and are demonstrating good practice (i.e. rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding') as an essential part of early years training. This requirement applies equally to those students studying through the apprenticeship system.

An early years career: progressing to and beyond level three

Increasing the professionalism of the early years sector is essential to improving its quality; however, this is undermined by the lack of clear progression routes. It is essential that employment in the sector is seen as a career, rather than a job.

The report recommends an early years career pathway is developed that is structured, clear and easy to understand, where employees have clear and intelligible roles, responsibilities and status.

CSN POLICY BRIEFING

Clear job titles and role responsibilities – suggested in the report - would greatly enhance the professionalism of the sector, enabling individuals to have a clear career plan. Individuals could progress through different routes to the level which they wish to achieve: for example, remaining as a qualified practitioner at level 3, progressing through a level 4 qualification to become a Senior Practitioner, or progressing onto a degree level course with the aim of becoming an Early Years Teacher. The report recommends that the Department of Education should conduct research on the number of Black and Minority Ethnic staff at different levels to ensure there is no adverse impact on this group.

Support and training of practitioners at all levels is an essential element of increasing the professionalism of the early years workforce. Newly qualified staff need support as they develop their knowledge and experience, which is best developed with the help of experienced practitioner (from a setting rated as 'Good' or higher) as a designated mentor. Similarly, settings should have support structures for all staff, including leaders and managers.

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is fundamental to ensuring the continued quality of practitioners, however the report notes concerns over access to (because of barriers of cost), and the quality of CPD. To address this, the report recommends the introduction of freely available, online modules, whose quality is assured by the Teaching Agency and the National College. However, not all CPD can, or should, be done online. The report notes the importance of peer contact, and the benefits of learning from exceptional settings. The Teaching Schools approach could present opportunities and benefits for the early years sector.

Raising our aspirations: qualifications for leadership

Evidence shows that graduate leaders have a significant positive impact on the quality of provision in a setting, and that the more time a graduate leader spends with the children, the greater the impact. Consequently, the report supports the idea that every early years setting should be led by a graduate.

The system currently has a range of graduate pedagogical leaders: people with Qualified Teacher Status, people with Early Years Professional Status, and also those with relevant degrees and postgraduate qualifications. The impact of the Early Years Professionals has been beneficial, on both the professionalism of the sector and on children's experiences and outcomes, however, the report notes concerns about their status in comparison to qualified teachers. On the other hand, QTS has universal currency across the education sphere, and there has widespread support for increasing the number of people with QTS in the early years sector. Current routes of initial teacher training mean that a person who wishes to obtain QTS can specialise only in the ages of three to seven years. The report therefore recommends that a new early years specialist route to QTS, specialising in the years from birth to seven, should be introduced from September 2013. The arrangements for acquiring QTS in the early years sector should be equivalent to those for any other QTS (for example, a relevant degree and a PGCE) and the early years specialist route to QTS should build on, and eventually replace, current routes to EYPS. EYPS should continue to have currency, and the report recommends that those who hold it should be able to access routes to obtain QTS as a priority, if they so wish (possibly through a PGCE or the assessment-only arrangements for teachers without QTS).

CSN POLICY BRIEFING

Employing graduates will present new financial pressures for settings, however, the report recommends that the Government considers the best way to maintain and increase graduate pedagogical leadership in all early years settings.

Making it happen

The report notes that its recommendations are ambitious, but realistic, and it is for the Government and the sector to take forward the recommendations. However, it recognises that the recommendations will have an impact on particular areas, including cost, the impact on the current system, and interaction with wider early years issues.

With regards to costs, although some recommendations are low cost or neutral, nevertheless others will carry costs, notably proposals to change level 3 courses, the insistence on a minimum level 3 qualification, level 2 qualifications in maths and English, regular CPD for tutors and the introduction of a new early years specialist route to QTS. However, the recommendations would result in a more professional, more effective system and would therefore represent a better investment than the current system.

The recommendations will also, necessarily, have a significant impact on the sector. However, the sector needs to embrace the new possibilities and that there will be differences of opinion within the sector. Consultations will need to take place to ensure that the implementation of the recommendations is done sensitively and properly, to build on the strengths of a committed sector.

Finally, the early years sector faces other challenges and issues, including the expansion of provision for disadvantaged two-year olds, and the cost of childcare. The report suggests that whilst the staff to child ratio for babies and two year olds should not be changed, it might be worth exploring whether better qualified staff could reasonably work with more three- and four-year-olds.

Comment

Professor Nutbrown is to be commended for setting out a vision, based on research evidence and good practice, of the need for a well-qualified early years workforce which helps young children grow and develop in their early years and achieve a successful transition to school. It is a workforce which is seen as professional, and recognised for the important role it has in society. The report makes the important link between the skills and knowledge staff have to achieving the best outcomes for babies and young children and their families.

The additional cost of a well-qualified workforce will be uppermost in the minds of Government Ministers when responding to the Nutbrown report. The implications for some groups, such as childminders, could be significant, or rather future childminders, should they all need to have a relevant level 3 qualification. This will no doubt be considered the Government's Childcare Commission which was launched by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in June with expressions of concern that the 'high' cost of childcare may be putting off parents re-entering the workforce. See [Commission on childcare: call for evidence](#) for further information about the Commission and the request for views by 31 August 2012.

It is expected that the Government will respond after the Childcare Commission has reported in the late Autumn. There will be interest in the Government's potentially different approach to the

CSn POLICY BRIEFING

need for a professionally qualified workforce between the early years and childcare sector and the schools sector. The Government announced on the day of the Olympics opening ceremony that it was not going to require teachers in Academies to have Qualified Teacher Status. See [Academies to have same freedom as Free Schools over teachers](#) (27 July 2012).

External links

[Foundations for quality - The independent review of early education](#)

Related briefings

[Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care OECD survey England 2012](#) (August 2012)

[Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage](#) (May 2012)

[Children's Services – Regulation of Early Years Providers – Ofsted consultation](#) (January 2012)

For further information, please visit www.lgiu.org.uk or email john.fowler@lgiu.org.uk