

Early years recruitment crisis putting Government's 30 hours policy at risk ^[1]

Nurseries are losing qualified staff and the proportion of Level 3 practitioners has dropped significantly in the last two years with a fall of almost 20 per cent, a major survey by the National Day Nurseries Association claims.

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EXCERPTS

According to the NDNA 2017/18 Workforce Survey of more than 500 nurseries, qualified staff are leaving because of endemic low pay, which is hitting recruitment and retention.

The NDNA warns today that nurseries are concerned that the recruitment crisis will mean that they will be unable to deliver the places for the Government's 30-hour funded childcare policy, as well as leading to less support for children with additional needs.

It also says that without Government action the social mobility agenda will be seriously undermined.

The association is calling on the Department for Education to undertake a rigorous assessment of the cost of delivery for settings, working with nurseries to understand the financial pressures, as well as an urgent review of the free entitlement funding.

The current early years workforce strategy must also be urgently reviewed so that nurseries can recruit and retain skilled staff.

Nursery employers in the survey say that they want to pay above the minimum wage but insufficient funding means they are unable to compete with pay in other sectors.

Among Level 3 staff who have left nurseries in the last year, 80 per cent have found jobs outside early years and childcare, followed by almost half of graduate staff and early years teachers.

Of those nurseries that took part in the survey, 86 per cent reported losing staff in the last 12 months, some saying that Level 3 staff have left to work for supermarkets or call centres.

Two-thirds of nursery managers say they are unable to recruit suitable staff to replace this that have left due to a shortage of candidates.

The report also reveals anxiety about the impact of Brexit, with reports that some EU nationals have already left their jobs.

The NDNA warns that the situation could get even worse with a third of nursery practitioners surveyed saying that they are considering leaving the sector, either due to low pay or because they no longer have a passion for working in early years because of policy changes.

Despite the scrapping of the requirement for Level 3 practitioners to have GCSE maths or English at grade C a year ago next month, the report finds that a third of respondents have not found any positive benefit.

A third of employers are limiting CPD to mandatory training only due to budget constraints as a result of poor funding levels.

Key findings from the annual workforce survey include:

- 69 per cent of Level 3 leavers were moving out of early years because they had lost passion for working in the sector due to policy changes
- 51 per cent of those entering as unqualified workers or apprentices have left or not been retained as they were unsuited to the role
- 25 per cent of employers employ EU National staff. Within the practitioner survey 12 per cent of respondents said they were EU Nationals and of these 17 per cent were concerned about the impact of Brexit on their employment within the UK.
- 79 per cent of practitioners are working overtime to cover for staff who have left, risking burnout for themselves and with consequences for quality provision.

NDNA's survey represented 522 nurseries across England caring for more than 31,000 children. Of these, 74 per cent were single site nurseries. In addition, 315 practitioners were questioned separately.

NDNA chief executive, Purnima Tanuku said, 'The results of our survey are shocking and show the true staffing crisis in our nurseries. Although our members show passion and commitment to providing excellent early education and care, they are struggling to recruit and

retain practitioners, especially at Level 3.

'Our members are genuinely concerned that they won't be able to deliver 30 hours of funded childcare if numbers of qualified staff continue to drop. Nurseries are having to work increasingly tightly to statutory adult to child ratios, but this has knock-on consequences for their ability to support children with behavioural or other needs for which they don't get additional funding.

'Settings work efficiently and try to make funding rates work, but they have less and less room for manoeuvre.

'Employers are becoming more cautious, making sure they have sufficient children on a waiting list before trying to recruit additional staff. Ultimately this will mean fewer childcare places for working families and could call into question the quality of delivery if not enough qualified staff are present.'

Ellen Broomé, chief executive at the Family and Childcare Trust, said, 'The concerns raised by nurseries today resonate with the one in five local authorities who reported in our Childcare Survey 2018 that the 30 hours offer is having a negative impact on the financial sustainability of childcare settings. Government needs to make sure childcare providers are better supported to deliver the childcare that parents need: our research found that only half of local areas have enough childcare for parents working full time.'

Steven McIntosh, director of UK Poverty at Save the Children said, 'High quality early education can determine children's chances of succeeding in the classroom and in life – yet these new figures suggest that the nation's nurseries are hemorrhaging skilled staff.

'As a country, we already face a shortage of 10,000 qualified early years teachers, but it is clear that efforts to train and retain skilled nursery staff are going backwards, with huge consequences for children's early development and life chances.

'Just as quality teaching makes all the difference in school, a well-skilled nursery workforce, led by early years teachers, is proven to help children from falling behind at a crucial time in their lives. Right now one in three children in England are beginning primary school without the necessary basic skills, and shockingly this figure increases to half of all poorer children.

'Unless the Government urgently invests in quality early education and increasing the number of skilled early years teachers, we will continue to see generations of children falling behind in their pre-school years, when they may never catch up.'

A Department for Education spokesperson said, 'We want to boost the status of our dedicated early years professionals and encourage the brightest talent into this already thriving industry – that's why by 2020 we will be spending an additional £1 billion a year to deliver 30 hours of free childcare and fund the increase in rates that we introduced in April 2017.

'This increased level of investment is based on the Department's 'Review of Childcare Costs' which was described as "thorough and wide ranging" by the National Audit Office. We continue to collect robust, wide-ranging and up to date evidence on childcare providers and this year are expanding that programme of work to look at providers to include more detailed research on provider finances and childcare costs for two to four-year-olds.

'Our Workforce Strategy set out plans to support the sector to remove barriers to attracting, retaining and developing the early years workforce. We are also providing additional information on entry routes and career progression, and an employer led group is currently designing a new apprenticeship to ensure there is an effective employment-based training route available.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

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