**Early Years Qualifications and CPD**

The importance of having well qualified staff within the Early Years workforce has been known for many years. Especially the value of employing an Early Years graduate in every setting. However, there are many conflicting requirements regarding the accepted qualifications required to work within the Early Years Sector and to manage the varied settings which include Nursery Schools, Pre Schools, Day Care, PVI settings and settings within Infant and Junior Schools. The level of qualification to manage these settings is a Level 3 Early Years Educator, although Nursery Schools usually employ an Early Years Teacher. There is no requirement to employ a graduate, despite the recommendations linked to research projects such as the EEL project (1997 – 2000) and the Nutbrown Review of Childcare Qualifications(2012).

The advantage identified by the EEL project, of employing well qualified staff was the very positive impact on the learning and development of the children who have been exposed to and gained the advantages experienced when there is a graduate member of staff in the settings. This is particularly noticeable for children living in disadvantaged areas.

The Purpose of the Nutbrown Review was: ‘*To build a stronger foundation years’ experience for all children by creating a high qualified early learning workforce of skilled, knowledgeable professional practitioners who are child and family centred as well as confident and ready to work with families’.(Nutbrown 2012)*

Many members of staff have taken advantage of studying for higher levels of qualifications, i.e. levels 4, 5, and 6, some when they have been able to apply for grants and others self- funded, only to realise that their efforts are not recognised in the pay scales. They feel undervalued and that there is little advantage to gaining these qualifications because the pay scales do not offer matching remuneration. It can be argued that candidates have gained many new qualities and self-improvement such as their deepening levels of knowledge, management skills, ability to work with parents and confidence. However, remuneration remains vitally important.

The benefits to Early Years settings employing highly qualified staff have been immense throughout their training period and afterwards. The quality of the provision and the pedagogy has been greatly enhanced. However, a large number of staff who have gained the qualifications soon leave the sector because they are able to earn higher salaries by working in less stressful environments with fewer high level responsibilities.

Another issue relating to the quality of the training for and qualifications offered in Early Years has been the inconsistency between the courses as identified by many academics within the sector and the DfE. For example in the July 2010 issue of *Child Care* concerns were raised by Tricia Pritchard and Chris Lawrence about the Level 3 course being offered to students by the CWDC with the possibility of completing the course in 1 year as there was no timescale for completion. Whereas the,

 ‘*CACHE Award, Certificate, Diploma in Child Care and Education (DCCE) is a full-time, two-year course. It has a maximum of 360 UCAS points attached, which allow candidates to progress to higher education. Through assessment tasks, internal and external, candidates must show an in-depth knowledge of all aspects of children’s care, learning and development. It has recommended learning and placement hours* ‘

The above course is still delivered by the NCFE.

In order to address inconsistency the current level 3, 4,5 and 6 qualifications offered by several awarding bodies such as the National College of Further Education (NCFE/CACHE), Pearson, City and Guilds and various universities must be deemed full and relevant by the DfE. The criteria for the Early Years Educator (EYE) must be included within the criteria for the qualification and each candidates must be assessed through the theoretical knowledge and assessed within the specified placements across the age ranges from birth to five years. If there is only evidence of knowledge, then the persons may not be included in the ratios of staff at level 3 within the settings. (DfE 2014/2024)

Qualification levels from 4 – 6 that do not have the criteria for the EYE included with their criteria are not recognised by the DfE unless the candidate already holds a relevant level 3 qualification. All awarding bodies and Universities are required to submit details and supporting evidence, such as inclusion of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) subject benchmark statements for Higher and Further Education within their Early Years Courses to the DfE for accreditation.

**CPD**

 Once qualified and employed it is important that all members of staff continue to update their knowledge by attending courses that ensure Continuing Professional Development especially in areas such as Paediatric First Aid, Safeguarding, the Early Years Foundation Stage, Early Years Legislation and Food Handling. It is a requirement of the EYFS that staff attend regular training in these areas. Safeguarding Training should also be attended by committee members.

Opportunities for staff to progress and update their knowledge through further studies must also be identified either by the member of staff or through regular appraisals.

This short overview of the issues surrounding Early Years Settings in relation to Qualifications, CPD and quality provision highlights the fact that this is an ongoing situation that has been acknowledged by all working in the Sector for decades.

Well qualified staff are essential

References

Lawrence, C; Pritchard, T (2010) ‘Child Care’

NutBrown, C (2012) ‘Nutbrown Review of Childcare Qualifications’. DfE

DfE (2014/2024) ‘Full and Relevant Qualifications’ after September 2014. DfE