

TRAINING THE EARLY YEARS SECTOR

**EARLY YEARS LEARNERS, TUTORS
AND PRACTITIONERS**

RESEARCH COMMISSIONED AND FUNDED BY THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOUNDATION

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Research Scope

Training the Early Years Sector examines access to professional development opportunities across the early years sector with a particular focus on the professional development needs of early years tutors delivering initial training to early years learners, and the experience of learners currently enrolled on early years courses as well as the ongoing professional development needs of early years practitioners.

The Government has recently announced the introduction on T levels, technical study programmes for post-16 learners that offer an alternative to the academic A levels pathways. Childcare and education is one of the first three subject areas to undergo reform of its qualifications with the first childcare and education T levels pathways to be offered by 2020 and full pathways offered by 2021.¹

These reforms will significantly alter the landscape of early years qualifications with early years tutors likely to need additional supporting, including high quality professional development opportunities, to develop the knowledge and skills to deliver the revised qualifications.

The overall purpose of the current research is to support the Education and Training Foundation in developing the resources, training and strategic support for early years tutors so that they feel better equipped to support early years learners to become well-qualified and highly skilled practitioners.

Research has been divided into two parts: Part I focuses on the professional development needs and opportunities for early years tutors, and the experiences of their learners, while Part II explores access to ongoing professional development for early years practitioners and looks at how current policy supports the professionalisation of the early years workforce.

In this context, early years tutors refer to the post-16 further education tutors responsible for delivering early years qualifications; early years learners refer to individuals currently studying towards an early years qualification; and early years practitioners refers to individuals working in an early years setting, including childminders, nurseries and preschools.

¹ Department for Education (2017), Post-16 Technical Education Reforms: T Level Action Plan.

1.2 Findings and Recommendations

Full report findings and recommendations are presented at the end of both Part I and Part II of the report. The following summary provides highlights from these key findings and recommendations.

Part I of the report indicates that early years tutors typically undertake professional development through self-directed study and/or peer learning with colleagues. While these approaches are favoured because of the low-cost and flexibility that they offer, early years tutors are keen to have the time and funding to attend in-person training courses to enhance their professional development further. Key recommendations to meet this need include improving access to in-person training for early years tutors were developing and expanding existing regional professional exchange hubs for early years tutors; and ensuring that early years tutors could access local authority training traditionally offered exclusively to early years practitioners.

Early years tutors were also keen to see the development of an online resources database that would be dedicated to early years subject and training resources specific to their needs, together with an online forum to share best practice. A key recommendation from this report the need to raise awareness of existing portals available across the early years sector may help to meet this perceived gap in resources, as well as undertaking a full review to make sure that existing resources meet tutors needs.

Early years tutors identified a number of areas in which they would benefit from professional development training specific to maths and English. With respect to subject knowledge, tutors were keen to improve their own knowledge and understanding of emerging numeracy and literacy amongst pre-school aged children. With respect to skills development, tutors felt that they would like to see more targeted resources to help them embed literacy and numeracy skills more effectively within early years qualifications for the benefit of learners that experienced significant challenges with maths and English.

Evidence presented in Part II of the report indicates that early years practitioners are keen to participate in professional development training, as well as taking advanced qualifications, to improve their practice. Time and cost remain the principal barriers for both early years practitioners and their employers to fund further training, however. In response to these pressure, early years practitioners are increasingly accessing online training and/or in-house training delivered by senior practitioners and managers.

2. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

2.1 Project Overview

Training the Early Years Sector examines access to professional development opportunities across the early years sector with a particular focus on the professional development needs of early years tutors delivering initial training to early years students. The analysis presented in the current report will help the Foundation to develop sector-specific professional development training and support for early years tutors in the further education (FE) sector. To provide further insights into what early years practitioners need from tutors delivering initial training, the key research questions also explore the experiences of learners currently enrolled on early years courses, as well as the subsequent experiences of early years practitioners in accessing ongoing professional development through further training, qualifications and CPD activities.

The project as a whole has been divided into two parts: Part I examines the professional development needs and opportunities for early years tutors, and the experiences of their learners, while Part II explores access to ongoing professional development for early years practitioners and looks at how current policy supports the professionalisation of the early years workforce.

In this context, early years tutors refer to the post-16 further education tutors responsible for delivering early years qualifications; early years learners refer to individuals currently studying towards an early years qualification; and early years practitioners refers to individuals working in an early years setting, including childminders, nurseries and preschools.

Part I

Part I focuses on the professional development and training needs of early years tutors, as well as expectations of learners with regards to the training they receive. Early years tutors are understood here as the individuals responsible for delivering initial training and qualifications for the early years workforce. This includes tutors working in further education (FE) colleges, independent training providers (ITPs), and work-based training schemes and/or mentoring placements.

Early Years Tutors

- What are the qualification levels and ongoing training needs of tutors and trainers who deliver post-16 qualifications to the early years workforce?
- What other forms of support do these tutors and trainers need to help them improve delivery of all aspects of early years education?
- Are there any specific gaps in the knowledge, understanding or training of early years tutors and trainers? Are these gaps different for tutors or trainers based across different types of initial training providers, specifically FE colleges, ITPs and workplace trainers?
- Are early years tutors and trainers successfully preparing early years practitioners to take up positions within the early years workforce?

Early Years Learners

- What is the background (previous education, training and work experience, and course decision choice) of learners undertaking early years training courses in FE settings?
- What are the expectations of learners in terms of their courses? How do they find the teaching and course content - what works well, and where could it be improved?

Part II

Part II of the research offers a supplement to Part I by examining the training needs of the early years workforce and the extent to which these needs are being met by existing professional development opportunities.

Early Years Practitioners

- What does the early years workforce look like?
- What are the training needs of early years practitioners? How are they being met?

The purpose of this stage of the research was to gain a broader insight into the transition from early years learner to early years practitioner in terms of meeting ongoing training needs and skills development.

2.2 Methodology

Part I

Interviews

Potential interviewees were identified through a stakeholder mapping exercise. Relevant providers were selected from the list of Education & Skills Funding Agency Allocations for 2016/2017;² a brief search of the providers' websites was conducted to verify their provision of early years initial training qualifications, as well as to identify suitable individuals within the organisation to invite to participate in the research. Another three of the 30 interviewees were warm contacts identified by organisations and training providers involved in a related Education and Training Foundation professional exchanges project running alongside the research.

A total of 31 interviews (against a target of 30) were delivered with tutors, trainers and other relevant staff working in further education colleges, independent training providers, and workplace training providers in the post-16 sector that deliver early years qualifications. 23 of the 30 interviewees comprised early years trainers, lecturers and assessors. The remaining eight interviewees comprised individuals with prior experience or insights into early years teaching, including two department heads, four team leaders or managers, and two curriculum/strategic leads.

	Sample
Further Education Colleges	20
Independent Training Providers	8
Workplace Training Providers	1
Local Authority Training Providers	2
Total	31

Focus Groups

Five focus groups were conducted with learners undertaking early years initial training qualifications. Focus group participants were identified by interviewees, and parental consent forms were obtained for learners under the age of 18.

Four focus groups were held with learners undertaking Level 3 qualifications at a further education college, while another discussion was held in a nursery setting with a mixture of participants, including early years apprentices, college learners undertaking a placement at the nursery, and other nursery staff that were currently undertaking or had recently completed early years initial teacher training (EYITT). Discussions lasted between 30 and 90 minutes; there were between six and 11 participants attending each focus group.

Literature Review

The literature review for Part I comprised a thorough search for relevant quantitative data, qualitative research, policy documents, and research reports across the further education and early years sectors. The search strategy involved keyword searches using Google and Google Scholar, as well as manual searches for publications on relevant websites. Where specific data and/or research was not available for early years teaching and learning within the further education sector, relevant evidence for the further education sector as a whole was identified.

Validation Workshops

Key findings and recommendations were discussed and tested with early years tutors and managers participating in the three regional Professional Exchanges hubs hosted by the Education and Training Foundation. In-person workshops were held with the first two hubs, consisting of 16 (including seven online attendees) and nine attendees, respectively. The final hub submitted written feedback to the key research findings and report recommendations, and consisted of 30 attendees divided into two groups. Research findings were refined on the basis of feedback from tutors participating in the Professional Exchanges.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sfa-funding-allocations-to-training-providers-2016-to-2017>

Part II

Interviews

A total of 18 interviews (against a target of 15) were conducted with key stakeholders for the second part of the project. The purpose of the interviews was to explore the training needs and priorities among the early years workforce. Interviewees were identified through a stakeholder mapping exercise; the final interviewees comprised five nurseries, five training providers, two professional associations, and six other stakeholders, including charities, researchers and unions.

	Sample
Early Years Settings	5
Early Years CPD Training Providers	5
Early Years Professional Associations	2
Other Early Years Specialists (Charities, Academic Researchers and Trade Unions)	6
Total	18

Literature Review

The literature review for Part II comprised an extensive search for relevant quantitative data, qualitative research, policy documents, and research reports across the early years sector. The search strategy involved keyword searches using Google and Google Scholar, as well as manual searches for publications on relevant websites, including early years professional associations and government policy document portals. All identified sources were assessed for quality, and coded for relevance to the key research questions, prior to inclusion within the final analysis.

AELP Presentation

The Research Base held a presentation of the Part II research findings for the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) Health, Social Care and Early Years Sector Forum in August 2017. The forum also provided an opportunity to gain feedback from the forum attendees, which was used as another source of evidence for this report.

Research Challenges and Limitations

- The recruitment of interviewees for Part I of the research was particularly challenging, with more than 700 points of contact made with around 200 stakeholders. It is likely that the final group of interviewees were more motivated to engage in continuing professional development in comparison to their peers working in similar roles at other institutions; the relatively low levels of professional development training pursued amongst our interview cohort suggests that levels across the further education sector as a whole may be significantly lower, if existent at all, but further research would be required to test this hypothesis.
- Part I interviewees includes two individuals that the researchers believed had an initial training focus, but when interviewed, it transpired had worked in early years continuing professional development. Their responses have nevertheless been included as part of their analysis, as their input was deemed to be useful to the research.
- Where there are emerging trends, we have indicated comparisons between tutors working in FE colleges and tutors working in ITPs; however, these findings should be treated with caution as the sample sizes are relatively small and further research would be needed to fully test these findings. Please see table above for full breakdown of interviewees by provider type.

3. PART I – INITIAL TRAINING IN THE EARLY YEARS

3.1 Background Context

Policy Context

Post-16 Education Policy

The Government has recently announced the introduction of T levels, technical study programmes for post-16 learners that offer an alternative to the academic A levels pathways. Childcare and education is one of the first three subject areas to undergo reform of its qualifications with the first childcare and education T levels pathways to be offered by 2020 and full pathways offered by 2021. The Government's expectation is that the majority of further education providers will offer T levels by 2024.³ These reforms build on recommendation set out in the Post-16 Skills Plan to improve the quality and coherence of post-16 technical and vocational qualifications.⁴

Early Years Policy

Recent policy in the early years sector has been shaped by three key documents: the Nutbrown Review from 2012; the More Great Childcare report from 2013, which contains the Government's response to the review; and the Early Years Workforce Strategy from 2017. Major policy developments in qualification and training resulting from these reports include the introduction of the Early Years Educator (EYE) criteria to improve the quality of qualifications at Level 3 and above; the introduction of the Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) similar to QTS; and the requirement for learners to have a minimum Level 2 qualification in literacy and numeracy to enrol on Level 3 qualifications. These literacy and numeracy requirements have only recently been introduced after previous requirements to hold a grade C or above in GCSE maths and English led to a drop in recruitment to the early years sector.⁵

Further sector priorities and challenges that emerge from recent policy developments include increasing the quality of training and access to continuous professional development among practitioners, as well as promoting good practice for early years tutors, such as ensuring tutors are qualified to a higher level than the courses they teach, and increasing tutors' knowledge and experience of early years provision.⁶

³ Department for Education (2017), Post-16 Technical Education Reforms: T Level Action Plan.

⁴ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and the Department for Education (2016). Post-16 Skills Plan.

⁵ Department for Education (2017), Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

⁶ Department for Education (2017), Early Years Workforce Strategy.

Professional Development and Standards

Professional Development Across the Further Education Sector

Evidence from the literature review emphasises the value of improving not only the quality of professional development opportunities available to further education tutors, but also ensuring that all further education tutors receive the support that they need to engage with CPD in the first instance. Since the removal of FE workforce regulations in 2012, it is no longer mandatory for further education tutors to declare annual time spent on CPD. The Society for Education and Training (SET), the professional membership organisation for the sector, requires all members to commit to and record all CPD but there is no minimum requirement on the number of hours;⁷ SET membership enables teachers and trainers to work towards Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills status (QTLS).⁸

There are a range of online and in-person training courses available to further education tutors. The Education and Training Foundation, as the sector-owned body, offers CPD courses in maths and English; Prevent; SEND; digital skills support; collaborative training; study programmes; and future apprenticeships programme.⁹ Further specialist organisations providing resources and training include the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics (NCETM)¹⁰ and Prevent for Further Education and Training.¹¹

Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers in Education and Training

The Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers in Education and Training were developed by the Education and Training Foundation to support the professional development of tutors working in the further education sector. The framework comprises 20 standards across three core areas: professional values and attributes, professional knowledge and understanding, and professional skills.¹² These standards encourage teachers and trainers to engage in reflective practice, as well as taking up opportunities for further training and professional development within their given specialism.¹³

Further resources developed by the Education and Training Foundation to support the implementation of these standards include an initial guidance note,¹⁴ a series of 'how to' guides for FE colleges and institutions,¹⁵ a self-development guide for practitioners,¹⁶ and an online self-assessment tool.¹⁷ The Foundation has also produced a series of professional development modules for further education tutors to enhance their knowledge and skills in areas directly related to the professional standards.¹⁸

7 <https://set.et-foundation.co.uk/professionalism/cpd/>

8 <https://set.et-foundation.co.uk/professionalism/qtls/>

9 <http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/supporting/support-practitioners/>

10 <https://www.ncetm.org.uk>

11 <http://www.preventforfeandtraining.org.uk>

12 Education and Training Foundation (2014), Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers in Education and Training. 13 Education and Training Foundation (2014), Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers in Education and Training. 14 Education and Training Foundation (2014), Initial Guidance for Users of the Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers - England.

15 Education and Training Foundation (2014), Summary Professional Standards 'How To' Guides.

16 Education and Training Foundation (n.d.), Self-Development. Using the 2014 Professional Standards: A Guide for Practitioners.

17 http://www.foundationonline.org.uk/course_files/sat-single-page/

18 <http://www.et-foundation.co.uk/supporting/support-practitioners/>

3.2 Early Years Tutors

Qualifications and Workplace Experience

Qualification Levels

There are no national datasets available that provide details of the qualification levels of early years tutors working in the further education sector; however, sector-wide regulations along with evidence from the SIR dataset give an indication of broader trends across the further education workforce as a whole.

The recommended qualifications for teaching staff on permanent contracts working in further education comprise a minimum Level 3 qualification in their subject area and a minimum Level 3 teaching qualification¹⁹ or willingness to gain a teaching qualification.²⁰ There are a broad range of different teaching qualifications available to further education teaching staff with a Level 5 Diploma recognised as a full teaching qualification for the sector.²¹

The SIR dataset analysed by the Education and Training Foundation indicates that around three quarters of further education tutors hold a teaching qualification; most commonly held qualifications are a PGCE (32%), a Certificate of Education (23%) and a Level 5 Diploma in Education and Training (11%).²² Half of tutors hold a Level 5 or 6 qualification in their main subject area and a further quarter of tutors hold a Level 7 qualification.²³ Less than 5% of tutors hold a Level 2 qualification or below.²⁴ Unfortunately SIR data is only collected for health, public services and social care, and is not broken down in a way in which data for early years can be isolated; this represents a key data gap.

Evidence from qualitative interviews with early years tutors reflects these general trends. Almost all interviewees hold a wide range of qualifications encompassing both early years qualifications and generic teaching qualifications. Over half of interviewees already hold a bachelor's degree, many of whom also hold a postgraduate certificate in education; a small number of interviewees hold a Master's qualification.

The remaining interviewees have a strong vocational background with more than a decade of workplace experience as well as a minimum Level 3 qualification and a teaching certificate such as a Diploma or PTTLs certificate. A number of interviewees with extensive workplace experience indicated that this experience could quickly become outdated in a fast-moving sector such as early years education. Some interviewees also hold assessor and internal verifier awards.

Early years tutors also reported that their colleagues had comparable levels of qualification and training, and shared a similar enthusiasm for pursuing further learning opportunities. As one interviewee explained, *'In FE, originally you didn't have to have degree, it was more important to have that vocational background. That's still just as important but most of my colleagues have gone on to do level 5 or degree [qualifications]'*. Overall, a high proportion of interviewees reported that they are currently pursuing additional early years qualifications at degree or Master's level.

The majority of the early years tutors that took part in these qualitative interviews deliver initial training up to Level 3 qualifications or apprenticeships in early years childcare or related subjects at either a further education college or independent training provider. A smaller proportion of interviewees work in organisations that deliver early years qualification up to Level 5 (foundation degree) or Level 6 (Bachelor's degree). A high proportion of interviewees hold a managerial role within their organisation, or work as assessors for early years trainees. Two interviewees deliver further training for qualified early years practitioners.²⁵

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19 <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/job-profiles/further-education-lecturer>

20 <https://www.feAdvice.org.uk/i-want-work-fe-skills-sector/i-want-be-teacher-fe-skills>

21 <https://www.feAdvice.org.uk/i-want-work-fe-skills-sector/i-want-be-teacher-fe-skills/teaching-qualifications-fe-skills-sector>

22 Education and Training Foundation (2017), Further Education Workforce Data for England.

23 Education and Training Foundation (2017), Further Education Workforce Data for England.

24 Education and Training Foundation (2017), Further Education Workforce Data for England.

25 Part I qualitative interviews.

Workplace Experience

All interviewees have substantial workplace experience ranging from 18 months of intensive experience to over 20 years working in and managing early years settings: according to one interviewee, *'the college expectations are that whatever subject role you're teaching in you have some vocational experience in that as well.'*

A small number of assessors working for independent training providers continue to hold a part-time role in an early years setting alongside their training role.²⁶

The vast majority of early years tutors have held previous roles in nurseries, childminding and nannying, while a small number had experience in other areas including working in a children's hospice, residential care home, specialist care for children with additional needs, primary school teachers and teaching assistants, and as a child protection officer. Only one interviewee referred to a colleague that came into early years teaching directly from university.²⁷

There appears to be some debate about the right balance between workplace experience and teaching experience, according to some interviewees. As one early years tutor explained, *'A nursery manager doesn't always make a teacher, because in a further education college your vocation, your specialism comes before pedagogy, whereas in other sectors it's the other way around. So it is a dilemma that we have... although ideally we need both.'*

A number of tutors also mentioned that they continued to get workplace experience while conducting observations of students on placements: *'It is wonderful when you can do that, so you can be in the nursery setting, see what is going on, have a chat with the manager at the place and see what they do now compared to what you did so many years when you were in the setting... it's [about] being able to visualise what's going on.'*²⁸ Tutors at one of the validation workshops felt student observations were not the most effective way to stay up to date with current practice, however.²⁹

A small number of interviewees had the opportunity once or twice a year to spend the day in an early years setting focused purely on their own professional development; one interviewee reported that her college set aside two weeks for early years tutors to complete an on- the-job placement each year.³⁰

While on-the-job placements continue to be seen as best practice for early years tutors, funding cuts across the FE sector mean that access to these kind of CPD opportunities varies across different colleges.³¹ Early years tutors working in other colleges, for example, highlighted how they had limited opportunity to spend time in the workplace: *'If I was to come out of this job and decide to go into practice, I would be so out of date... That's one of the pitfalls, that once you come into the [FE] sector, there isn't the opportunity to refresh.'*³²

The benefits of workplace experience are also highlighted in a report by the Institute for Learning that identifies best practice for the professional development for tutors working across the further education sector. This report recommends developing 'links with employers, experts and higher education in the related field' and spending time with employers within their field.³³ Another best practice model, the Teach Too programme, facilitates knowledge sharing between industry experts and further education tutors; however, the programme has not yet been rolled out to tutors delivering early years qualifications.³⁴

For all interviewees, the combination of early years qualifications and workplace experience was sufficient for them to take up a role as an early years tutor or assessor without the need for further training courses; a small number of interviewees highlighted additional in-house training and/or CPD that they received to help prepare them to fulfil their current role after taking up the position including specific training in first aid, safeguarding, and health and safety. One tutor described how, after being offered the position, she was given the specifications for the job role and responsibilities and then expected *'to hit the ground running'*; however, she felt that most tutors come with a high level of experience and skills that easily transfer into developing teaching skills.³⁵

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26 Part I qualitative interviews.

27 Part I qualitative interviews.

28 Part I qualitative interviews.

29 Validation workshops.

30 Part I qualitative interviews.

31 Supplementary information from the Education and Training Foundation.

32 Part I qualitative interviews.

33 LSIS (2010), Brilliant Teaching and Training in FE and Skills.

34 <http://tvet.excellencegateway.org.uk/vocabulary/EGresourcetype/Effective%20practice%20example>

35 Part I qualitative interviews.

Access to Professional Development and Training

Across the sector as a whole, it is notable that while the average for teaching staff is 15 hours of CPD per year, more than half of tutors (60%) did not take part in any CPD in the past year.³⁶ At the same time, it is clear that effective CPD has an important role to play in improving teaching and learning across the sector. CPD can take a number of formats with further education tutors typically pursuing self-directed study and/or peer learning alongside formal training courses or events.³⁷ It is also recommended that further education tutors engage with professional bodies in their subject area in order to strengthen subject-specific knowledge, and to be aware of recent policy changes in their subject area.³⁸

Evidence from qualitative interviews indicates that most early years tutors pursue a mix of subject-specific CPD and broader skills training for teaching and pastoral roles; the specific balance between these two elements depends on institutional requirements and individuals' professional interests.

Early years tutors appear to take a positive, pro-active approach to professional development training with almost all interviewees taking part in some form of professional development or training within the last year. While relatively few tutors participate in formal CPD courses or professional development events due to the constraints of time and cost, almost all of early years tutors report that they undertake self-directed study to keep up to date with current research and policy development in the sector. There also appears to be a strong culture of sharing best practice with colleagues and learning from each other's specialisms.

Self-directed study typically involves online research and reading, often making use of specialist early years websites or social media tools such as Twitter to identify relevant information: *'It's just down to the trainers being aware, being subscribed to the right websites and researching the right sort of places'*. Tutors at one of the validation workshops said they take part in in-house CPD to prepare for Ofsted inspections, covering generic aspects of teaching, learning and assessment, as well as specific early years content.³⁹

Interviewees currently undertaking further study also felt that this counted towards their ongoing professional development; as one interviewee explained, *'That's something I think will inform my teaching practice and my knowledge and specialism if I can do my master's in early years'*.

Key benefits of self-directed study include the low costs involved, and the ability to fit it around other commitments: *'It's as and when really. We can sometimes go weeks without having any proper CPD within that area and then sometimes we have a couple of weeks where we have spare time so we brush up on things there.'* Some interviewees also referred to learning from in-college events for early years students, for example, visiting speakers who are experts in early years.

It's as and when really. We can sometimes go weeks without having any proper CPD within that area and then sometimes we have a couple of weeks where we have spare time so we brush up on things there.

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³⁶ Education and Training Foundation (2017), Further Education Workforce Data for England.

³⁷ <https://set.et-foundation.co.uk/professionalism/cpd/example-activities-for-your-cpd/>

³⁸ LSIS (2010), Brilliant Teaching and Training in FE and Skills.

³⁹ Validation workshops.

In terms of formal professional development training, tutors and assessors working at ITPs appear to have greater access to opportunities compared with tutors working at further education colleges, where the time and cost of training are more significant barriers. Tutors working in FE colleges are also more likely to undertake mandatory training in general areas outside of early years, such as Prevent duty. Popular modes of formal CPD include attending conference and training days; several interviewees also referred positively to the training provided by awarding bodies such as Cache or City & Guilds. As one tutor explained: *'we've needed to adapt as new curriculums and qualifications come in'*.

Collaborative learning is also popular amongst early years tutors. There appears to be a common model of sharing learning from any formal training or events with colleagues through cascade learning, as well as attending in-house or local 'teach meets' to share best practice. Informal learning and knowledge sharing between tutors was also identified as an important way of keeping up to date: *'There's a lot of professional discussions that take place where we talk about current practice.'*

There was a broad mix of preferences with respect to the mode of learning. While online courses were popular with many interviewees, not all interviewees shared that enthusiasm. Perceived benefits of online training courses include flexibility in when and where training is completed, as well as opportunities for interactive learning; however, a small minority felt that online learning was not effective for early years because of the practical nature of the subject. Tutors that have already engaged in online training refer to sites such as FutureLearn as a good source of high quality resources.⁴⁰ Tutors at one of the validation workshops noted that online learning is most effective when it forms part of a monitored system of professional development: as one participant explained, *'We're required from our awarding body to have a log of our CPD, but we also have an online system within our college where it's attached to our appraisal.'*⁴¹

There's a lot of professional discussions that take place where we talk about current practice.

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Locally delivered training courses were also popular amongst interviewees. Some interviewees were keen to access the same local authority training as early years practitioners to help them stay up to date with current practice. In one example, a tutor described how her college had already established these links with local authority training: *'the early years advisors in our area... they've offered for us to access online training, the safeguarding training, which we do as part of our role anyways, but that's specific for linking into early years.'* Some tutors, however, reported that they had experienced significant barriers in accessing local authority training following budget cuts.

In one example of developing best practice, an early years education manager described how her college had set up a nursery-style classroom within the college and that each week local nurseries come for visits so the early years learners can work closely with both tutors and practitioners to develop their on-the-job skills.⁴²

Further strategies to support and enhance professional development identified across validation workshops include: peer observations within and across subject areas; self-assessment of training needs with line manager; college-wide sharing good practice week; mentoring programmes; senior staff walk throughs; innovation rooms where staff across the college can leave relevant resources; teach meets; innovation passports and other rewards systems for sharing good practice. It should be noted, however, that many of these strategies are not necessarily subject-specific, although they could be tailored to meet subject-specific training needs.

40 Part I qualitative interviews.

41 Validation workshops.

42 Part I qualitative interviews.

Subject Gaps in Professional Development

There were a number of subject areas in which early years tutors felt that a greater range of high quality professional development opportunities would be desirable. These include:⁴³

- **The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS):**
By far the most popular area for further subject specific training, the EYFS and associate legislation was mentioned by a high proportion of interviewees. Tutors were keen for policy updates to be clearly communicated to them, as well as having additional training on how to teach the statutory requirements covered by the EYFS in everyday practice. As one tutor explained: *'it would be good to have specific training that draws on our experiences but allows us to update our skills and knowledge - and allows us to be able to teach it better.'* Another interviewee felt that the links between the EYFS and theories of child development needed to be made more explicit, while tutors at one validation workshop felt that the National Curriculum for early years should be covered more fully.
- **Child development and psychology:**
A high number of tutors were keen to receive additional training on the child development theories included within early years initial qualifications, both in terms of the content of those theories and best practice in teaching the material: *'the minute you mention it [theory] to students, a big wall goes up. [It's] trying to do it in a way that you understand and they understand, without it being boring.'* Several interviewees also felt that up-to-date training on child psychology, including recent innovations in neuroscience, would be beneficial for tutors in the sector. Tutors at the validation workshops were also keen to have greater access to training in theory and philosophy relevant to early years education.
- **Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND):**
Further training in working with children with SEND was raised by a number of interviewees, including those that had workplace experience in SEND environments but felt that more tutors needed additional training in this area. As one tutor reported, *'it's very hard to find training around that [SEND].'* Another interviewee was keen to see the Government's proposed SENCO qualification for early years rolled out in order to improve access to initial training (and thus well-qualified practitioners) in this specialised area.
- **Emerging literacy and maths for preschoolers:**
Some interviewees felt that they would benefit from more training in emerging literacy and maths for preschool aged children. As one interviewee noted, *'the biggest problem is that people just don't understand how maths is taught now compared to how they were taught years ago.'* Tutors at one of the validation workshops were keen for the Foundation to develop a subject specific maths and English revitaliser for early years comparable to the general revitaliser courses currently on offer.⁴⁴
- **English as an additional language (EAL):**
A small number of interviewees referred to the increasing number of students working closely with preschool children who have English as an additional language. Additional training in this area was seen as necessary to better support these students and the children in their care: *'The number of children within setting now where English is an additional language has greatly increased so I think that's kind of a subject area that there is a gap... for everyone.'*
- **Paediatric first aid:**
A small number of interviewees felt that more tutors need to have paediatric first aid training, and be able to deliver this training to students, in order to make sure that they keep up with current statutory requirements for practitioners in the sector.
- **Specialist approaches:** Some interviewees felt that it would be beneficial to have more training in specialist areas, such as forest schools, Steiner schools or the Montessori approach to early years.

43 Part I qualitative interviews.

44 Validation workshops.

One interviewee observed that, in her dual role as learning manager for early years education alongside health and social care, the breadth of CPD opportunities specifically related to health and social care were far greater than those for early years education: *'there's not a lot out there specific to early years.'* Many other tutors also felt that access to subject-specific professional development remained limited, although one interviewee insisted that: *'there's a lot out there if you go and find it, it doesn't always come to you.'*⁴⁵ One tutor at a validation workshop reported that her college had organised its own conference to meet gaps in subject knowledge: key themes addressed at the conference included autism, special educational needs, attachment theories, and outdoor learning.⁴⁶

Tutors were also keen to continue receiving courses in more general subjects areas, including safeguarding, behaviour management, equality and diversity, educational theory, the Prevent duty and British values. As one interviewee explained, early years tutors need a wide range of skills in order to fulfil their role: *'There are a number of courses developing, sometimes you have to look more broadly than early years - you're not just an early years specialist in our role, it could be negotiation skills or conflict resolution skills.'*⁴⁷

Skills and Knowledge Gaps in Professional Development

There is a broad consensus amongst interviewees that while the skills and knowledge gaps of early years tutors vary depending considerably on prior learning and experience, almost all tutors benefit from closer interaction with early years settings: *'If we're inside our own little bubble, then we don't really know the struggles with things that are happening [on the ground].'* Participants at one of the validation workshops said that tutors may miss out on opportunities to observe students on placements as this is sometimes conducted by assessors. Where tutors carry out visits to workplaces, this can also be a wasted opportunity unless specific objectives have been set for the visit.⁴⁸

Benefits of building a closer working relationship with early years settings include: improved lesson planning by seeing students in placements, better knowledge of the practical realities of working in the sector, and opportunities to work more closely with workplace mentors to ensure that students receive well-integrated training and guidance.

⁴⁵ Part I qualitative interviews.

⁴⁶ Validation workshops.

⁴⁷ Part I qualitative interviews.

⁴⁸ Validation workshops.

⁴⁹ For example, the EYupskill portal provides a searchable database of training courses on offer to professionals working across the early years sector: <http://eyupskill.org.uk>

As one interviewee explained: *'It's a very practical subject and it becomes very disjointed when there's lack of correlation between class-based training and on-the-job training.'*

A number of interviewees also highlighted that it would be beneficial to have access to the same training opportunities as early years practitioners to help them stay up to date; as one interviewee observed, *'being proactive... rather than being reactive would be beneficial to everyone.'* Other interviewees reported that they were able to attend training and events held by their local authority for early years practitioners.

It's a very practical subject and it becomes very disjointed when there's lack of correlation between class-based training and on-the-job training.

EARLY YEARS TUTOR



Some interviewees also raised the issue of skills and knowledge to effectively embed English and maths for students. As one interviewee noted, the early years sector typically attracts students that may continue to struggle academically with these core subjects: *'Some of our students are only at a certain level... and that's a huge barrier to progressing because they might actually be the best practitioner you've ever had but for the sake of a particular area they can't have that qualification.'*

Another interviewee felt that it would be beneficial to have access to specific resources for English and maths in early years to help tutors embed these subjects effectively. While these resources do already exist, it may be the case that FE tutors are not fully aware of sector-wide resources focused on how to deliver maths and English within an early years setting.⁴⁹ Tutors who discussed the question of students' maths and English skills also welcomed the recent change in minimum requirements for early years qualifications from GCSE maths and English to the more accessible Level 2 Functional Skills qualifications.

The idea of having a good team is that you have a bank with a wealth of experience. You need to ensure as a team that you have a cross sector of experience and also of knowledge as well.

EARLY YEARS TUTOR



In general, there appears to be a high degree of collegial working amongst early years tutors. Several interviewees felt that this shared learning approach meant that it is more helpful to look at skills and knowledge gaps across a team as a whole rather than for each individual tutor: *'The idea of having a good team is that you have a bank with a wealth of experience. You need to ensure as a team that you have a cross sector of experience and also of knowledge as well.'* Experienced early years tutors acting as mentors for newly recruited tutors was also identified as an important strategy to help inexperienced staff develop their skills.⁵⁰ Tutors at the validation workshops also agreed that encouraging the development of different specialisms within each early years' department created an effective way of sharing knowledge.⁵¹

Challenges for the Professional Development of Early Years Tutors

There were a number of common themes in terms of specific challenges facing early years tutors, in particular, the time and cost associated with participating in professional development training. Tutors were keen to attend more training courses and events, both national and local, but that this needed to be balanced against time for regular workplace experience and opportunities to pursue further qualifications. Several interviewees also raised the issue of the time and location of training events as a potential barrier for early years tutors: *'if we have full teaching timetable, its always thinking of timing.'*

Tutors who joined the profession a decade or more ago with a Level 3 qualification may also experience significant barriers to *'upskilling'* by pursuing higher qualifications. As one interviewee observed, for these colleagues, time and budget constraints mean that: *'they are teaching students who want higher qualifications, but don't have these themselves... they are very experienced, but they don't have qualifications to support their knowledge.'*

Further challenges noted by a significant number of interviewees include the need for better access to resources in order to keep up with the fast pace of policy and practice developments in the sector: *'I think there's a gap in keeping up to date in a very fast-moving sector.'*

I think there's a gap in keeping up to date in a very fast-moving sector.

EARLY YEARS TUTOR



One interviewee also felt that too much emphasis was placed on tutors to keep up to date with developments in the sector; she had observed that not all her colleagues made the time to read current early years news and research, which makes professional development a *'very hit and miss'* scenario.

Some tutors living and working outside of major cities also reported challenges accessing face-to-face training: *'we have to travel quite a long way to access conferences and things, we don't have anything in our area.'*⁵²

Evidence from the validations workshops also suggests that tutors living further from major cities struggle to access a broad range of high quality training.⁵³

A number of tutors also raised concerns about the quality of professional development training on offer. As one interviewee explained, taking part in courses and events is not always a good use of time because *'sometimes it just clarifies something that you already know.'*⁵⁴

A number of tutors also highlighted how the requirements for certain qualifications were out of step with current practice in early years settings, and felt that they were not always adequately preparing their students for the workplace: *'the work they do in colleges versus the work they do in settings is just poles apart... some of the basic stuff still isn't there and you think it is because a group of committed skilled practitioners will move on but the vast majority of practitioners still aren't getting those basics right.'*⁵⁵

50 Part I qualitative interviews.

51 Validation workshops.

52 Part I qualitative interviews.

53 Validations workshops.

54 Part I qualitative interviews.

55 Part I qualitative interviews.

Tutors attending one of the validation workshops agreed that qualifications are not giving students the practical grounding they need for working in an early years setting; one tutor noted, for example, that *'awarding bodies are still delivering a very traditional way that we have to teach. What we're assessing and teaching the students doesn't match what's taking place sort of in the real world.'* Another participant felt, however, that the problem lies with the lower levels of practice in early years settings rather than the content of the qualifications: *'knowledge in the workplace isn't where it needs to be, [so] it becomes quite difficult for us.'* In the case of Level 2 qualifications, however, participants felt that these were not sufficient to prepare students for the workplace.⁵⁶

Tutors at one of the validation workshops also raised the issue of the level at which most professional development is currently pitched. There was a broad consensus that most of the current training is either too basic for experienced tutors and/or required them to enrol on formal degree-level courses which necessitated considerable time commitment alongside their professional roles.⁵⁷

Some participants at another validation workshop expressed concern about the possible loss of funding for early years professional development as a result of leaving the European Union. Some early years managers at the workshop said they had used the EU Erasmus fund to support tutors and learners visiting settings in Finland to study holistic approaches to early years, but worried that these funds may not be available in the future.⁵⁸

Improving Professional Development for Early Years Tutors

Early years tutors identified diverse strategies to improve the current professional development landscape. These include:⁵⁹

- **Online resources database:** There was a wide interest in having access to an online portal that would provide relevant subject and/or teaching resources, as well as a database of professional development training, events and opportunities.⁶⁰ One interviewee also suggested that the portal could include a tool to help identify key areas for professional development and match these areas with existing training according to preferred cost and mode of delivery. Participants at one of the validation workshops felt that the quality of the content would be key to the success of any database, including strong quality assurance mechanisms, and recommended that content be provided by experienced early years professionals, as opposed to awarding bodies. It was also suggested that the database include content that is differentiated according to level, as well as a dedicated section for changes in policy.⁶¹
- **Online forum:** Early years tutors were also keen to see an online forum for sharing best practice to be established. Some interviewees referred to accessing similar forums for early years practitioners and/or further education tutors but felt that there is a need for an online forum dedicated to early years tutors.
- **Conferences and networking events:** Interviewees expressed an interest in attending conference and networking events, both to improve their own subject knowledge and to facilitate shared learning. One interviewee suggested that these events would allow tutors to *'work together with other organisations and come up with solutions, share resources and ideas... I think it's a really good idea to get everybody working from the same hymn sheet - that consistency.'*

⁵⁶ Validation workshops.

⁵⁷ Validation workshops.

⁵⁸ Validation workshops.

⁵⁹ Part I qualitative interviews.

⁶⁰ As noted above, portals such as Eyupskill are already established with details of training opportunities for the early years sector; it may be desirable to raise awareness amongst EY tutors working in the FE sector and to explore whether the training identified through the portal meet their specific needs as tutors.

⁶¹ Validation workshops.

- **Shared practice:** Early years tutors place a high value on developing greater knowledge of workplace learning. As such, there were a high number of interviewees who wanted more support to develop shared learning practices in local communities, especially between training providers and early years settings: *'We're sending the next generation of practitioners out there, it would be nice to strengthen that link.'*
- **Regional hubs:** Many early years tutors expressed an interest in sharing practice with other tutors in their local area. One interviewee referred to regional hubs that used to happen in her area led by the awarding body as a possible model for future initiatives. Tutors attending the validation workshops felt that professional exchanges (where the validation workshops took place) provided an ideal forum for regional hubs and were keen to see this opportunity extended.⁶²
- **Learning from experts:** There was some interest in having access to training provided by early years specialists across a broad range of subjects including outdoor learning, SEND, Ofsted regulations and other key areas of early years practice. One interviewee felt that she had benefited significantly from attending talks delivered by early years experts: *'people who make me think and I can take that back to students.'*
- **Improving professional recognition:** A number of interviewees also highlighted the need for greater recognition of the professional skills and status of early years practitioners as the foundation for all other improvement across the sector. According to one interviewee, early years is not properly recognised as a specialism within the education sector: *'in FE we're known as the Cinderella sector.'* Further examples of the need to greater professional recognition include ensuring that early years teacher status confers the same status and esteem as that of school teachers.

There was a general consensus that early years tutors need access to regular professional development opportunities. As one tutor described it, the best training is *'flexible, short and sharp'*. One interviewee also commented that organisations responsible for developing CPD resources may benefit from coming in and observing practice in a college setting to help inform the development of these resources.⁶³

Tutors attending validation workshops responded enthusiastically to the idea of an online database of resources, with some participants seeing it as the most practicable approach to professional development. A number of tutors that had helped to develop subject-specific training resources were also keen to have the opportunity to upload resources to any database, while others felt that it would be helpful to have guidance to help them pinpoint the most relevant resources for their training needs.⁶⁴

It is notable that tutors attending this workshop were aware of the general training courses currently provided by the Foundation but felt that they were too costly; however, it appears that the perceived costs of courses are much higher than the actual costs, with one tutor suggesting that courses run by the Foundation were as much as £800. The Foundation may wish to develop specific strategies to help market their courses as affordable, and address any mistaken perceptions about the costs involved.⁶⁵

62 Validation workshops.

63 Part I qualitative interviews.

64 Validation workshops.

65 Validation workshops.

3.3 Early Years Learners

Early Years Qualifications

Qualification Routes

There are a number of qualification routes that early years learners may choose to follow, including early years qualifications offered by further education (FE) colleges and independent training providers (ITPs), and early years apprenticeships.⁶⁶ Since 2014, early years qualifications at Level 3 or above are required to meet the Early Years Educator (EYE) criteria. These criteria cover children's early education and development, effective practice for educators, safeguarding and welfare, and collaborative working.⁶⁷

Learner Demographics

There is limited literature available regarding the background of learners undertaking early years training courses in FE settings; a key gap in the data is that the majority of FE learner data is reported at the broader level of Education & Training, and is not specifically targeted at early years.

Within the broader category of education and training, however, 78,000 learners successfully completed QCF qualifications in 2015, of which a majority were Level 3, while 8,300 individuals started apprenticeship programmes in education and training.⁶⁸ A majority of learners completing QCF qualifications were aged 20 or over; most apprentices were also aged 19 or over.

Apprenticeship data is one of the few areas which is broken down at the level of early years. The table below shows apprenticeship programme starts under the Children's Care, Learning and Development sector framework, highlighting pathways relevant to early years and broken down by age. The most common age for early years apprentices is under 19 at 43%, followed by 19 to 24 (35%) and 25+ (22%).

Apprenticeship Programme Starts by Age (2014/15)⁶⁹

Pathway	Under 19	19-24	25+
Children & Young People's Workforce	5510	2940	2260
Early Years Educator	2960	3810	1880
No Pathway Assignment	0	70	70
Average %	43%	35%	22%

Learner Education and Experience

The majority of focus group participants report previous work experience in early years and/or childcare prior to starting their course including work experience in a childcare setting, nursery or primary school as well as delivering extra-curricular activities with school groups. However, the majority of focus group participants did not complete previous education or training in childcare or child development, with only a small number of individuals qualified in a GCSE in childcare or childhood development; suggesting that work experience might be a more important factor.

**It gives you a good insider to what you're doing...
After I did it [work experience], I was sure that's what
I wanted to go into.**

EARLY YEARS LEARNER

Three focus group participants report the benefits of having undertaken work experience in childcare: *'It gives you a good insider to what you're doing... After I did it [work experience], I was sure that's what I wanted to go into'*. A smaller number of young people also mentioned previous experience looking after younger family members and babysitting. Two participants were employers as well as trainees; both said that they prefer applicants who had prior experience to the extent to which they would often prefer to take apprentices, who would gain experience in the role, rather than degree graduates without experience.⁷⁰

66 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/early-years-qualifications-finder>

67 National College for Teaching and Leadership (2013), Early Years Educator (Level 3): Qualifications Criteria.

68 Department for Education (2017), Awards of NVQs/SVQs,VRQs and QCF by Gender, Level, Age, Sector Subject Area and Geography. Numbers rounded to nearest 1,000.

69 Apprenticeships by Framework & Pathway, Level and Age: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523257/apprenticeships-starts-by-framework-pathway-level-and-age.xls. Data for the Children and Young People's Social Care and Residential Childcare pathways has been excluded as being out of scope; data for the Children and Young People's Workforce (England) and Early Learning and Childcare pathways has been excluded as there were no apprenticeship starts.

70 Focus group participants

Motivations for Enrolling

Motivations for enrolling on the childcare course vary. According to a number of individuals, working with children has been a long-term aspiration: *'I've always liked working with children. I wanted to do this course and I was passionate to get into this course and work with children.'* A small number of individuals also suggested that previous experience looking after family members influenced their decision to take this course: *'I've got older siblings and they've all got kids and I babysit them all the time, it's kind of a natural thing... I just like working and being around kids'*. A minority of learners indicated that they were not directly motivated by a desire to work in early years, but were motivated instead by circumstantial factors such as meeting the entry requirements and/or not knowing what other career path to follow.

The structure of the course was also felt to be important; students were specifically attracted to courses which offered elective work experience modules, as well as emphasis on practical learning rather than examinations. At one focus group, the majority of focus group participants agreed that the presentations at the open day presented the course in a very positive light and had also influenced their decision to apply for this particular college.⁷¹

Overcoming Barriers

Across the further education sector as a whole, the majority of early years learners are studying for Level 3 qualifications; however, the majority of academic research papers focusing on early years learners focus on the relatively small cohort of learners studying for a foundation (Level 5) or Bachelor's degree (Level 6). This means that the evidence summarised below may not apply to the broader population of early years learners.

According to one recent academic study, mature students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds⁷² often face additional barriers in terms of accessing and preparing for an early years foundation degree.⁷³

A series of case studies drawn from the admission interviews indicates that these students do not typically come with the 'cultural capital' to understand the various structures involved in studying for a foundation degree (funding, coursework, etc.) and that they may need additional pastoral support to overcome emotional barriers around perceptions of their suitability for degree-level study.⁷⁴ A further research article suggests that the majority of non-traditional learners studying for early years degree courses in further education colleges are mature women, who often balance studying with work and family commitments.⁷⁵

Despite the potential barriers to degree-level study for early years students from non-traditional backgrounds, the evidence presented in these studies demonstrates the high potential for these students to successfully pursue an early years foundation degree; to develop their academic and social confidence when studying within a well-supported college environment; and to integrate family, work and academic responsibilities. Earlier research also points towards the benefits of offering higher education qualifications in further education colleges for early years learners from non-traditional backgrounds, who may not otherwise feel able to access this level of qualification.⁷⁶ In addition to impact at individual level, research evidence highlights the positive impact of mature students studying for early years qualification on community cohesion and educational attainment of the pre-school children in their care.⁷⁷

They [people] don't understand how in depth and how demanding it is because our course is one of the most demanding at this college.

EARLY YEARS LEARNER 

⁷⁰ Focus group participants

⁷¹ Focus group participants

⁷² The term 'non-traditional' students is used in the study referred to here to identify mature students over the age of 21 from a socioeconomic group that is under-represented in academia; the term is also widely used across the higher education sector.

⁷³ Webber, L. (2014), Accessing HE for Non-Traditional Students: 'Outside of My Position', Research in Post-Compulsory Education 19:1.

⁷⁴ Webber, L. (2014), Accessing HE for Non-Traditional Students: 'Outside of My Position', Research in Post-Compulsory Education 19:1.

⁷⁵ Wright, H. R. (2013), In Search of Stability: Women Studying Childcare in an English Further Education College, Journal of Further and Higher Education 37:1.

⁷⁶ See, for example, M. O'Hara and R. Bingham (2004), Widening Participation on Early Childhood Studies and Early Years Education Degrees, Journal of Further and Higher Education 28:2.

⁷⁷ Wright, H. (2014), Education And Community Cohesion: How Training In Childcare Adds Benefit, Journal Plus Education 11:2.

Learner Experience

Learner Expectations

Evidence from focus groups suggests that there is a significant gap between young people's initial expectations of the course and their experience as learners once they started the course; an emergent theme is how learners did not anticipate the comprehensive demands of the course.

The majority of focus group participants felt that they had underestimated the workload and rigour involved in the course: *'I thought it was going to be hard, but not this hard.'* Young people also felt that this reflects assumptions within the wider public: *'they [people] don't understand how in depth and how demanding it is because our course is one of the most demanding at this college.'*

A high proportion of young people expected the course would focus primarily on practical work and placements in settings and had not anticipated that the course would include theory, examinations and a number of assignments. One individual stated that: *'I thought the course would be a lot more fun. I know we have a lot of banter and we get to go to setting, but I thought it would be a bit more active.'*

In terms of career prospects, individual learners feel that their expectations for how the course would prepare them for employment would be sufficiently met: *'When I was applying, I heard people went straight out and into jobs. And when I've been doing placements, people have said 'let us know when you're finished' so I know I can go and work for them.'*⁷⁸

Teaching Content and Quality

Preferences for teaching style and course content vary; however, the majority of students report that a tutor's teaching style is crucial to having a positive experience on the course. Another common theme is that blended learning is felt to be very productive and is highly favoured by learners.

[The tutors] link everything to placement, so they teach it and then we experience it at the same time so it helps you learn more.

EARLY YEARS LEARNER 

Many students report that they enjoy interactive pedagogical styles including posters, social media and discussions.⁷⁹ Evidence from focus groups points towards examples of best practice within specific early years course delivery, for example, students from one focus group reported that they found it highly engaging to take part in a workshop in social media and online research as part of their early years course.

A large number of individuals also felt that the opportunity to undertake work placements works well, and that integrating class based learning with their work in settings is extremely beneficial: *'[The tutors] link everything to placement, so they teach it and then we experience it at the same time so it helps you learn more.'* Individuals from one focus group commented on the importance of different tutors bringing their own knowledge and experience of working in settings to class. Individuals from this focus group also highlighted the importance of having a supportive tutor: *'[the tutor] will go to the end of the earth to help you. She'll put in more hours.'*⁸⁰

Areas for Improvement

Across the sector as a whole, developing the digital skills to deliver interactive lessons remains a key area in which further education tutors require additional training.⁸¹ Participants at one of the validation workshops felt that colleges view technology as less of a resource priority for early years in comparison to other vocational areas. Tutors also expressed concern that online coursework could be challenging for some learners, particularly for mature students who may lack access to technology at home.⁸²

There appears to be a high consensus among focus group participants that undertaking placements or working in settings greatly complements their learning in college. Learners also have a preference for interactive and blended learning. In general, areas for development tend to focus on facilitating these kinds of learning, as well as improving methods of examination and assessment.

Learners felt that the current system places too much emphasis on examinations and assignments and would be keen to see placement work integrated into assessments: *'we're all practical learners here so we prefer, when we're writing our work we like to refer back to practice.'*

78 Focus group participants

79 Focus group participants

80 Focus group participants

81 LSIS (2010), Brilliant Teaching and Training in FE and Skills.

82 Validation workshops.

Learners from one college report recent improvements in timetabling work placements and found the new schedule working two days a week in a setting rather than every other week more beneficial. This suggests that both increasing integrated learning as well as consistency in different forms of learning is another potential area for development.⁸³

Tutors at one of the validation workshops agreed that integrating more practical sessions into early years courses would be preferable; however, they noted that even in colleges that have a practical resources room for interactive learning, it is not always used effectively because of tutors' confidence and/or timetabling issues: *'sometimes we'd be having theory lessons in the early years practical room, yet you'll have someone on a different room trying to do creative arts and crafts'*.⁸⁴

There was a mixed response from tutors at the validation workshops to the idea of increasing the level of practical assessment included within current qualifications. Participants at one workshop felt that awarding bodies do not attach sufficient value to the practical elements of early years courses, as the UCAS points system is weighted towards academic achievements. Tutors at the workshop suggested including more grades in addition to Pass for practical elements, such as Merit and Distinction, as this would reflect student achievements better and motivate them to increase their performance in placements. There was a broad consensus that the learners benefited from gaining a thorough knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of practice, however, this was seen to be essential for the continued professionalisation of the sector, as well as ensuring that learners that wanted to undertake higher level qualifications were adequately prepared. One tutor also noted that it was important to tread carefully before revising assessment methods because *'one assessment might work for one set of students but not for another'*. In general, tutors also felt that the Level 3 qualifications have undergone significant changes in recent years, and that time was needed to assess their efficacy and impact.⁸⁵

Many focus group participants also commented on time constraints and mounting deadlines around examinations. Areas for improvement mentioned by these individuals include increasing preparation time for exam papers and assignments, as well as spreading the work load across the course of the year. A few respondents mentioned issues with the assessment process in their college, such as with the timing of assessments - one student, for example, said that the high caseload of assessors in her college meant that there were large differences in the times at which students graduate: *'some of us could be done by April, but some of us can't because we haven't been assessed.'* Other learners said that limited contact with assessors made the assessment process unrealistic and disruptive to lessons; they suggested that it would be helpful if supervisor's feedback could be incorporated in the assessment process.

She'll display work and she'll have a bit of banter and it will help us remember it more because we'll remember the lesson. If it's just straight talking, we'll probably forget it.

EARLY YEARS LEARNER

A number of learners discussed how their tutors in college had failed to establish a bond or good rapport with the classes. Good tutors were described as those who gave engaging classes: *'She'll display work and she'll have a bit of banter and it will help us remember it more because we'll remember the lesson. If it's just straight talking, we'll probably forget it'*. Students in one focus group said that they had failed to engage with their tutor in college who taught with Powerpoint presentations and lectures; they preferred teaching that included a strong practical focus and interactive tasks.⁸⁶

83 Focus group participants

84 Validation workshops.

85 Validation workshops.

86 Focus group participants

Preparation for the Workplace

Future Plans

Most participants at the focus groups said they wanted to continue working in early years after their current course; and the majority wanted to engage with further study. The nature of this further study depended on individual circumstances, although there appears to be a high amount of interest in university study. Some individuals had already expressed interest in pursuing Level 4 and Level 5 foundation degrees whilst working part time in a nursery. Some participants, who had already acquired undergraduate degrees, said that they hoped to gain Masters or PhD qualifications relevant to Early Years. In two of the five focus groups, individuals expressed an interest in doing specialised courses on Autism and SEND education.⁸⁷

Preparation for the Workplace

Focus groups participants were largely positive about the extent to which their courses prepared them for work in the early years workforce. In particular, there was a large degree of praise for the value of placements, as a tool for putting concepts learned on courses into practice, and for developing employability skills. While this was not unanimous - a few participants said that they were not given enough responsibility in their placement or that the working culture of the placement was stressful - most participants recognised the experience as valuable for gaining future employment.

A few participants mentioned that the placement had increased their confidence; one participant said that this would help with future job interviews: *'When I first started my placement I was a bit shy and now I'm like a child myself.... if I went for an interview now I wouldn't hold back anything'*.

When I first started my placement I was a bit shy and now I'm like a child myself.... if I went for an interview now I wouldn't hold back anything.

EARLY YEARS LEARNER 

Tutors were praised by focus group participants for their advice on career decisions and practical skills such as writing CVs and applications. The participants in one focus group said that they found their tutors one-to-ones particularly helpful, in which the tutor identified the career aspirations of trainees and helped trainees to identify the steps they would need to take to achieve these goals.

Other positive comments about tutors included the fact that they continued to practice while delivering the course, and maintained in touch with best practice; that they were 'passionate' about early years; and that they continued to learn themselves, for example by taking Masters qualifications.⁸⁸

Areas for Improvement

Comments about what could be improved had a strong emphasis on the practical aspects of learning; consistent with the positive experience participants described about placements. Learners felt that their tutors could incorporate more practical skills into college work; for example, by allowing students to practise specific skills - such as making bottles, changing nappies or creating a 'story sacks' - within the classroom. Learners also suggested that they had found role models very helpful throughout their placements, and they would welcome this if it were a formal aspect of courses: tutors could *'introduce us to people who have already been through that process. Get someone to come in and explain how they got through it, what they've done to get to where they are'*. Tutors attending validation workshops agreed that visits from role models are motivating and informative for students as well as staff, but that increasing safeguarding and security checks were making it more difficult to organise. Tutors also suggested that encouraging students to give presentations on their experience on placements may help facilitate practical learning.⁸⁹

In one focus group, a few participants were doubtful of the extent to which courses aimed at achieving Early Years Teacher status would prepare them to teach. The participants said their placements had given them limited teaching experience, as they had served as classroom assistants rather than delivering lessons. Participants added that, since the course did not provide Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), they would struggle to gain employment in schools as early years teachers. Although they could apply for work as teachers in academies, they would have to compete with job applicants who had QTS. While an extension course exists to gain QTS, participants felt that it was too expensive, and said that they would prefer to do a combined course that would provide QTS.⁹⁰

87 Focus group participants

88 Focus group participants

89 Validation workshops

90 Focus group participants

3.4 Key Findings

Early Years Tutors

Qualitative evidence indicates that early years tutors typically possess both subject-specific and teaching qualifications at Level 3 or above; a high proportion of early years tutors report holding or working towards a degree or Master's level qualification in the subject area.

- Tutors who were able to observe students on placement and/or take CPD days in an early years setting felt that this experience helped to keep their workplace skills up to date.
- Self-directed study online and peer learning with colleagues were identified as the most common approaches to professional development amongst early years tutors. These approaches were favoured because of the low-cost and flexibility that they offered.
- A high proportion of early years tutors were keen to attend local, in-person training courses; tutors were particularly keen to have access to the same training courses as early years practitioners, for example, courses run by the local authority and similar institutions.
- Early years tutors working in ITPs are more likely to have access to funding and time allowances to pursue formal professional development training, for example, attending CPD courses and events.
- Key subject gaps for professional development and training include keeping up to date with the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and other relevant policy; learning more about recent research in child development and psychology; and developing greater awareness of how to support children with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Early years tutors identified a number of areas in which they would benefit from professional development training specific to maths and English. With respect to subject knowledge, tutors were keen to improve their own knowledge and understanding of emerging numeracy and literacy amongst pre-school aged children. With respect to skills development, tutors felt that they would like to see more targeted resources to help them embed literacy and numeracy skills more effectively within early years qualifications for the benefit of learners that experienced significant challenges with maths and English.

- Early years tutors living in rural areas experienced greater barriers to accessing in-person training because the time and costs associated with travelling to courses and events was more likely to be prohibitive.
- Early years tutors were keen to see the development of an online resources database that would be dedicated to early years subject and training resources specific to their needs, together with an online forum to share best practice. Raising awareness of existing portals for the early years sector as a whole may help to meet this perceived gap in resources.
- There was a strong interest amongst early years tutors in establishing regional hubs to facilitate in-person networking and collaborative learning for peers working in the same geographic area.
- Early years tutors were keen for current level 3 qualifications to remain unchanged in order to recent revisions to qualifications to become fully embedded.

Early Years Learners

- Learners felt that the skills they were developing in their current courses would prepare them well for employment or higher education; many learners also expressed an interest in studying further towards advanced early years qualifications. Early years learners interested in working in schools expressed concern that current advanced qualifications do not provide them with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).
- Learners place a high value on an integrated approach to learning across classroom teaching and placements in early years setting with more time spent on practical and interactive learning activities.
- Learners were also keen to see greater weight given to practical skills within course assessments; however, tutors felt that the balance between practical and theoretical assessments should be maintained at its current level to support the drive towards greater professionalisation of the workforce.
- Learners often receive additional support from their early years tutors, including practical advice in writing job applications and developing their CVs to help them progress into employment when they finish their courses.

3.5 Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Collecting data about further education tutors at a subject level would allow more detailed analysis of the qualification levels of early years tutors (and other subject areas) in future research. Subject-specific data may also be considered for early years learners (and other subject areas) as well.

Recommendation 2

There is an identified need for the development of an online portal with subject-specific resources, training materials and an interactive forum to support the professional development of early years tutors.

Recommendation 3

Regional hubs for early years tutors, such as the Professional Exchange hubs, should be established and/or expanded to facilitate in-person networking and collaborative learning practices amongst tutors working in the same geographic area. Offering subsidies to cover participation costs is likely to improve attendance and commitment among tutors.

Recommendation 4

Early years tutors would benefit from regular and formal access to CPD days within early years settings in order to stay up to date with current practices in the workplace. Further policy advocacy and/or practical support is needed to take this recommendation forwards.

Recommendation 5

Early years tutors may benefit from training resources that encourage interactive teaching practices: for example, utilising social media or inviting role models from the early years sector to deliver presentations.

Recommendation 6

Revising the current grading system for practical assessments from Pass/Fail to include Merit and Distinction may better meet learner needs and allow them to demonstrate ability in the practical elements of their qualifications.

4. PART II – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY YEARS

4.1 Background Context

The Early Years Workforce

Workforce Demographics

In 2016, there was just over 450,000 early years practitioners working in England, of which approximately 270,000 held roles in groups-based settings (nurseries, preschools and wraparound care for school aged children) with a further 50,000 early years practitioners working in nurseries in school-based settings and 50,000 working as childminders.⁹¹ Compared to 2008, these figures represent a decline in the total childcare workforce.⁹²

The majority of early years practitioners are female staff aged 25-50. The age profile of childminders and school-based nursery staff tends to be marginally older than that of nursery and preschool staff working in group-based settings. The proportion of BME staff varies according to region, for example, London has a much higher proportion of BME early years practitioners (38%) compared to the national average across all types of setting (ranging from 9% to 17%). The proportion of EY practitioners with a disability remained consistent at 1-2% of the early years workforce.⁹³ These figures do not appear to include all early years practitioners with additional needs across the SEND spectrum.

Qualification Levels

Among early years practitioners in group-based settings (including non-school based nurseries), 79% hold a Level 3 qualification and 10% hold a Level 6 qualification. In comparison, 77% of the early years practitioners working in school-based nurseries hold a Level 3 qualification or above, and 29% hold a Level 6 qualification or above.⁹⁴ The minimum requirement for qualified early years practitioners is Level 2; however, in practice, many settings prefer to recruit practitioners with qualifications at Level 3 or above.⁹⁵ Since 2014, early years qualifications at Level 3 or above are required to meet the Early Years Educator (EYE) criteria. These criteria cover children's early education and development, effective practice for educators, safeguarding and welfare, and collaborative working.⁹⁶

91 Department for Education (2017), Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers, England, 2016: Main Report. Figures rounded to the nearest 10,000.

92 Simon, A. et. al. (2015), Provision and Use of Preschool Childcare in Britain, Institute of Education.

93 Department for Education (2014), Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2013: Main Report.

94 Department for Education (2017), Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2016: Tables SFR09/2017.

95 <http://www.earlyyearsprofessions.com/eyc/qualifications-and-training/childcare-qualifications-needed-to-work-in-childcare/>

96 National College for Teaching and Leadership (2013), Early Years Educator (Level 3): Qualifications Criteria.

Recruitment and Retention

Evidence across a number of studies⁹⁷ indicates that many early years practitioners are keen to remain in the sector, with opportunities for professional development identified as one of the range of strategies to strengthen recruitment and retention rates.⁹⁸ However, low pay and lack of opportunities for progression present ongoing challenges for recruitment and retention across the sector.⁹⁹

Occupational Standards

There are professional criteria and standards that cover early years practitioners. These include the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which sets out the statutory framework that all early years providers must follow, including staff ratio requirements and qualifications;¹⁰⁰ the Teachers' Standards (Early Years), which must be met by students to achieve Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) at Level 6;¹⁰¹ and the Level 3 Early Years Educator (EYE), which sets out criteria for the minimum knowledge, understanding and skills content for Level 3 early years qualifications.¹⁰² Criteria for Level 2 early years qualifications are currently in development, as are standards for apprenticeships in early years.¹⁰³ The professional standards most commonly referred to by interviewees working within the sector were the EYFS; according to one interviewee, standards set out in the National Occupancy Standards (NOS) are now perceived as out-of-date for the sector.¹⁰⁴

Statutory Requirements

Statutory requirements set out in the EYFS that refer to the qualifications and training of early years practitioners include that half of staff working with children in an early years setting must hold a Level 2 qualification, with at least one manager holding a Level 3 qualification. EYFS requirements also specify that early years settings must support practitioners to undertake relevant training and professional development opportunities to include up-to-date training on safeguarding and child protection, health and safety, paediatric first aid, and food hygiene and the administration of medicine.¹⁰⁵

4.2 Early Years Practitioners

Access to Training

A high proportion of early years practitioners undertake up to a week of professional development annually.¹⁰⁶ Activities may include taking part in training courses, attending workshops, reading relevant publications, and engaging with peer support networks. The main providers of formal professional development training for early years practitioners include local authorities, private training providers, and charities or professional bodies.

Evidence from the literature review points towards significant changes in the training opportunities that early years practitioners are accessing. NDNA workforce data, for example, charts a rise in online and in-house modes of training paid for by early years settings and/or practitioners, in comparison to the traditional model of face-to-face training funded and delivered by local authorities.¹⁰⁷ Interviewees had mixed reactions to the impact of recent changes in the training landscape. While some interviewees felt that the scaling back of local authority support has led to a greater choice of different providers and modes of provision, other interviewees noted that it has become much harder to assess the quality of training available; as one interviewee observed: *'we've got no way of knowing if [the training] is good, bad or indifferent'*.¹⁰⁸

Recent developments have also highlighted differences in the preferred approach to training across early years managers and practitioners. As one interviewee explained, while managers tend to prefer *'shorter, more intensive training programmes like webinars, online bitesize things... [practitioners] prefer to go on full day or multi day courses'*. There were also differing perspectives on the value and quality of in-house training; some interviewees felt that in-house training lacked the rigour of external training provided by local authorities and professional bodies, while interviewees working in early years settings emphasised that delivering in-house training helped them to tailor training to individual needs and ensure consistency in practitioners' knowledge and understanding of early years practice.¹⁰⁹

97 PACEY (2017), Building Blocks 2017: A Report on the State of the Childcare and Early Years Sector in England; and Cooke, G. and K. Lawton (2008),

For Love or Money: Pay, Progression and Professionalism in the 'Early Years' Workforce, Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR).

98 Department for Education (2017), Early Years Workforce Strategy.

99 NDNA (2016), Early Years Workforce Survey: England 2016.

100 Department for Education (2017), Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

101 Department for Education (2013), Teachers' Standards' (Early Years).

102 Department for Education (2013), Early Years Educator (Level 3): Qualifications Criteria.

103 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-standards-in-development> 104 Qualitative interviews: Phase I

105 Department for Education (2017), Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

106 See NDNA (2016), Early Years Workforce Survey: England 2016 and PACEY (2017), Building Blocks 2017: A Report on the State of the Childcare and Early Years Sector in England.

107 See, for example, NDNA (2016), Early Years Workforce Survey: England 2016.

108 Part II qualitative interviews. 109 Part II qualitative interviews.

Training Priorities

NDNA workforce data suggests that the key priority areas in which early years practitioners feel that they need further training is SEND and the Education, Health and Care (EHC) process; maths and English do not appear to be a priority training area for EY practitioners.¹¹⁰ Evidence from qualitative interviews indicates that most current training focuses on safeguarding, child protection, health and safety, and first aid with gaps in current training provision identified in outdoors play and learning and language and communication, as well as leadership and management for advanced practitioners.¹¹¹ As one training provider interviewee noted, senior early years practitioners *'rarely have any leadership or management training, so they have to make it up as they go along'*.¹¹²

Training needs also appear to be different depending on the type of early years setting. In contrast to nursery-based practitioners, a priority training area for childminders is business training; childminders also place a high value on membership of professional associations to support their ongoing professional development.¹¹³

Interviewees agreed that childminders have different training needs to nursery-based practitioners; some interviewees proposed that increased opportunities for childminders and nursery practitioners to share good practice would enhance the professional development for both groups. One interviewee noted that a lot of the current training resources focus on group settings, making it less relevant for childminders.¹¹⁴

Interviewees also emphasised the importance of participating in ongoing professional development training, including opportunities to pursue advanced early years qualifications. A high proportion of interviewees felt that practitioners need improved access to information around high quality training to ensure that they receive maximum impact from the investment of time and money; several interviewees were keen for an online platform to be developed with information on training opportunities together with reviews and/or ratings to help practitioners judge quality.¹¹⁵

Training Benefits

Evidence from the literature review indicates a strong correlation between Ofsted-rated outstanding settings and the access to CPD;¹¹⁶ a similar correlation exists between Ofsted-ratings and higher levels of pay.¹¹⁷ As well as improving the quality of care, early years managers reported that further reasons for investing in CPD include ensuring that practitioners are up to date with current policy and research; encouraging reflective practice; providing opportunities for learning from and sharing best practice; and improving staff retention. Early years managers typically use supervision and appraisals, self-evaluation processes and Ofsted recommendations to help identify training needs for practitioners and the setting as a whole.¹¹⁸

110 NDNA (2016), Early Years Workforce Survey: England 2016.

111 Evidence drawn from Part II qualitative interviews. Feedback from client indicates that leadership and management training is typically pursued through generic rather than sector-specific training (Email 21/12).

112 Part II qualitative interviews.

113 National Centre for Social Research (2014), Study of Early Education and Development: Views and Experiences of Childminders.

114 Part II qualitative interviews.

115 Part II qualitative interviews.

116 PACEY (2017), Building Blocks 2017: A Report on the State of the Childcare and Early Years Sector in England.

117 Maughan, C. et. al. (2016), In for a Pound: The Relationship Between Staff Wages and Ofsted Grades in Group-Based Childcare Provision, Family and Childcare Trust (FCT).

118 National Centre for Social Research (2017), Study of Early Education and Development: Good Practice in Early Education, Department of Education.

Barriers to Training

Cost and time are consistently identified by early years managers and practitioners as the main barrier to engaging with training and professional development opportunities.¹¹⁹ The current situation is further exacerbated by recent changes to funding for Level 2 and 3 qualifications, according to interviewees.¹²⁰ Enthusiasm for professional development training remains high, however. PACEY survey findings indicate that early years practitioners would be keen to spend more time on CPD if there were more affordable and subsidised training opportunities.¹²¹

For early years managers, the need to meet requirements on the national minimum wage and 30 hours childcare has placed further constraints on the budget for professional development training.¹²²

As one interviewee explained, the financial costs meeting current policy initiatives has 'stalled a lot of training opportunities'. A further, unintended impact of smaller training budget in early years settings is the rising number of practitioners who are funding their own training.¹²³

Strategies for cost-effective training increasingly adopted by early years managers include online training courses; internal training and development delivered by early years managers and specialist practitioners; learning through experience and peer observation; sharing learning from formal training courses with other practitioners within the early years setting; and in some cases, supporting practitioners to pursue qualifications at local colleges.¹²⁴ One of the biggest challenges in terms of delivering training focuses on the choice between covering the cost of training during working hours versus expecting practitioners to stay after hours to take part in evening training sessions.¹²⁵

Improving the Training Landscape

Interviewees identified a number of recommendations to improve access to high quality training and professional development opportunities. These include:¹²⁶

- Increased funding earmarked for training and professional development.
- Access to an online platform to share information on training opportunities, including rating the quality of training provisions.
- A clear workforce strategy mapping out '*what the pathway strategies are to achieve progression*' and '*the qualifications and training you need*', according to one interviewee.
- Greater professionalisation of the workforce, including enhanced pay and progression opportunities supported by high quality professional development training routes.
- Improving perception of the critical importance of early years education and the value of investing in early years practitioners.
- Diversifying access to training. Examples include scheduling training on weekends and evenings, using peer to peer support, and ensuring that information is downloadable and free to access.

There is also evidence that individuals and organisations within the sector are already developing new tools to support training and development needs. One training provider, for example, has designed an online portal (SMARTpd by the Pre-School Learning Alliance)¹²⁷ to provide free consultation according to the individual needs and budget. The interviewee stated that there is '*no point putting out loads of provision that people couldn't afford to run, they know what they need so let's ask them*'.

A high proportion of interviewees also felt that the government needed to take a more active role to improve the training landscape through a more balanced approach to policy development, as well as monitoring the quality of training providers and courses, for example, setting up a body to accredit training courses. Interviewees also felt that it would be beneficial for the government to set up an advisory group with experts from across the early years sector to inform future policy development; some interviewees felt that the evidence base for recent policy innovations was not as strong as it could be.¹²⁸

119 See, for example, Department for Education (2017), *Early Years Workforce Strategy*.

120 Part II qualitative interviews.

121 PACEY (2017), *Building Blocks 2017: A Report on the State of the Childcare and Early Years Sector in England*.

122 NDNA (2016), *Early Years Workforce Survey: England 2016*.

123 Part II qualitative interviews.

124 National Centre for Social Research (2017), *Study of Early Education and Development: Good Practice in Early Education*, Department of Education.

125 Part II qualitative interviews.

126 Part II qualitative interviews.

127 Permission was obtained from the interviewee to cite the name of the portal in the report.

128 Part II qualitative interviews.

4.3 Key Findings

- A high proportion of the early years workforce are female practitioners aged between 25 and 50. Over three quarters of early years practitioners hold a Level 3 qualification in childcare or a related subject.
- Low pay and lack of progression opportunities are having an impact on recruitment and retention across the sector. There is also a need to target underrepresented groups in the sector, specifically male practitioners and individuals from black and ethnic minority backgrounds.
- The principal occupational standards used within the sector are the EYFS. The EYFS sets out statutory requirements for all practitioners working with preschool children; this includes an expectation that practitioners take part in ongoing professional development.
- Early years practitioners are keen to participate in professional development training, as well as taking advanced qualifications, to improve their practice. Time and cost remain the principal barriers for both early years practitioners and their employers to fund further training.
- Early years managers are increasingly turning towards in-house professional development opportunities to meet the needs of their staff. Online training courses are also growing in popularity amongst early years practitioners, although some voices within the sector have raised concerns about the quality and rigour of both online and in-house training.
- Key priority areas in which further training could be developed include SEND; the Education, Health and Care (EHC) process; leadership and management; outdoors learning and play; and language and communication.
- Experts across the sector also raised concerns that the current policy landscape has had a detrimental impact on opportunities for practitioners to pursue professional development training. Suggestions included increased levels of funding earmarked for training, as well as a review of the indirect impact of current policy, such as financial implications for early years setting of the 30 hours childcare scheme.
- Recent expansion of training available from a wide range of different providers within the sector has led some experts to call for clearer guidelines to ensure that practitioners access high quality training opportunities; a common recommendation was to establish an online platform to share information on training opportunities, including rating the quality of training provision.

4.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations would further strengthen the early years sector, especially when considered in combination with the recommendations for Part I opposite.

Recommendation 1

The development of an online training portal, or further expansion and marketing of existing resources, would provide a database of professional development training courses and other opportunities; the ability to add ratings and/or reviews would further strengthen the proposed portal.

Recommendation 1

Early years practitioners would benefit from greater access to guidance on relevant training to pursue professional pathways from initial training through to senior and/or managerial positions within early years settings.

Recommendation 3

Experts within the sector have emphasised the need for more effective policy advocacy, in particular, earmarked funding for professional development training.

Recommendation 4

Training priorities for early years practitioners indicate that core areas for further training opportunities include SEND; the EHC process; leadership and management; outdoors learning and play; and language and communication.

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