

Government rejects calls for more focus on play in new qualifications ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Despite a call for more emphasis on play-based learning from many respondents to the consultation on Early Years Educator qualifications, the Government has not amended the criteria.

The details of the criteria for Early Years Educators and Early Years Teachers, set out yesterday by the National College of Teaching and Leadership, do not include an explicit reference to play-based learning, despite the fact that learning through play is a key tenet of the EYFS and high-quality early years practice.

The sole mention of the word play is in standard 2.1 which states that Early Years Educator qualifications must cover planning and leading activities, 'purposeful play opportunities and educational programmes which include the learning and development areas of current early education requirements.'

The Pre-School Learning Alliance said it had grave concerns about the omission.

Chief executive Neil Leitch said, 'We are dismayed that the Government has chosen to ignore the advice of qualified and experienced early years and childcare practitioners and makes no explicit reference to learning through play in both of these qualifications.'

'In our consultation responses to the Government we stressed the importance of referring to learning through play in these qualifications as this is the cornerstone of high-quality early years provision in this country. That the Government has chosen to ignore such a key foundation of early years practice is a grave concern.'

The Government's response to the consultation on the Early Years Educator criteria, published alongside the standards, reveals that just over a third of respondents 'felt that there was a lack of reference to play-based learning and its fundamental importance in children's early development.'

But the report said, 'We have not amended the Early Years Educator criteria to specifically include play. The criteria are designed to allow for a range of pedagogical approaches. This gives professionals the freedom and flexibility to deploy a range of methods and to decide how best to structure children's activities throughout the day. We know that play is essential for children's development, and is an integral part of how children learn to explore, think about problems and relate to others.'

It adds that Early Years Educators will be required to understand and deliver the EYFS, which is 'clear that practitioners must deliver activities for children through planned, purposeful play.'

The Early Years Educator qualification, which is set at Level 3, also makes no explicit reference to working with children with special educational needs, nor to the rights of the child.

But Mr Leitch added, 'We are glad to note that the qualification now includes requirements about diversity and equality, which were previously absent, and that the role of EYEs is to promote young children's speech, language and communication development rather than direct development in these areas.'

Both the Early Years Educator and Early Years Teacher qualifications are central to the Government's drive to raise the status of the profession and encourage more graduates to work in early years settings.

From September 2013, applicants wishing to become Early Years Teachers will need to meet the same entry requirements as primary trainee teachers and hold a GCSE in grade C or above in English, maths and science. Moreover, from September 2014 they will also need to pass the same skills test as classroom teacher trainees.

However, despite their name, Early Years Teachers will not be entitled to Qualified Teacher Status, and consequently will not be eligible for the same pay and conditions as teachers.

Commenting on the standards, Purnima Tanuku, chief executive of the National Day Nurseries Association, said, 'We fully support the idea of simplified professional qualifications which will give the early years workforce the status which is easily understood by parents and people coming into the profession.'

'All changes come with new challenges and proper thought must be given to what support the sector will need to achieve the new

qualifications and the pay and conditions that reflect their merit. The delivery of training, which was highlighted by the Nutbrown Review, has been a weakness in the past and getting this right will be a crucial element to making these new plans work.'

The Pre-School Learning Alliance added that it was 'very disappointed but not surprised' that Early Years Teachers would not be granted QTS.

Mr Leitch said, 'Failure to do so means that early years will continue to be seen as less important and less deserving than children's formal education, when the opposite is the case.'

Government's response

There were 266 responses to the NCTL consultation on the Early Years Educator criteria.

The key themes expressed by the nurseries, local authorities, sector and organisations and others are highlighted in the Government's response to the consultation, published alongside the standards.

A quarter of respondents agreed on the need for all Early Years Educators to learn the theory of child development, and some respondents were pleased that neuroscience and brain development were included.

The criteria include an understanding of child development from birth to five and a range of theories, as well as an understanding of development from the age of five to seven 'so that practitioners can support children's transitions to school effectively'.

Just under one in five respondents said that there was an overemphasis in the criteria on the preparation for school.

'There was concern that the criteria were too focused on promoting "school readiness" rather than of a baby's or young child's well-being and potential future outcomes.

'We have not amended the criteria specifically to reflect these comments as we recognise that both education and care are intrinsically valuable in children's development.'

A similar number of respondents had noted that 'caring' was missing from the criteria.

This has been amended so that 'care' is included in the criterion 'covering planning and carrying out physical care routines suitable to the age, stage and needs of the child.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

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