

Nursery recruitment crisis threatens 30-hour childcare offer ^[1]

Nurseries in England are struggling to recruit the staff they need to deliver 30-hours 'free' childcare for working families, a new study suggests.

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Research conducted by independent analysts Ceeda, shows one in two private and voluntary sector day nurseries and pre-schools have vacancies, totalling an estimated 24,600 posts.

More than half of all childcare vacancies are for staff with level three (A-Level equivalent) childcare qualifications, and a further 4,180 estimated vacancies for apprentices.

Worryingly, four out of five nurseries say they are finding vacancies hard to fill, putting the expansion needed to meet a 30-hour offer 'at risk'.

Dr Jo Verrill, managing director of Ceeda, said: "Recruitment difficulties are rife in the early years sector and show little sign of improving in the short term. It will take time to replace the fall-out in new entrants; meanwhile, wider market pressures are building.

"Employment levels are at 75.1 per cent, their highest since comparable records began in 1971, mainly driven by increases in full-time female employment. We have also yet to feel the full impact of Brexit on labour supply, with an estimated six per cent of childcare workers being EU Nationals.

"To recruit and retain staff employers need to remain competitive. As the 30-hour childcare offer rolls-out across the country, Government funding levels have an ever-increasing influence on what the sector can afford to pay its workers."

'It's no surprise that providers are struggling to attract new recruits'

The research highlights several challenges, with childcare providers reporting a lack of applicants with: the required skills, the required disposition, the required qualifications, the required experience and a general lack of interest in childcare as a career option.

Current pressures are, in part, the Government's decision in 2014 to require GCSE Maths and English – as opposed to functional skills – for Level 3 childcare qualifications.

Pay rates, prospects for career progression and deep-rooted perceptions of childcare as a job for women have also been found to have an impact on the sector's ability to recruit and retain staff.

According to Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-school Learning Alliance, difficulties in recruiting early years staff remains a 'huge obstacle' to childcare providers considering offering the 30 hours.

He said: "Unfortunately, we are still feeling the effects of the Government's ill-thought-out qualification policy which required Level 3 childcare practitioners to have English and Maths GCSEs, rather than functional skills – and while this has now rightly been scrapped, it's going to take some time for the sector to recover from the impact of this on the workforce.

"Add to this the fact that, as a result of historic government underfunding, childcare remains a low-pay, low status career, and it's no surprise that providers are struggling to attract new recruits. If the 30 hours is to have any chance of succeeding, we need to be able to attract and retain quality, experienced childcare staff – and this means paying them a fair wage for what is an absolutely vital educational role.

"Put simply, if you don't have enough staff, you can't offer more places – or extended hours – to local families."

Oli Blackwell, chief technical officer of daynurseries.co.uk said: "We realise that unfilled vacancies can be a real problem for nurseries and we are hoping this will make a real difference and help to reduce their recruitment problems.

"We now have over 10,000 CVs stored on our site and nursery owners and managers can put in their key criteria and search for people's desired job roles, salary range, languages spoken, location and the type of contract they are looking for."

-reprinted from Day Nurseries

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