

# Nursery staff skill concerns raised in Nutbrown review <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

Nursery staff and childminders are allowed to work at pre-school groups without displaying basic literacy or numeracy skills, according to a government-commissioned review.

Colleges demand more qualifications for students training to look after animals than for those who will care for babies, the report said.

Professor Cathy Nutbrown, an expert in early childhood education from Sheffield University, conducted the research and discovered that there was no requirement to demonstrate competence in English and mathematics.

These skills are important in supporting the development of babies and young children, as well as communicating with parents, she stated.

Professor Nutbrown found that although there are "examples of excellence", there remained "substantial concerns" about the quality of training.

Despite the importance of early education in children's development, she concluded that the work was seen as "low status, low paid, and low skilled".

She wrote: "The hair or care stereotype still exists for many considering a course in the early years; yet many other sectors have raised their expectations in relation to enrolment.

"It must be a cause for concern that early years courses are often the easiest to enrol on and the courses that the students with the poorest academic records are sometimes steered towards."

The Nutbrown review quoted Dr Celia Greenway, from the University of Birmingham, who said: "For too long early years work has been perceived as an alternative to hairdressing and a suitable route for those who fail in school."

Unison said: "By allowing non-qualified people to work in childcare settings we undermine the status of the qualified workforce. In nearly all professions, staff can only be employed if they are qualified.

"This should be the case in early education and childcare."

Helen Perkins of Solihull College told the report that students must achieve a higher level of qualifications on their courses for animal care than childcare.

"Nobody demands the same level of qualification before you can be left alone with a baby," she said.

Meanwhile Professor Nutbrown expressed concern that some learning centres "push students through a course" even if they are not suited to a career in pre-school groups in a bid to achieve high completion rates.

She considered the introduction of a licence for nursery staff, but conceded it was unclear which organisation would manage such a scheme or how it could be funded.

Her interim report was published last week, and she will make her final recommendations in the summer.

-reprinted from the Guardian

**Related link:** Review of early education and childcare qualifications: Interim report <sup>[2]</sup>

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