

Schools call on more men to be child carers [GB] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The government plans a fivefold increase in the number of male child care workers. National advertising campaigns tailored to men and male-only training courses will be used to recruit the extra staff.

Around 163,000 new child care workers will be required to provide the government's planned pre- and after-school supervision, but some warn there will have to be a massive shift in public attitudes towards men working with children to encourage more men to apply.

'It is persuading them to make the step of joining in the first place that is the massive hurdle,' said Charlie Owen from the Thomas Coram Research Unit, co-author of *Men In Child care*. 'The image of the profession as women's work is the biggest hurdle, compounded by the failure of careers advisers to suggest it to young men and the fear of accusations of abuse.'

Many local authorities are already planning to attract men through imaginative campaigning, such as advertising at football matches and by organising free, men-only seminars, mentoring sessions and road shows with slogans such as 'Men who dare, child care' and 'Cool2Care'.

'At present there are nearly 300,000 people working in child care and 98 per cent are women,' said a spokesman for the Department for Education and Skills. 'Even in the most progressive child care countries, such as Denmark and Sweden, men only make up around 10 per cent of the child care workforce. Nevertheless, this is a figure which we aspire to.'

'The sector needs to draw on a wider pool of talent if it is to ensure that children receive the best quality early-years provision. A diverse workforce enhances children's experiences and raises their awareness of others as role models.'

The target has, however, been rejected by some politicians for not being ambitious enough. 'The extended schools are an excellent opportunity to involve more men' said Keith Vaz, MP for Leicester East. 'An excellent target would be 50 per cent, but we should not accept less than one third.'

Daniel Brand, 25, works as a nursery assistant at the Play Pit nursery in Felixstowe, Suffolk. He believes many more men would come forward if they were approached in the right way.

'More men would be interested in it than currently dare to come forward if they could be persuaded it isn't a girls' profession their mates will laugh at,' he said. 'I couldn't be happier though: I recommend this career to all my mates every chance I get.'

- reprinted from the Guardian

Region: Europe ^[2]

Tags: staff ^[3]

gender ^[4]

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/05/06/schools-call-more-men-be-child-carers-gb> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/staff> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/gender>