

Briefing Paper following the ECSDN/TACTYC Symposium

University of Reading 1st November 2019

‘Professionals working with young children: or just anybody?’

A group of academics, practitioners, professionals and employers from the early childhood sector met to discuss the growing crisis in the early childhood workforce.

All children should have the opportunity to experience high quality care and education, from appropriately qualified early childhood professionals and practitioners, who are valued by society as a whole.

Recent research, however, has shown that those working with young children are not always appropriately qualified, while many of those who are qualified are no longer working with children.

The findings from the NDNA (2019) survey, which should be of great concern, include

- 16% increase in unqualified staff since 2017/2018 – 26% of those working with young children have no qualifications
- 14% decrease in Level 3 qualified staff
- 8% decrease in graduate/EYT staff
- There is less training and CPD due to rising staff costs and stagnating funding, which has an impact on the most vulnerable children

Reasons given by staff for leaving the early childhood sector focus mainly on pay, status and conditions, which have impacted on them both professionally and personally. These reasons include:

- Financial instability due to inadequate government funding, and low pay; 44.5% of workers are claiming state benefits or tax credits. 1 in 10 childcare practitioners are living in poverty.
- Feeling overwhelmed with the impact of excessive paperwork and administration leading to increased levels of stress about work
- Work-related mental health issues which have had an impact on personal relationships
- Of those who leave the sector, 50% go into retail employment, while 21% have ‘lost their passion for childcare’

Of additional concern, from the EPI (2019) study is that:

- The childcare workforce is less qualified than both the teaching workforce and the general female workforce.
- Qualification levels might be even lower in the future as the workforce is ageing and fewer employees are upskilling or being offered CPD opportunities.

Following in-depth discussions, participants agreed the following:

- Children and childhood must be valued; we must therefore value those who work with children;
- We need to have an early childhood workforce which has a strong professional identity, recognised and valued by parents, other professionals and society as a whole;
- The sector needs to speak with one professional voice and advocate for the appropriate status and conditions for those who work with children;
- There is a need to help politicians find solutions by lobbying local MP and Local Government – help them to understand the questions, and to find answers;
- There needs to be cross-party commitment and investment – a ‘Vision 2050’ rather than short term approaches – bearing in mind the sustainable development goals and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

A joint social media campaign began on 8th November entitled #‘One voice for childhood’

References

Akhal, A. (2019) London: *The Early Years Workforce: a comparison with retail workers*. London: Education Policy Institute
National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) (2019) *NDNA Workforce Survey 2018/9*. NDNA
<file:///C:/Users/meshuser/Downloads/NDNA%20Full%20Workforce%20Survey%20Report%202018-2019.pdf>