
Minds Matter

The impact of working in the early
years sector on practitioners' mental
health and wellbeing

Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| Key findings | 3 |
| Background | 4 |
| Methodology | 5 |
| Survey results | 6 |
| Conclusion and recommendations | 16 |
| Appendix: full results | 19 |

Please note that this report looks at issues relating to mental health and wellbeing and includes brief references to self-harm and suicide.

If you require support on any of the issues raised in this report, it is important to remember that there is support available.

The helplines below may be of help:

Samaritans: 116 123

Mind: 0300 123 3393

Papyrus (for people under 35): 0800 068 4141

The Silver Line (for older people) :0800 4 70 80 90

Anxiety UK: 08444 775 774

Key findings

- **25%** of respondents are considering leaving the early years sector due to stress or mental health difficulties.
- **66%** of respondents say their personal relationships have been negatively affected by work-related stress or mental health difficulties over the past year.
- **62%** of (non-self employed) respondents work outside of paid working hours 'very often', with a further **19%** working outside of paid working hours 'quite often'.
- **62%** of respondents do not think their work life and non-work life are balanced.
- **44%** of respondents have felt stressed about work or an issue relating to work in the last month 'very often', and a further **30%** 'quite often'.
- The top four sources of stress identified by respondents were 'Administration and paperwork', 'Financial resources of the setting', 'Workload (other than administration and paperwork)' and 'Pay'.
- The most commonly cited symptoms / health impacts experienced due to work or where work was a contributing factor cited by respondents were fatigue (**60%**), loss of motivation (**58%**), anxiety (**57%**) and insomnia (**53%**).
- **52%** of respondents have not spoken to anyone at work about their stress or mental health issues.

Background

Many of the challenges facing the early years sector in England are, by now, well-known.

Concerns over the adequacy of government funding levels for the various 'free' entitlement offers have continued over recent years, with recent research from independent sector experts Ceeda revealing an overall shortfall of more than £500m across the PVI (private, voluntary and independent) sector. As a result, pay levels in the sector remain low, with the most recent report by the Low Pay Commission confirming that the 'bite' (value relative to the median wage) of the national living wage in the childcare sector was 89.5% in 2017, up from 86.7% in 2015.

With five government ministers having been given responsibility for the early years over the past six years, the early years sector is certainly one used to change. Indeed, the sector has had to respond to a number of significant legislative changes over the past decade: from the introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework and the Early Years Single Funding Formula to the implementation of a tougher Ofsted inspection framework; the introduction and subsequent scrapping of a number of government policies such as the relaxation of statutory staff:child ratios and GCSE requirements for level 3 staff; amendments to paediatric first aid requirements, and of course, most recently, the introduction of the new Early Years National Funding Formula.

Each change has brought with it the challenge of remaining up to date and compliant with the latest requirements, while continuing to ensure the day-to-day delivery of high quality care and education on increasingly limited budgets and with a sustained reduction in local authority support. Add to this the growing administrative and paperwork duties placed on those working in the early years – from written observations to grant applications to GDPR privacy notes – and it's clear that the pressure on practitioners is as high as it has ever been.

There is no doubt that societal understanding of the importance of discussions around mental health has increased significantly over recent years. But while a number of surveys have been carried out on the impact of workload, stress and mental health pressures on teachers working in the primary and secondary sectors, very little attention has been paid to the experience of early years practitioners – despite the significant challenges facing the sector.

This survey seeks to fill that gap and provide a comprehensive overview of the impact of working in the early years sector on practitioners' mental health and levels of stress.

Methodology

This survey was conducted online between 23 April and 18 May 2018, and received 2,039 responses. Respondents comprised of pre-schools (43%), nurseries (27%), childminders (15%), and a small number of primary school nursery classes (3%), children's centres (2%), maintained nursery schools (1%), nannies (1%), out-of-hours school clubs (1%).

NB: One survey question on working outside of hours was asked differently depending on if the respondent effectively paid themselves a wage (i.e. setting owners and childminders) or were paid members of staff: the former were asked how often they work outside of what they consider 'reasonable hours', while the latter were asked how often they work outside of paid hours.

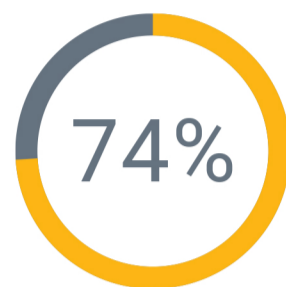
Survey results

The survey results paint a stark and concerning picture of an early years workforce under significant pressure, with a substantial majority (74%) of respondents describing themselves having been stressed as a result of their jobs 'quite' or 'very often' over the past month.

Workload is clearly a significant contributor to this, with **81%** of paid staff and **71%** of self-paid respondents working outside of paid or reasonable working hours 'quite' or 'very often'.

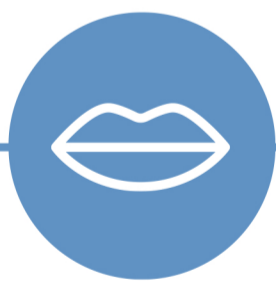
PAPERWORK AND ADMINISTRATION

76% of practitioners cited paperwork and administration as a regular source of stress, with a number pointing specifically to the paperwork required to evidence setting practice and children's development to inspectors as a particular source of concern. Many stated that they believed that much of this paperwork is unnecessary, but that their fear of Ofsted inspections meant that they felt that they have



of respondents have been regularly stressed as a result of their job over the past month

no choice but to produce it anyway. Some respondents also argued that these fears were often exacerbated by a perceived lack of consistency within Ofsted inspections, with expectations in terms of required paperwork differing from inspector to inspector. For example, one respondent argued that the statutory framework requirements need reforming as they are "too open to interpretation and inspectors' own personal opinions". Another said: "I feel that the fear of Ofsted makes people in the sector fearful. Every inspector is different so people get told different things about what they should and should not be doing."

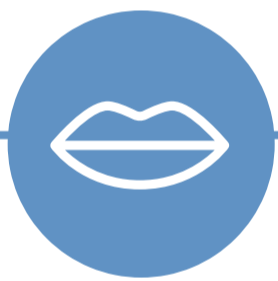


"I get frustrated with all the paperwork. Some of it is overload and some essential ... but it's an uneven balance in the wrong direction. Ofsted scares us too much!"

"The overwhelming amount of paperwork needed to prove to Ofsted that you are performing correctly is challenging."

Many respondents also voiced concerns that paperwork demands are negatively impacting on the amount and/or quality of time they are able to spend with the children in their care. One stated: "The red tape and paperwork has become over the top, which means the staff spend half their time filling in paperwork, instead of what really matters which is of course the children. This leads to staff taking work home." Another commented: "The paperwork and EYFS goals are ridiculous. I do not agree with the way the UK government perceives children as robots reaching milestones at set points in their lives."

Some also argued that an increasingly paperwork-led approach to assessing child development means that this process has become a tick-box exercise with limited benefits for children's learning.



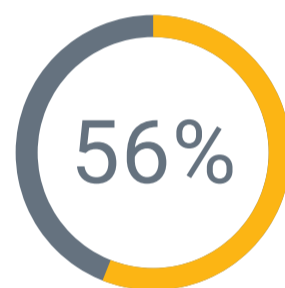
"Early years has become about making [children] fit a criteria - no consideration is given to the speed the children learn at the moment ... Everything is now about ticking the right box."

Practitioners also cited recent changes to the childcare funding system as another source of administrative stress, with one respondent noting that the deputy manager at their setting spends around a quarter of her time dealing with funding/fee queries and a further quarter helping parents to access tax-free and government-funded childcare.

Another commented that "[the] 30 hours has not been thought through properly. [It] ends up with practitioners having to sort out funding problems. Our LA [local authority] have stated they can not continue to give us the same level of support over 30 hours and [for] portal queries, [we] only can ring in a two-hour slot in the morning!"

FINANCIAL PRESSURES

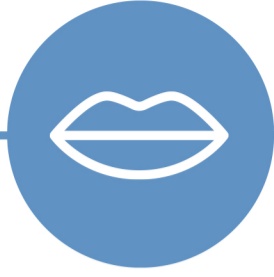
As would be expected from a sector that has long voiced its concerns about a lack of adequate funding, financial pressures were also high on the list of practitioner concerns, with **56%** of respondents stating that it is a regular source of stress.



56% of respondents say that financial resources have been a source of stress 'fairly' or 'very often' over the past month.

Many pointed to the lack of government funding as a key cause of this, highlighting the impact this has on the sustainability of early years settings, and the negative impact this in turn has on staff morale. One respondent commented that the "lack of adequate funding leads to disillusioned and depleted staff". Another said: "Lots of uncertainty about our future - funding isn't covering our expenses properly. If funding doesn't increase and expenses do, I don't see how we will be able to continue going."

Respondents also noted a reduction in other forms of funding – in particular, additional funding to support children with SEN(D), and the impact this is having on their ability to provide quality care for those with high needs.



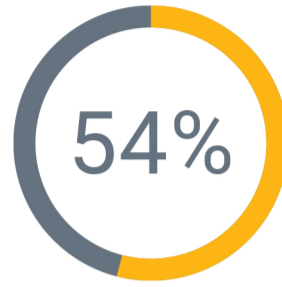
"Additional staff are needed in the room for SEN children which we do not receive funding for. Some children's behaviour can be challenging and therefore staff need additional supervision. We apply for additional funding but it takes additional time to complete paperwork - which we do not receive funding for."

Respondents also pointed out that there has been a reduction in funding for training at a time when there are increasing calls from the government for early years practitioners to be 'highly qualified'. One respondent commented: "The LA used to give bursaries for compulsory training so that there was funding for cover staff. Now they don't and the cost of that training has also increased." Another said: "Each member of staff is required to train but this is no longer free and again has a financial implication for the pre-school."

PAY

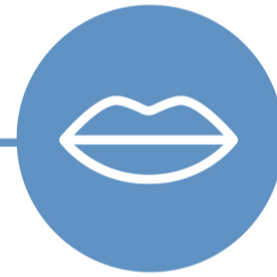
With childcare once again identified as one of the lowest-paying occupations in the most recent Low Pay Commission 'National Minimum Wage' report, it is unsurprising that pay was also a common concern among practitioners responding to the survey, cited as a regular source of stress by **54%** of respondents. Many argued that pay levels in

the sector do not reflect the value or importance of the role of early years practitioners, and that inadequate funding leads to an ability to increase salaries.



of respondents say that pay has been a source of stress 'fairly' or 'very often' over the past month.

One said: "I feel that staff have a very negative view of their workload and pay scales, which in turn brings a negative disharmony to the group and adds more stress and mentoring time on myself as a manager." Another said: "I feel the sector is largely ignored, with poor pay and poor conditions, which leads to a workforce that is disgruntled and frustrated."



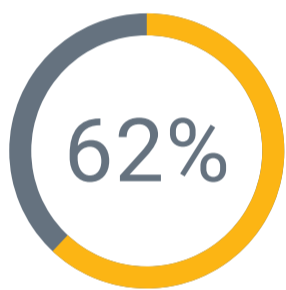
"I have loved this work but I have continually updated my skills and qualifications and I still receive little more than minimum wage. Sadly it is now time to take on a new career to ensure I am able to retire with some liveable pension."

Others pointed out that when unpaid hours are taken into account, many practitioners are likely to be receiving a much lower wage than their official salary. One respondent said: "I dread to think what my hourly rate is if I divided my daily average income by the 10 hour I work per day and then add on extra hours for paperwork and training."

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

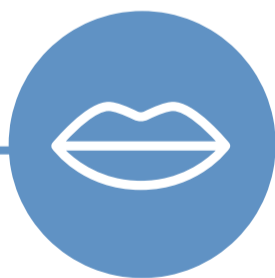
The majority of those who responded to the survey (**62%**) do not believe they have a good work-life balance.

Many respondents cited the need to work regularly out of hours to keep on top of their respective workloads as the primary reason for this. For example, one commented that they work more than 60 hours per week and on weekends citing "extra pressure & curriculum demands". Another commented: "There cannot be a balance when managing a childcare setting - the workload takes over and the majority of what needs doing is statutory requirements."



62% of respondents do not believe that their work and non-work life are balanced.

This was a particular concern of early years managers and owners, many of whom pointed out that they are regularly required to remain in ratio during the day meaning that most, if not all, paperwork has to be done at home.

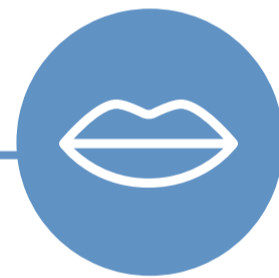


"It is hard because I am the owner and I am counted in the ratios because we can't afford to pay another member of staff. I have to do all of the business side outside of hours."

Similar concerns were raised by childminder respondents, who also pointed out that working from home means that it can often be even more difficult to separate working life from home life.

One commented: "After the children have left - and you are not being paid anymore - you then have to clean and tidy away, update learning journals, plan for the next day's children and set out the environment. You don't get a meal break or any break during the day."

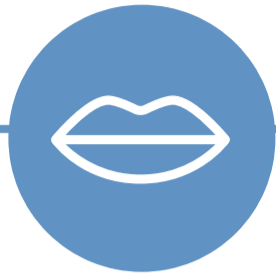
Another said: "As a childminder, my home is my workplace so there is no escape at the end of the day or week. I underestimated the long-term impact on my family as our home now resembles a mini-nursery, as we have very limited storage, so most resources and toys are part of our home."



"I work 10/11 hour days contact time. No coffee/lunch/tea breaks. No time to catch up on observations (who are these even for?) or other paperwork. Constantly chasing my tail feeling inadequate."

Respondents of all provision types noted that, even if they are physically able to leave work behind at the end of the working day, they are often mentally preoccupied with work-related issues, problems and concerns outside of working hours. One said: "I spend a lot of time when not at work thinking about work,

feeling like I cannot take time off, [that] we might not be in ratio, that the paperwork does not get done, that the finances are not up to date, [that I don't know] where ... the funding [is] coming from."



"If I am not at work, I am constantly worrying about the setting, i.e. if staff are managing, if parents need to discuss matters, if telephone calls/enquiries are being handled effectively ... When I am not at work, I feel I should use this time to catch up on outstanding paperwork."

A number of respondents also raised concerns about the impact that their lack of work/life balance is having on their own children and families. One said: "I feel like I spend so much time worrying about the children's needs and what I have to do at the pre-school, that my own family take a back seat. Sometimes it gets on top of me and I feel sad that I can't enjoy my work and not bring the stress home with me." Another commented: "I work every weekend ... with two children and a husband who don't get to spend quality time with me. It's tough and I miss out as much as they do."

It should be noted, however, that there were some positive comments, particularly from respondents working part-time who said that doing so had a positive impact on their work/life balance - although some did also comment that they were still working unpaid during their days off.

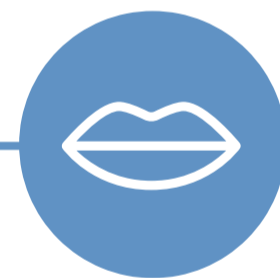
CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

It is perhaps to be expected, therefore – though it is still of concern – that nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents stated that stress or mental health difficulties relating to work have had an impact on their personal relationships.



Nearly two-thirds of respondents say work-related stress/mental health issues have impacted on their personal relationships

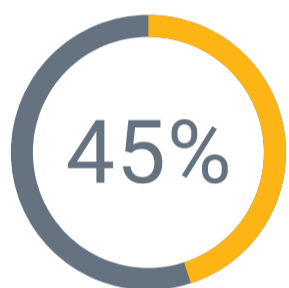
A number noted that they are often in a bad mood when they come home, which impacts on their relationships with their own families. Others pointed out that regularly being required to bring work home with them means that they are unable to 'switch off' and spend quality time with their families.



"Home life can be affected by my low mood, not allowing me to focus on the importance of family life and relationships with my daughter and husband."

"My partner has always complained about the amount of work that I do at home and that he is fed up of seeing me staying up to all hours of the night. This has caused a lot of arguments between us."

More than two in five (**45%**) practitioners also stated that work-related stress and mental health difficulties had had an impact on their work performance. Many noted that the sheer number of tasks they are required to complete means that they are often unable to do so to a high standard. Others commented that it was the stress caused by the pressure placed on them at work that had had a negative impact on their performance. One respondent said: "I felt under pressure from my boss to perform and found that I was making ridiculous mistakes and had difficulty focusing on the job in hand, hence I resigned from my post."



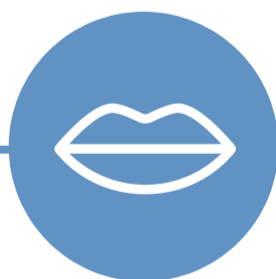
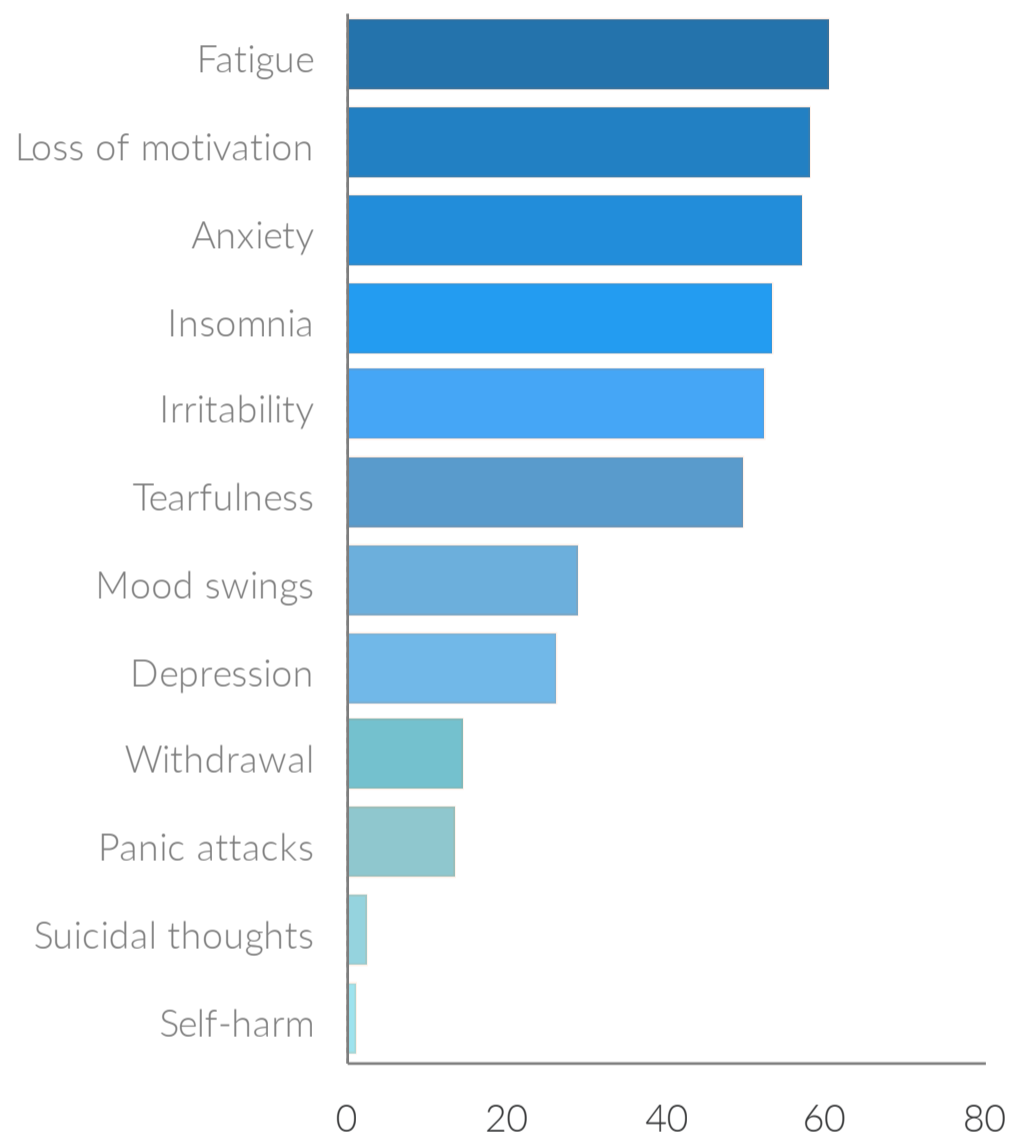
45% of respondents say work-related stress/mental health issues have impacted on their work performance

The majority of respondents identified one or more work-related health impact that they had experienced over the past year. Fatigue was the most common, cited by **60%** of survey respondents, followed by loss of motivation (58%), anxiety (57%) and insomnia (53%).

20 respondents (**1%**) said that they had self-harmed, while 45 (**2%**) stated that they had had thoughts of ending their own lives.

Only **8%** of respondents hadn't experienced any symptoms or health impacts caused by, or related to, their work.

Impact of work-related stress or mental health difficulties



"I feel like I am not 'living', I am existing. The summer holiday is the only real break and then going back in September is a big shock and so hard."

"If I wasn't the owner, I'd be signed off work. I cannot afford to be away from the nursery not working. I wasn't able to take the needed time off work when my father was dying, [I] haven't been able to grieve for him properly because of work."

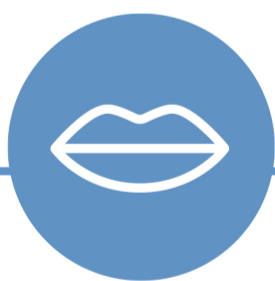
Just under a quarter (**23%**) of respondents said that they have taken time off work due to work-related stress or mental health issues over the past year. Many stated that they had been signed off from work directly as a result of mental health difficulties such as stress, anxiety, panic attacks and depression.



23% of respondents have taken time off work as a result of work-related stress or mental health difficulties

One respondent said: "I have severe depression, which I didn't have until the government started interfering with pre-schools by bringing in the funding system. The financial and mental health impact has placed an incredible strain on my relationship with my husband, so much so that I often wonder how we are still together!"

Others said that they had suffered physical illness and ailments as a result of work stress. This ranged from an increased susceptibility to general illness to migraines, palpitations, high



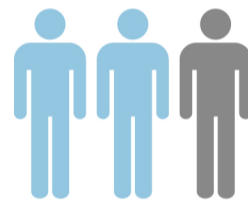
"I ended up in hospital with pneumonia, pleurisy and flu that had turned to sepsis. [The] consultant said it was brought on by over-exerting myself."

blood pressure, psoriasis and, in a small number of cases, heart attacks and strokes.

INTERNAL SUPPORT

Only just over half of those who responded to the survey (**52%**) said they had spoken to someone in their workplace about their stress or mental health issues - most commonly, their line manager (**41%**) or a colleague (**33%**).

Encouragingly, **66%** of those respondents who had done so felt that they were given adequate support. Examples given included being given time off work for medical appointments, being offered counselling, the sharing of ideas to reduce workload and pressure and generally feeling that colleagues were supportive.



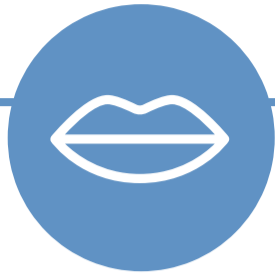
Two-thirds of respondents who spoke to someone at work felt they were given adequate support

One respondent said that their nursery set a plan regarding staffing and recruitment to enable them to spend less time in the setting, which allowed them to complete admin tasks during working hours and therefore have time away from the nursery.

Other comments included: "We are a close team and feel that we can talk to each other which helps" and "Support was put in place not just for me but for the whole team which was a positive achievement."

Of those respondents who did not feel that they were given adequate support, many stated this was because their colleagues were

in a similar position and that it was felt that there was nothing that could be done to improve the situation generally.



"She was supportive as she could be, but it is the system that needs to change."

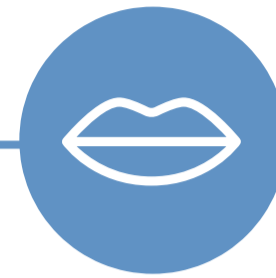
"They suggested I take time off but then I would get more behind and feel anxious that I was at home when I have so much work to do."

The reasons given by those respondents who had not spoken to anyone at work about their stress or mental health issues varied. Some felt that they weren't enough to warrant speaking about, while others felt that their colleagues were in the same situation and that there was nothing to be achieved by doing so.

A number of respondents voiced concerns that speaking about their experiences could put their position at risk. One said: "There is no current achievable solution and so a conversation would only serve to worry others. I am the manager, there is no one to talk to ... and the staff have their own issues." Another said: "I feel as though this will reflect badly on my ability to do my role."

Respondents in leadership roles often cited the seniority of their position as a key reason for not speaking to colleagues about any difficulties they were experiencing, with a

number stating that they felt that they had to be seen to be 'strong' by their employees. Others stated that they felt that their role was to support their staff, rather than to ask for support themselves.



"I am the manager. The staff would feel concerned about their jobs if they believe I am not coping."

"It is something that I need to get over and as the manager I am here to support my team and not burden them with my own challenges."

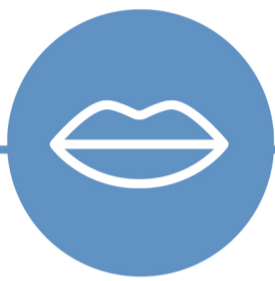
A high proportion of childminder respondents noted that often working alone meant that they didn't have anyone within a work context to speak to about any difficulties they were facing, though some did say that they had spoken to other childminders.

One commented: "Because I work alone as a childminder, we have no one to support us or understand the demands of our work." Another said: "When you work for yourself there is no one to turn to."

A number of childminders also expressed their fear of the reputational damage that could be caused to their businesses if they spoke out about their stress or mental health difficulties, while others voiced specific concerns that seeking help or support might result in Ofsted being notified, though they did not specify what they thought would happen if they were.

Despite the scale of the concerns raised by respondents in the survey, more than two in five (**44%**) said that they feel positively about working in the sector at the moment (**32%** somewhat positive, **12%** very positive).

These respondents commonly cited their passion for the 'hands-on' side of their jobs, their love of seeing children learn and develop, and the job satisfaction they get from making a difference to families' lives.

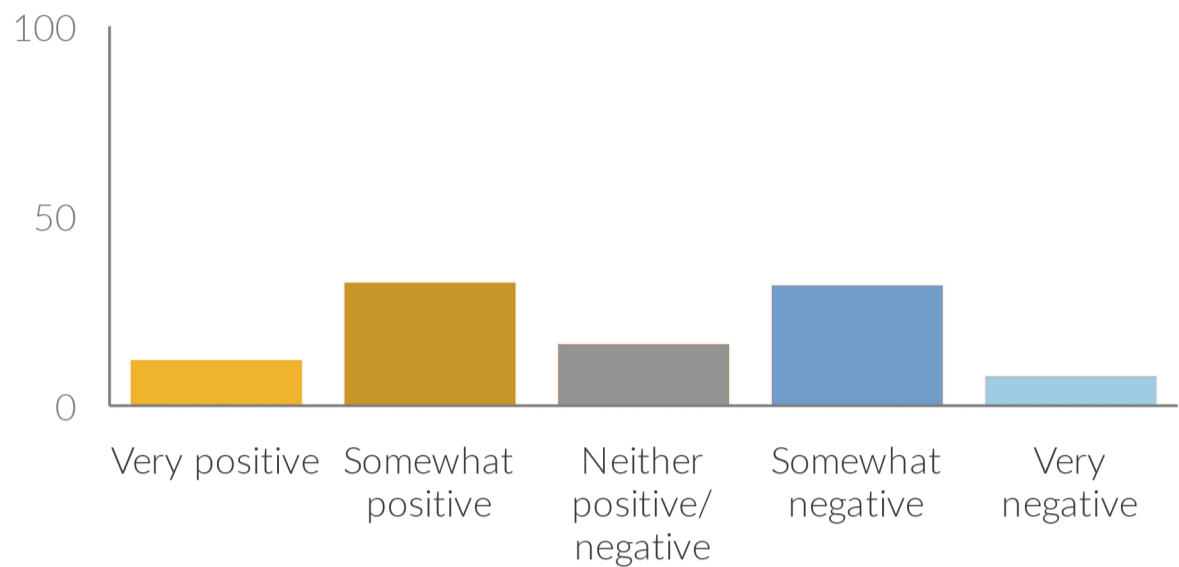


"I love seeing the children grow and flourish and move onto their next steps positively and with confidence."

It should be noted, however, that many of these respondents still highlighted concerns and issues in their qualitative responses, most commonly on the issues of paperwork demands and funding levels. Comments included: "Very rewarding but feel that I don't have the time to do my job properly. Plus I am struggling to make ends meet on my salary" and "I love playing and interacting with the children but the paperwork expectations are so high that it makes me wonder why I'm doing the job at all."

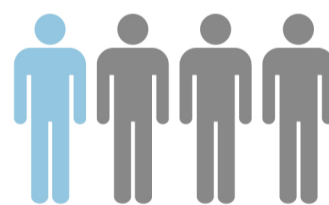
Those who feel negatively about the sector at the moment (**40%** - **32%** somewhat negative, **8%** very negative) most commonly cited the same concerns - paperwork and funding - alongside the other issues previously highlighted in this survey, such as pay and Ofsted requirements.

How would you describe how you feel about working in the early years sector at the moment?



LONG-TERM IMPACT

Looking ahead to the long-term, it's clear that if left unaddressed, the challenges currently facing the early years workforce - and the mental health concerns that many practitioners are experiencing as a result - are likely to have a significant impact on the sector: **25%** of those who responded to the survey said that they are considering leaving the sector, while a further **5%** of respondents have either already left the sector, or already confirmed they are leaving.



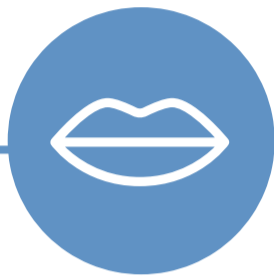
One in four respondents say they are considering leaving the sector

Many stated that they do not feel able to continue working as they have been doing, while others cited the impact on their families and personal relationships as their primary reason for considering leaving the sector. Some of those who have been working in the sector for a significant length of time indicated that

they are considering taking early retirement. It is worth noting that those respondents considering leaving the sector are marginally more likely than the overall respondent base to have spoken to someone at work about their stress or mental health concerns (**51%** vs **48%** overall), but significantly more likely to feel that they weren't given adequate support (**48%** vs **33%** overall).

to them. One respondent said: "I have invested everything in working in this sector. I am in my late 50s, What could I do for income? Trapped." Another said: "Worked in this sector for 30 years - can't see [myself] doing anything else."

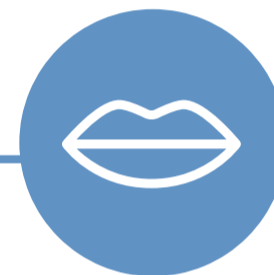
Only three in 10 (**29%**) of those responding to the survey say they aren't considering leaving the sector at all. Interestingly, this group of respondents were much less likely to have spoken to someone at work about their concerns (**65%** hadn't), but of the minority who had, **90%** felt that they had been given adequate support.



"I know I cannot keep this pace up as it's not fair on me or my family."

"I do not think I have the energy to continue in the sector for much longer."

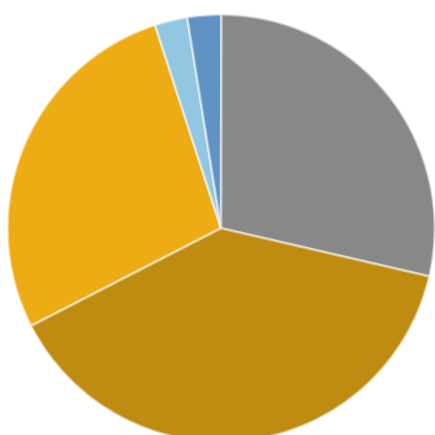
Four in ten (**41%**) respondents say they have considered leaving the sector, but don't think that they will. Many cited their love of working with children as the main reason for staying, while others felt that there weren't many viable alternative career options open



"I love working in the early years sector, it is such a rewarding job and cannot ever imagine working anywhere else."

"The passion remains, and I believe things can be made better."

Have you ever considered leaving the early years sector due to stress or mental health difficulties?



- Yes, I have already left: **2.6%**
- Yes, I have already confirmed that I will be leaving: **2.7%**
- Yes, I am considering leaving: **24.8%**
- Yes, I have considered it but I don't think I will leave: **40.9%**
- No: **29.1%**

Conclusion and recommendations

The results of this survey paint an incredibly concerning picture of the future of the early years sector.

Despite respondents' strong commitment to, and passion for, the practical, child-focused aspect of their jobs, it is clear that external pressures – constant legislative changes, sustained financial pressures as a result of government underfunding, and what are widely deemed to be excessive levels of paperwork – are having a significantly negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing of a substantial proportion of the early years workforce.

Addressing some of the issues raised in the report in the long term would require, at least in part, large-scale government changes that the sector has already long been calling for. For example, increasing funding rates for government funded childcare schemes, as was recommended by the cross-party Treasury Committee in March 2018, would go at least some way to enabling settings to pay their staff – and in the case of self-employed practitioners like childminders, allow them to pay themselves – a wage that much better reflects the responsibility and the importance of the role of an early years practitioner. It would also help address the significant stress that many respondents said was a direct result of the lack of stability, and the fear of imminent closure, caused by inadequacy of funding.

In the short- to medium-term, however, it is clear that it is the issue of paperwork and administration that must be tackled if many of the mental health concerns identified in this survey are to be addressed. Many respondents expressed the view in this survey that over recent years, the level of paperwork that they are required to complete has steadily increased but that much of it is little more than a 'tick-box' exercise which has little to no beneficial impact on children's learning and development. In fact, many felt it often had the opposite effect, limiting the ability of practitioners to spend quality time engaging with the children in their care.

Some respondents attributed these requirements directly to Ofsted, saying that this paperwork – though viewed to be unnecessary and unhelpful – had to be completed in case of an inspection. Concerns were also raised about inconsistencies in Ofsted inspections, and that what one Ofsted inspector might expect in terms of paperwork could differ from another.

It should be noted that in April 2017, Ofsted produced a myth-busting guide to early years inspections in an attempt to dispel misconceptions about what is expected during inspections. With regard to paperwork, the guidance states: "Ofsted does not want to see a particular amount or type of paperwork during an inspection. Settings should use whatever approach to paperwork that suits them and are free to file it however they like. Each inspection is unique and inspectors will only ask to

Conclusion and recommendations

see evidence they consider appropriate to that individual setting, usually determined by their observations of teaching and learning” – although the guide goes on to note that the *Early Years Inspection Handbook* includes a list of the paperwork most commonly requested by inspectors. In February 2018, Ofsted also confirmed it was scrapping the optional early years self-evaluation form (SEF) in an effort to reduce the administrative burden on providers.

It should be of some concern, therefore, that these steps appear to have had a limited effect on the worries and fears of many early years practitioners. It is not clear from the survey whether this is because practitioners are not aware of the changes made, and clarifications issued, by Ofsted, or if it is because these efforts have not gone far enough.

However, the complaints raised in the survey did not, of course, relate exclusively to Ofsted. The often-piecemeal changing of Department for Education legislation – and the pressure that this places on practitioners to ensure they are remaining compliant – was raised as a source of stress by a number of respondents, as was a perceived duplication of requirements between various bodies, such as Ofsted and local authorities. Respondents also criticised the lack of government support provided to assist the sector to adhere to broader legislative changes that affect providers, such as the implementation of GDPR.

At a time when staff recruitment is still such a significant challenge for much of the sector, the fact that a quarter of the existing workforce is actively considering leaving the early years should be a cause of great alarm for government, particularly in light of the ongoing rollout of the 30 hour funded childcare offer across the country and the need for a sustained, qualified workforce in order to successfully deliver this.

Mental health is a complex, nuanced and often very personal issue and it would be short-sighted to suggest that there are any ‘quick fixes’ to the broad and varied individual concerns raised by the respondents to this survey. That said, given that a number of issues were identified as shared concerns by the survey respondents, it is clear that there are key steps that can be taken to at least improve the current situation.

The Pre-school Learning Alliance believes that these include:

- A review of administrative and paperwork requirements in the early years sector, conducted by the Department of Education and Ofsted in partnership with the Pre-school Learning Alliance, to

Conclusion and recommendations

identify (a) areas in which there may be further misconceptions with regard to what is expected of providers that could be clarified, and (b) areas where existing requirements could be reviewed and potentially reduced, without compromising on the quality of provision or children's safety and wellbeing. This should also include a review of any (perceived or actual) areas of duplication of requirements between bodies, organisations and agencies such as Ofsted and local authorities.

- The provision of greater sector support and guidance from both the Department for Education and Ofsted to help providers adhere to new and amended/updated regulations and legislation: both those that are early years specific, and broader rule changes. This could take the form of, for example, a concise guide to what has changed and what steps providers need to take to ensure adherence on any occasion that plans to implement new or amended requirements are confirmed, published on the Gov.uk website.
- An increase in early years funding levels that ensures that local rates cover the cost of delivering funded places; and the establishment of a mechanism through which to ensure that rates increase on an annual basis going forward to reflect rising business costs, such as statutory wage requirements, business rates, and mortgages and rents – as called for by the Alliance's *Fair Future Funding* campaign.
- The development of guidance and resources to help improve discussions around stress and mental health in early years settings, as well as a review of the support mechanisms available for childminders and other non-group based early years providers.

As the largest and most representative early years membership organisation in England, the Alliance will be seeking to work with the DfE and Ofsted over the coming months to ensure that the above recommendations are acted upon.

Appendix: full results

How would you best describe where you work in the early years?

Nursery: **27.1%**

Pre-school: **43.2%**

Childminder: **15.2%**

Maintained nursery school: **1.5%**

Primary school nursery class: **3.1%**

Out of hours club: **1.1%**

Children's centre: **2.2%**

Other: **6.5%**

How would you best describe your role within your setting?

Owner only: **2.1%**

Both owner and manager: **11.3%**

Manager only: **30.9%**

Deputy manager: **10%**

Early years teacher/professional: **11.0%**

Room leader: **4.5%**

Level 3 practitioner: **12.6%**

Level 2 practitioner: **1.7%**

Level 2 assistant: **0.5%**

Unqualified practitioner: **0.9%**

Apprentice: **0.2%**

Other: **14.3%**

How regularly do you work outside of normal paid working hours?

Very often: **61.6%**

Quite often: **19%**

Sometimes: **12.6%**

Rarely: **4.6%**

Never: **2.3%**

Appendix: full results

How many additional hours do you think this adds up to on average each week?

Less than 5 hours: **35.9%**

6 – 10 hours: **37.4%**

11 – 15 hours: **13.1%**

16 – 20 hours: **7.3%**

More than 20 hours: **6.3%**

How regularly do you work outside of what you would consider to be reasonable working hours?

Very often: **50.0%**

Quite often: **20.6%**

Sometimes: **19.1%**

Rarely: **9.1%**

Never: **1.1%**

How many additional hours do you think this adds up to on average each week?

Less than 5 hours: **29.4%**

6 – 10 hours: **44.4%**

11 – 15 hours: **12.4%**

16 – 20 hours: **8.2%**

More than 20 hours: **5.6%**

How long have you worked in the early years sector?

Less than a year: **1.5%**

1 – 5 years: **12.7%**

6 – 10 years: **15.8%**

11 – 15 years: **20.1%**

16 – 20 years: **19.4%**

More than 20 years: **30.6%**

How would you describe how you feel about working in the early years sector at the moment?

Very positive: **11.7%**

Somewhat positive: **32.2%**

Neither positive nor negative: **16.5%**

Somewhat negative: **31.7%**

Very negative: **7.9%**

Appendix: full results

Thinking of your current early years role, how often over the past month have you felt stressed about work or an issue relating to work?

Very often: **43.8%**

Fairly often: **30.2%**

Sometimes: **20.6%**

Rarely: **4.4%**

Never: **0.9%**

How often do you feel the following are a source of stress? Please select the response that most applies to your current situation.

- *Administration and paperwork*: Never = **1.3%**, Rarely = **3.8%**, Sometimes = **19.3%**, Fairly often = **33.1%**, Very often = **42.5%**
- *Workload (other than administration and paperwork)*: Never = **1.7%**, Rarely = **11.7%**, Sometimes = **32.8%**, Fairly often = **31.1%**, Very often = **22.8%**
- *Working hours*: Never = **8.7%**, Rarely = **18.6%**, Sometimes = **34.8%**; Fairly often = **22.1%**; Very often = **15.8%**
- *Pay*: Never = **7.8%**, Rarely = **13.2%**, Sometimes = **25.2%**, Fairly often = **23.1%**, Very often = **30.7%**
- *Morale within your team or setting*: Never = **9.35%**, Rarely = **19.3%**, Sometimes = **33.2%**, Fairly often = **23%**, Very often = **15.27%**
- *Relationships with colleagues*: Never = **19.1%**, Rarely = **33.1%**; Sometimes = **30%**, Fairly often = **11.7%**, Very often = **6.1%**
- *Relationships with parents*: Never = **12.9%**, Rarely = **40.1%**, Sometimes = **34%**; Fairly often = **9.4%**, Very often = **3.7%**
- *Financial resources of the setting / provision*: Never = **5.4%**, Rarely = **13.9%**, Sometimes = **25.6%**, Fairly often = **22.6%**, Very often = **32.3%**
- *Meeting the needs of children*: Never = **9.9%**, Rarely = **23.8%**, Sometimes = **33.9%**, Fairly often = **19.1%**, Very often = **13.5%**

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "I believe that my work and non-work life are balanced."

Strongly agree: **3.2%**

Agree: **17.3%**

Neither agree nor disagree: **17.7%**

Disagree: **39.7%**

Strongly disagree: **22.1%**

Appendix: full results

Have you experienced any of the following symptoms / health impacts due to work, or where work was a contributing factor, over the past year? Please select all that apply.

Insomnia: **53.2%**

Depression: **26.1%**

Fatigue: **60.3%**

Anxiety: **56.9%**

Panic attacks: **13.4%**

Self-harm: **1.1%**

Thoughts of ending your own life: **2.4%**

Mood swings: **28.8%**

Irritability: **52.1%**

Withdrawal: **14.3%**

Tearfulness: **49.5%**

Loss of motivation: **58%**

None of the above: **7.6%**

Prefer not to say: **3.2%**

Other: **5.8%**

Has stress or mental health difficulties caused by or related to work caused any of the following over the past year? Please select all that apply.

I have taken time off work: **23.1%**

I have resigned from my job: **10.5%**

I have been fired from my job: **0.3%**

My work performance has been negatively affected: **44.5%**

My personal relationships have been negatively affected: **65.2%**

Have you spoken to anybody at your workplace about your work stress or mental health issues?

Yes: **47.8%**

No: **52.2%**

[If yes] Who did you speak to?

My line manager: **41.3%**

A senior staff member that wasn't my line manager: **9.2%**

A colleague: **33.3%**

Other: **16.2%**

Appendix: full results

Did you feel you were given adequate support?

Yes: 67%

No: 33%

Have you ever considered leaving the early years sector due to stress or mental health difficulties?

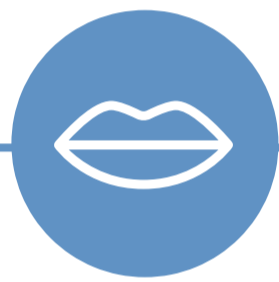
Yes, I have already left: 2.6%

Yes, I have already confirmed that I will be leaving: 2.7%

Yes, I am considering leaving: 24.8%

Yes, I have considered it but I don't think I will leave: 40.9%

No: 29.1%



"In the time I have worked in the sector there have been many, many changes and sadly, not all of them have been for the better. There has been an incredible increase in the amount of paperwork required, which takes me - and all my staff - away from actually having quality time with the children.

On top of that, the unfairly low levels of funding for eligible children has made it extremely hard for us to employ the number of high quality staff we would like. If you add in all the other factors thrown at us by the government, such as workplace pensions, it is hardly any surprise that so many of us in the sector are thinking of quitting, or have already done so."