

---

# BREAKING POINT

---

The impact of recruitment and  
retention challenges on the early years  
sector in England

# CONTENTS

Background	3
Methodology	4
Key findings	5
Survey results	6
Conclusion and recommendations	28
Appendix: full results	32

# BACKGROUND

It is by now well-established that the first five years of a child's life play a pivotal role in their long-term learning, development and life chances – and yet, many working in the early years sector in England argue that the professionals delivering this vital care and education are, and have for many years been, underpaid, undervalued and overworked.

A 2020 report by the Social Mobility Commission ([The stability of the early years workforce in England](#), August 2020) found that the average hourly wage across the early years workforce in England – which is 96% female – is just £7.42 per hour, compared to an average pay across the female workforce of £11.37.

A 2019 investigation by *Nursery World* magazine ([Childcare practitioners 'living in poverty'](#), September 2019) found that 14% of those working in the early years sector were living in relative poverty (defined as households earning an income of less than 60% of the UK average, which was £17,640 a year at the time of the investigation). Similarly, research into the early years workforce published by the Education Policy Institute in 2019 ([The early years workforce in England](#), January 2019) found that, at the time, 45% of those working in the sector claimed state benefits or tax credits.

Mental health and wellbeing in the sector also remains a significant concern, particularly in light of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. An Early Years Alliance survey of early educators carried out in January 2021 found that 80% of respondents had felt stressed about work because of an issue relating to the Covid-19 pandemic 'somewhat often' or 'very often' over the previous month. In addition, 72% had experienced fatigue/tiredness related to the impact of the pandemic on their early years role over the previous month, while 70% had experienced anxiety and 59% had experienced insomnia.

With growing anecdotal evidence of severe recruitment difficulties and recent studies estimating that turnover rates for the early years workforce are between 11% and 15% ([The stability of the early years workforce in England](#), August 2020), it is clear that the sector is reaching a crisis point.

This report seeks to examine the impact of current staffing challenges on the early years sector in England, and the effect they are likely to have on providers' ability to deliver quality care and education in the months and years ahead.

# METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted online from 21 October to 5 November 2021, and received 1,395 responses.

As the focus of the survey was on recruitment and retention, respondents mostly comprised of nurseries (43%) and pre-schools (48%), with only a small number of childminders (3%). Other respondents included maintained nursery schools (1%), out-of-hours clubs (2%), children's centres (1%) and specialist early years providers (1%).

The majority of respondents were managers (43%), owner/managers (18%) or owners only (10%), with a small number of deputy managers (6%), administrators (5%), Level 3 practitioners (4%), Level 6 practitioners (3%) and room leaders, Level 4/5 practitioners and Level 2 practitioners (all 1%).

Around a quarter (24%) of survey respondents operate more than one setting. In relevant questions, such providers were asked to base their responses on all of their settings, where appropriate. Where needed (for example, when asked how often settings had temporarily closed over the previous six months), those respondents were asked to base their responses on the average number of occurrences across their settings.

For ease and clarity, the word 'setting' has been used throughout this report to refer to both individual settings for single-site providers and multiple settings for multi-site providers.

# KEY FINDINGS

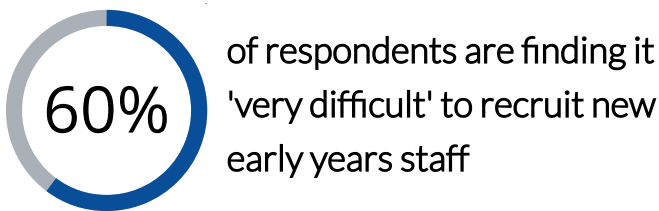
- **84%** of respondents are finding it difficult to recruit suitable new early years staff, with **60%** finding it 'very difficult'. The reasons mostly commonly cited by these respondents were: a lack of applicants for roles (**87%**), applicants lacking full and relevant early years qualifications (**70%**) and an inability to meet the salary demands of applicants (**52%**).
- **62%** of respondents say they are aware of staff who have left their setting in the past six months who have left the early years sector completely.
- **49%** of respondents say they have had to use bank or agency staff over the previous six months.
- **21%** of respondents have had to reduce or otherwise restrict opening hours as a result of lack of adequate staff over the previous six months.
- **49%** of respondents have had to limit or stop taking on new children due to a lack of sufficient staff over the previous six months.
- **61%** of respondents who had experienced staffing shortages over the previous six months say that it has had a negative impact on quality.
- **46%** of respondents feel pessimistic about having sufficient staff in 12 months' time.
- **34%** of respondents think that it's likely that a lack of adequate staff will result in their setting or rooms in their setting being forced to close temporarily over the next 12 months.
- **16%** of respondents think that it's likely that a lack of adequate staff will result in their setting being forced to close permanently over the next 12 months.
- **35%** of respondents are actively considering leaving the early years sector, with **3%** having already confirmed that they are leaving and **1%** having already left. The most commonly cited reasons were: feeling undervalued by government (**77%**), job-related stress (**72%**) and poor pay (**57%**).
- **66%** of those actively considering leaving the sector say that their experience of working in the sector during the pandemic has increased the likelihood of them leaving.

# SURVEY RESULTS

## RECRUITMENT

An inability to find and attract suitable candidates for vacant roles is clearly an urgent and pressing challenge for early years providers, with **60%** of respondents saying that they are finding it 'very difficult' to recruit suitable new early years staff and a further **24%** describing recruitment as 'quite difficult'.

Nearly two-thirds (**63%**) of respondents stated they are currently recruiting for roles, with **2.2** positions currently vacant on average per setting.



The vast majority (**87%**) of those currently struggling to recruit cited a lack of applicants as a reason for this. One respondent said: “[We’ve] been advertising for months now [but] very, very few people are applying ... We continue to advertise and continue to have no applicants.” Another stated: “We have advertised twice in one year and only received three application forms in total.”



“We have had an advert on Indeed and Facebook, and ... put a recruitment banner up on our railings, and we have had two applicants in three months.”

A number of providers highlighted that the lack of interest in roles is a much greater challenge now than it has been in previous years. One said that “in comparison to 10 years ago”, the number of applicants applying in response to adverts has “significantly declined”. Another commented: “The situation is getting worse, not better.”

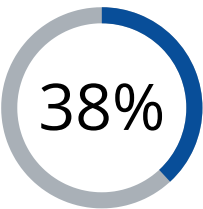
Many respondents based in rural areas also pointed out the additional challenges they face in attracting staff, given the extra and often challenging travel required of those interested in working at the setting. One commented: “There is no public transport to our setting as we are located in a rural area”. Another said: “In



“Why would anyone go into the early years sector? The pay is poor, the terms and conditions of employment are poor, the prospect of increased pay is unlikely, the demands placed on people who work in the sector are extremely high and we are treated with a lack of respect.”

a rural location, the challenge of getting to the setting – [with] unreliable taxi services and the timing of buses – for our opening hours is not great.”

Others working in full daycare settings noted the difficulties of attracting new staff with school-aged children of their own because many prefer term-time only roles that match school hours. One said: “We struggle to get qualified staff to do 8am starts and 6pm finishes ... [Applicants] often want school hours, term-time only.” Another said: “As an all-year setting who are open 7.30am-6pm, we are finding it increasingly difficult to find staff who are able to work all year and often find staff are only looking for roles with a 9am-2/3pm day so that they can fit around school hours.”

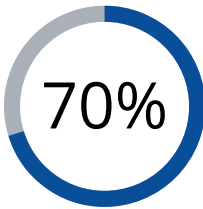


**of respondents struggling to recruit cite an inability to match desired working hours as a barrier**

Alongside the challenge of finding interested applicants, many respondents cited applicants lacking relevant skills or qualifications as a key barrier to recruitment. One respondent said that they regularly have applicants respond to adverts who simply like working with children or have babysitting experience, despite the setting clearly stating the qualification requirements for the vacant roles. Another said: “There is a lack of understanding around early years education ... a lot of applicants will ask why they need qualifications and often state that they are qualified for the role because they are parents or believe that all we do is 'play'.”

Others highlighted that even where an applicant

has a particular qualification, they may still be unsuitable for an early years role if that qualification is not ‘full and relevant’ (i.e. within the DfE-prescribed list of qualifications that enable a staff member to count in adult-child ratios at the relevant level at a setting).



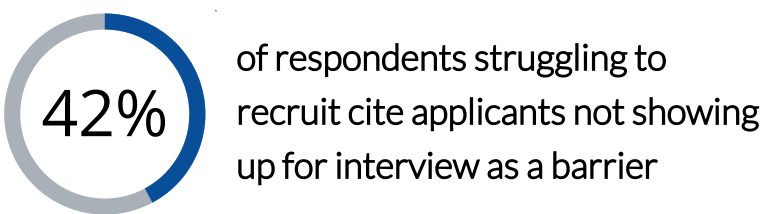
**of respondents struggling to recruit cite applicants lacking full and relevant qualifications as a barrier**

In fact, **70%** of respondents who are struggling to recruit cited applicants lacking full and relevant early years qualifications as a barrier to recruitment. A number of respondents pointed out that in many cases, applicants are unaware that their qualification is not full and relevant. One respondent referred to “experienced applicants with Level 3 qualifications [such as teaching assistant qualifications] discovering they don't meet the early years educator criteria”. Another said: “Qualified applicants are few and far between, and many have what they think is a relevant qualification that they have cheaply completed online, only to be disappointed to find it's not full and relevant.”



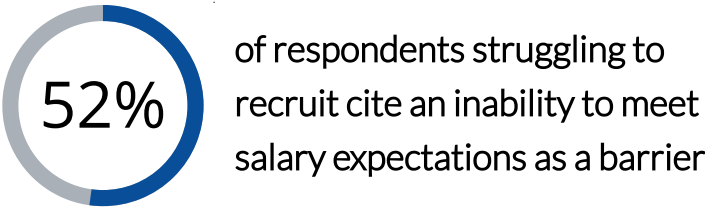
“It doesn’t help that colleges are recommending students take a health and social care qualification telling them it is relevant in early years – and it isn’t!”

Many respondents also noted that in some cases, an applicant may have a full and relevant qualification, but still not demonstrate the right skills for a role. One provider noted that online job sites “encourage candidates who lack employability”, and that even though some may be suitably qualified, “when observed with the children, [they] lack engagement and the desire to be with the children”. Another said: “Even when applicants have a Level 3 qualification, they do not know the EYFS [and cannot] actually fill the job role description.”



A number of respondents also described candidates withdrawing from the application process, or quitting shortly after starting a role, as a relatively common occurrence in the sector. One provider said: “We have had three people pull out of the recruitment process after having expressed a strong interest. We then had someone accept an offer but then pull out a few days before starting.” Another described applicants who “accept the position offered and then decline or do not show up to complete the relevant paperwork”.

Another said: “Even if we were offering a vacancy to an applicant who had agreed on a start date, they would sometimes resign before they started, or a few weeks, if not days, into the job citing too much work or having been offered a better position elsewhere. As a manager of a nursery with 40-70 children, I have been unable to recruit a deputy for the past year for the above reasons. The longest a deputy lasted was two months into the job.”



Being unable to offer the level of salary needed to attract a high calibre of applicant was another common complaint of respondents, with **52% of those finding it difficult to recruit** citing an inability to meet the salary demands of applicants as a reason for this.

“You can earn more working at McDonald’s without all the added paperwork and pressure”

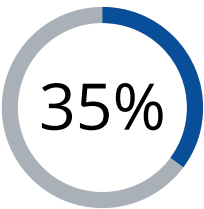
One respondent said: “Budget constraints mean that we cannot offer salaries that attract the desired level of applicant.” Another similarly commented: “The job requirements and responsibility far outweigh the salary we can offer.” *NB: Pay as a driver of staffing shortages is examined in more detail later in this report.*

“Staff we employ have left within a few weeks because they can get paid more elsewhere. We are so desperate that ordinarily these are not candidates we would choose.”



RETENTION

The ability to retain early years staff was also identified as a common challenge across the sector. While some respondents did reference staff leaving to take up roles in other settings, many also highlighted the growing trend of early years professionals opting to leave the sector altogether, with more than six in 10 (62%) respondents saying they are aware of staff from their setting who have left the sector completely in the previous six months.



of respondents are actively considering leaving the early years sector

Notably, over a third of respondents (35%) said that they themselves are actively considering leaving the early years sector, while a further 4% have either already confirmed they are leaving (3%) or already left (1%).

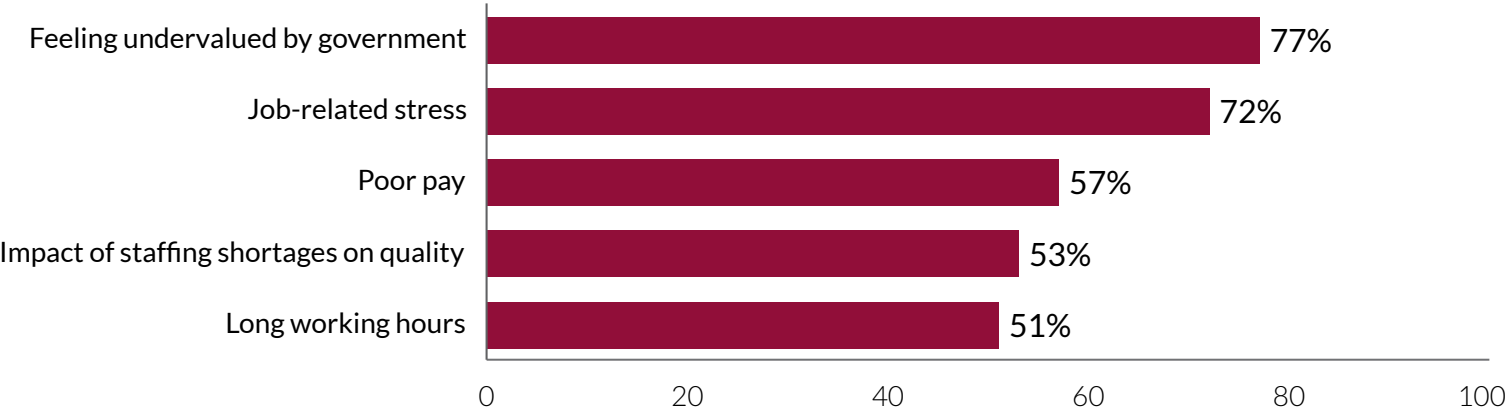
Unsurprisingly for a sector that has been repeatedly singled out by the Low Pay Commission as paying some of the lowest wages of any industry, poor rates of pay in the early years was frequently cited as a reason

why many qualified professionals are leaving the sector, or may do so in the near future.

Several respondents noted that staff could receive higher wages by working in supermarkets, fast food restaurants and other jobs which were generally perceived to have significantly lighter workloads and to be the cause of much less stress. One respondent said: “Most of my long-standing staff are looking to leave the sector due to workload and not enough pay. They would earn more working in McDonald's or Aldi.” Another voiced their fear that staff at their setting would look to “find better paid jobs at Tesco”. One setting manager respondent pointed out that her just-turned 16-year-old son had secured a new job as a waiter at a local stately home that would see him “earning more than all my staff”.

Perhaps surprisingly, however, for the third of respondents who themselves are currently actively considering leaving the sector, poor pay (57%) was not the most commonly-cited reason – feeling undervalued by government (77%) was. One respondent said: “[I] can’t wait to leave the sector. [I’m] fed up of the constant battle to improve the provision which only falls on deaf ears! No support, no care, no future.”

Most common reasons for wanting to leave the early years sector



Another said: “Yes, I am considering leaving the early years sector. The work we do is essential, high energy and highly involved. To work 40 hours a week, to be undervalued, under-respected and underpaid, all to have just enough money to barely survive, just isn't working for me.”



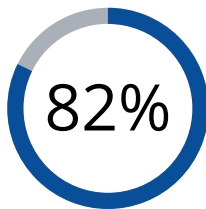
“I am very sad to be considering leaving this sector but I am tired of unrealistic demands and insufficient funding.”

“If I could sell up now, I would. I feel undervalued and am exhausted. We have to beg for any support ... [the government] needs to listen to the sector: it’s on its knees.”

A similarly high proportion (72%) of those respondents considering leaving the early years sector cited job-related stress as their reason for doing so. One stated: “I'm exhausted, running on empty and can't give any more to my work or my family.” Another commented: “Having worked in early years for over 24 years, 16 in my current setting, the stress of the job and lack of support means that I can no longer stay in a job I love.” Another provider simply stated: “[I’m] sorry to have to leave a sector I have worked in for 30 years but it’s not enjoyable anymore.”

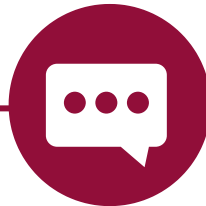
It is clear from the survey results that this widespread dissatisfaction is far more prevalent within the early years

workforce now than it has been in recent years. More than eight in 10 (82%) of respondents aware of staff leaving the sector said they are seeing an increase in the number of staff members choosing to leave the early years sector compared to this time two years ago, with 52% describing this rise as “significant” .



of respondents with staff leaving the sector say this is more common now than two years ago

The experiences of working in the early years sector during the Covid-19 crisis has without a doubt played a significant role in this, with two-thirds (66%) of respondents who are considering leaving the sector saying that their experience of working in the sector during the pandemic has increased the likelihood of them doing so.



“I don’t think I have, or will, recover from those terrible months of turmoil. I am perpetually exhausted and feel utterly unappreciated and unsupported.”

One respondent commented that the pandemic “highlighted all that is problematic in this sector”, while another stated: “Working as a key person has highlighted the importance of our role and it is more intolerable than ever that we are treated so unequally. I have been at my nursery for 29 years and never has it been

more transparent that we are so undervalued.”

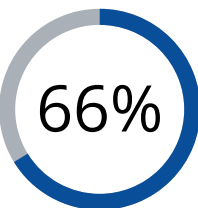
While schools and colleges did not fully reopen until March 2021, early years providers were expected to open to all families from June 2020, including during the 2020/21 winter wave of the pandemic, during which time Covid-related deaths regularly exceeded 1,000 per day.



“The early years sector is to education what the care homes are to the NHS. We were left hung out to dry.”

“January 2021 was a very difficult time and we felt we were battling against the tide.”

Despite the government stating at the time that early years settings were able to remain open in part because “the earliest years are the most crucial point of child development”, many survey respondents felt that there was a distinct and unacceptable lack of recognition on the part of government of the sector’s hard work and dedication throughout the pandemic, at a time when for those in the early years, going to work meant putting their own health, and that of their loved ones, at risk.



of respondents considering leaving the sector say the pandemic has increased the likelihood of them doing so



“Key worker? Never felt more undervalued in my life!”

One respondent said: “I have felt very undervalued in my role, which is difficult for me when I have worked in the sector for 37 years and I have really loved my job. I feel there has been no recognition for the hard work I have put in, particularly during the pandemic when I ensured that the setting remained open and took in children from settings that had closed when we were all facing an unknown.” Another referred to “the complete lack of regard or appreciation from the government that we remained open to high-risk key families ... Despite being frontline, we were offered no protection or reassurance and no compensation for doing so.”

Demonstrating the strength of feeling on the government’s approach during the height of the pandemic, one provider described the sector’s treatment as “disgusting”, saying: “We remained open throughout but this was never appreciated nor valued. Early years was often forgotten, dismissed or an afterthought. We were not adequately funded and were left to struggle alone.” Another stated: “People quite rightly are leaving / have left the sector since the pandemic unfolded. Childcare professionals feel like they don’t matter. Everyone else was told to stay at home – we were told to shut up and get on with it.”

Many respondents highlighted the difference

between the way that schools and early years providers were treated during the pandemic, and the differing levels of support given to the respective education sectors. One said: “We were good enough to provide care for key worker children but not good enough to afford the same level of consideration or protection that schools/teaching staff were given.” Another noted the “lack of clear guidelines from the government” and “the way they dealt with school closures but kept pre-schools open with little or no thought for the staff.”

A number of respondents also pointed specifically to the fact that the early years was often left out of important education-related Covid announcements as an example of the way in which the sector was overlooked and undervalued during the pandemic. A ministerial statement on the impact of Covid-19 on education settings delivered by then-education secretary Gavin Williamson on 6 January 2021 included only a single passing reference to the early years, despite the fact that it was the only part of the education sector expected to remain open to all children at the time.

One provider described feeling “very underappreciated by the government”, noting that “in Covid briefings, early years were an afterthought”. Another said: “I worked throughout the pandemic and felt very undervalued by the government. We in early years were expected to open without thought for how staff were feeling about being exposed to Covid. There was no recognition of what the sector contributed to the pandemic and we were sometimes not even mentioned by the government during their daily/weekly briefings when discussing what was happening in education. We have never been treated as

as professionals and this was just highlighted during the pandemic.”



“Not even being mentioned at briefings except to be told to stay open when all schools were closing was appalling and simply unforgiveable.”

Some respondents argued that this lack of consideration translated into inadequate and last-minute sector guidance. One respondent said: “Each announcement initiated sweeping changes to the way we operated, with guidance and key information often coming last minute or too late. It was a rollercoaster of stress, activity and uncertainty.” Another described the sector as “largely disregarded and then hastily added as an afterthought to the ever-changing guidance documents issued”, stating that “due to this, the advice/guidance did not translate well to our sector”.

Another common criticism among respondents was the lack of practical support provided by the government to early years providers during the pandemic. As explored in the Early Years Alliance report *The Forgotten Sector*, the early years sector was excluded from many government support schemes made available to schools and colleges, such as support with Covid cleaning costs and the costs of additional staff, as well as many support schemes made available to businesses, such as the £25,000 business support grants made available to some retail, hospitality and leisure businesses.

The watering down of the extent to which providers in receipt of government funding could claim support via the Job Retention Scheme three days before the scheme rolled out was also widely criticised by the sector.

One provider said: “The early years sector has been treated appallingly, forced to stay open without the proper support and measures put in place.” Another said: “Early years work has always been hard, but the pandemic and [the] ongoing failure to properly support settings that were already dragging themselves along has turned it from a thankless task to an impossible one.”

A number of respondents also criticised the government’s failure to take the steps needed to support the early years workforce to feel as safe as possible during the height of the pandemic. For example, settings were given no support with the purchasing of personal protective equipment (PPE), and early years providers only received access to lateral flow home testing kits in March 2021 – with childminders forced to wait a week later than nurseries and pre-schools – only a few weeks before twice-weekly home testing became available to the general public.



“We ... feel like we were sent in like lambs to the slaughter. We love what we do but no one should ever feel scared to go to work because they or someone they love may die.”

Some respondents also criticised the decision not to give those working in the early years sector priority access to Covid vaccinations, access which, in contrast, was given to those working in health and social care.

One respondent referred to the “psychological impact on staff who [were] worried about their own health and their families but initially were expected to come to work more or less unprotected”. Another said: “We were the underdogs, fighting for PPE equipment to protect staff and families’ safety whilst staying open to allow NHS staff to bring their children ... It was a constant battle.”



“We are required to care for children who are unable to socially distance, who often cuddle, lick and cough on you. We mix with 40 families a week and were unable to wear PPE.”

Given the lack of practical support and protection given to the sector, particularly at the height of the pandemic, it is unsurprising that many respondents highlighted the additional stress that the Covid crisis has created for professionals already working in a highly-pressured role. One referred to “the extra stress of working without PPE in the beginning of the pandemic ... all the extra stress of additional cleaning ... the huge amount of guidance to get through and make sense of [and the] stress of supporting other staff and families with their stress levels and, on some

occasions, coping with very few staff”. Another commented: “It has always been a position of high responsibility but the pandemic has significantly increased the workload, the stress and expectations”.



“[It was] just too much on top of what was already a challenging and stressful job.”

Many respondents also cited the extra administrative burden created by Covid-19 and the need to keep settings Covid-secure as a key factor in the additional stress created during the pandemic. One respondent commented that the “administrative workload and additional costs to maintain health and safety standards for children and staff alike and the restrictions put in place to prevent Covid-19 incidents” has meant a job that was “once a fun occupation has become an administrative and exhausting nightmare [that is] not worth the low paid hours and stress”. Another said: “The ways in which we needed to work during the pandemic e.g. more frequent, deeper cleaning, changes to the learning environment and daily rotation, cleaning and storing of equipment, have led to a higher and more physically draining workload. [Along with] the shortage of staff, many stresses have combined to create mental and physical overload.”

Other respondents commented that the pandemic has contributed to their desire to leave the sector as it has prompted them to reflect on their priorities in life. One said: “No

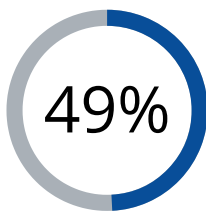
thanks (well, token thanks), no acknowledgement, low pay ... why on earth should we suffer this way? The pandemic has shown more than ever that life is just too short. I can earn more with no responsibility elsewhere.” Another stated: “I have felt that there was/is very little support from the government. A lot of my work was made a lot harder than it needed to be, with little or no support. I now feel that I would like a job with little or no responsibility. The thought of just going to work, doing the job and then going home with no worries appeals to me greatly.”



“I realised that there is more to life than work ...  
[I] enjoyed being at home with little stress and responsibility for other people.”

### IMPACT OF STAFFING SHORTAGES

Unsurprisingly, the significant challenges many providers are facing in both efforts to recruit new staff and retain existing staff, are having a notable impact on the day-to-day provision of early education and care.

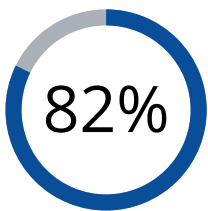


of respondents have had to use bank or agency staff over the past six months

A key concern highlighted by the survey was an increased reliance on temporary staff. Around

half (**49%**) of respondents say they have had to use bank or agency staff over the last six months, with **13%** saying they do so “all the time”. Of those that have used bank or agency staff during this period, nearly three-quarters (**73%**) say that their reliance on temporary workers is higher than two years ago (with **38%** describing their reliance as “significantly higher”). When asked to estimate the highest proportion of bank / agency staff they had had working at their setting at any one time over the past six months as a proportion of total staff numbers, the average response given was **18%**.

However, while the use of bank and agency staff can help in the short term by ensuring that settings are able to maintain staffing levels and adhere to statutory staff-child ratios, the responses to the survey suggest that in the long-term, such reliance can have a markedly negative impact on providers.



of respondents using bank or agency staff say it has had a negative financial impact

The most commonly cited challenge was the high cost of hiring temporary staff. A significant majority (**82%**) of those settings who said that they have used bank and/or agency staff over the past six months said that this has had a negative impact on their finances, with **49%** describing this as “significantly negative”.

A number of respondents stated that wages for agency workers can be twice as much the rate for a permanent member of staff. One respondent stated that their setting’s use of

bank/agency staff had led to a monthly wage bill increase of £2,000. Another commented: “It’s costing £21 per hour which is nearly double [the rate] of a permanent member of staff with less responsibility!” Another respondent, whose setting is currently reliant on temporary staff while they recruit for two Level 3 vacancies, said: “We pay the agency more than the manager for each of the bank staff. This has a significant drain on our budget.”



“From April to October, it has cost the setting £20,000. This is a lot considering the quality of care is not the same and [agency staff] cannot take on key children / the same responsibilities.”

Many providers pointed out that the high cost of bank and agency staff often means that settings reliant on temporary workers cannot afford to increase wages for permanent members of staff.

One stated: “We have less money to spend on the things such as giving staff the pay increases they deserve.” Another said: “Using agencies is very expensive for our setting and it affects us by not being able to increase the salaries for our existing staff and therefore they are looking for better pay in other sectors.” Similarly, another commented: “Having to pay out large amounts on agency staff means we are unable to increase pay for the employed staff.”



A small number of respondents additionally stated that in some instances, settings actually lose permanent members of staff to agencies as a result of the higher wages paid there. One said: “We do not get enough funding to cover staff wages as it is, and then we pay an agency (in some cases) almost double what we pay a permanent member of the team. This means we cannot increase staff wages and then staff leave to become agency staff as they see a higher wage in some cases.”

Another concern raised about the growing use of bank and agency workers is the increased pressure that this can place on permanent members of staff. A number of respondents pointed to the time it takes to induct temporary members of staff – for example, one stated: “Teams aren’t able to make progress in delivering quality education as [they are] constantly needing to induct new people every week instead of focusing on providing the best quality education through reflective practice.” Others said that permanent staff often end up taking on more work as a result of temporary workers being unfamiliar with the setting’s routines and the children.



“These staff are not only significantly more expensive, but they are not permanent [and] cannot do key person duties leaving our own staff to have too many key children to manage the paperwork.”

Many respondents also made the important point that high reliance on bank and agency staff can often have a negative impact on children at settings, and the quality – and crucially, consistency – of care they are able to receive. One highlighted the importance of relationships and connections between staff and children, commenting that “the familiar, safe aspects that create a good environment are diluted when we use supply staff”. Another stated: “Young children learn best when they have trusted relationships with a few carers. Staff turnover and agency staff are unsettling to young children and mean they don’t have as much energy and attention for learning. Turnover in a team and temporary staff also means that there is less consistency in pedagogical approaches to behaviour management and careful child-centred curriculum planning. The environment also can deteriorate along with team culture and relationship with parents.”



“With agency staff, there is no consistency for the children.”

“They don’t know the children. They further undervalue my staff. They’re a liability. But less so than being understaffed.”

It should also be noted that many settings have found that a willingness to use temporary staff is no guarantee that any will be available when needed: nearly eight in 10 (78%) respondents



who have used bank and/or agency workers in the past six months have said there have also been occasions when they have tried to do so and none have been available.

Reduction of service

With a growing trend of early educators leaving the sector, limited staff entering the sector and no guarantee of bank and agency staff being available when needed, it is perhaps no surprise that many providers have still found themselves forced to operate with fewer staff than they would normally do – in some cases, so much so that they have had no choice but to reduce, and in some cases, temporarily suspend, the service offered to children and families.

who need flexibility – but [we] can't force staff to do any more than they're doing.”



“We have had to reduce the number of children we can have in the setting as we currently don't have the staff.”

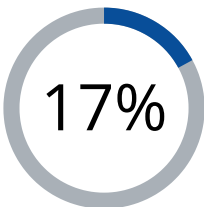
Staffing shortages have also forced a significant minority of respondents to temporarily stop providing places to some or all children at the setting on at least one occasion over the previous six months. Over a third (34%) of settings said they had temporarily limited the number of children able to attend the setting on a particular day or days, while around a quarter (24%) had temporarily closed a room or multiple rooms at their setting at least once. Perhaps most strikingly, one in six (17%) respondents said they had had to temporarily close their entire setting at least once over the previous six months due to a lack of staff.



of respondents have had to reduce or restrict opening hours over the past six months

One in five (21%) respondents said they have had to reduce or otherwise restrict opening hours as a result of lack of adequate staff over the past six months – this ranged from slightly later opening and closing times, to reducing the number of days the setting is open per week, due to a lack of adequate staff.

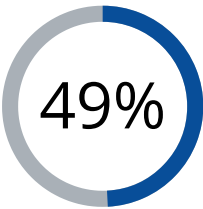
One respondent said: “We had to stop early opening and late opening due to staffing levels – staff would have to go over their contracted hours (we'd be happy to pay but staff are exhausted and don't want to) but can't do a shift as we need full staffing at all points of the day. It's frustrating to us and parents/carers



of respondents have had to close their setting at least once due to staff levels over the past six months

It is also important to note that staffing shortages not only impact the consistency and reliability of provision that settings are able to deliver to current families, but also their ability to take on new ones. Around half (49%) of all respondents said that they have had to limit or stop taking on new children due to a lack of

sufficient staff over the past six months. One provider said that their setting had a waiting list of 18 children unable to join as a result of insufficient staff, stating: “We have the space but not the staff to support it”.



of respondents have had to limit or stop taking on new children due to staff shortages

Another said: “We have had to cap numbers of children attending because we cannot appoint sufficient, good quality practitioners. Our waiting numbers have increased as there is a demand for spaces but we cannot meet this demand without sufficient staff.”



“We are not able to take any more children if we cannot recruit.”

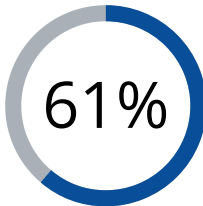
Impact on quality

Perhaps one of the most concerning findings of the survey is the impact that widespread staffing shortages in the early years sectors are having on the quality of provision. Around six in 10 (61%) of settings that have experienced staffing shortages over the past six months said that it has had a negative impact on quality.

A significant number of respondents highlighted the negative impact that low staffing levels have on children’s experiences, and the range of learning opportunities that

staff are able to deliver. One said: “We are unable to provide enriched learning experiences as we don’t have staffing to allow this.” Another commented: “We don’t have time to plan properly and we’re not able to update displays or rotate activities and resources.”

Another commented: “The quality of care is at a lower level. We used to be a really good pre-school and employed 15 staff. Now there are six, all of whom are part-time ... Although there are fewer children, there is little time to spend time with children with additional needs and there is no funding available to employ a member of staff even if we could. Also, there is little time to spend time bridging the gap for those children who need it.”



of respondents experiencing staff shortages say it has had a negative impact on quality

Many providers said that staffing shortages means that they are only able to offer what they consider to be a very basic service. One respondent revealed that their setting had received a ‘requires improvement’ judgement from Ofsted due to what they described as issues with their “consistency of teaching”, stating: “We have been providing what felt like emergency childcare and fighting fires instead of supporting the children to thrive.”

Another said: “When more short-staffed, there is more concentration on nappy-changing, supervision and feeding than on child development, just to keep children safe. This limits the activities and types of activities available.”

Another commented: “It’s sometimes impossible to engage with the children and focus on their development as we just spend most of the time policing just to make sure we know what’s going on and [can keep] all the children safe. It’s all we’ve been able to do on some days.”



“We are just about doing [the] basics so we don’t burn out staff who are qualified and reliable. This means the extras that make us excellent have had to go.”

Providers also highlighted the impact that staffing shortages are having on the ability to partake in activities like outings and trips. One cited having to limit the number of Forest Schools sessions offered due to a lack of adequate cover. Another said: “Staff are unable to give the children the extra things such as going out for walks to library, park etc due to lack of staff ... [They are] frustrated at not being able to provide more for the children.”

A number of respondents also raised concerns over the impact of the quality of provision delivered to children with additional needs and special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including concerns over the impact of inconsistency of staffing due to an increased reliance on bank and agency staff, as discussed more broadly earlier in this report.

One said: “We support children with SEND who rely on being supported by familiar staff. Not having consistent staff teams impacts on

the children.” Another commented: “We are having to rely on more voluntary and bank staff who are not familiar with the children initially. We have a high percentage of children with SEND [who] rely on routine and familiarity.”

Others pointed out that staffing shortages mean that remaining staff have less time to complete the administrative tasks needed to support children with SEND. One said: “We are unable to meet deadlines for SEND applications e.g. higher needs funding and unable to attend CIN [Children in Need] meetings and other social care meetings.”



“[Our] remaining staff are overworked, stressed and exhausted ... [There is] no time to arrange necessary meetings to meet the needs of children with SEND.”

Some respondents additionally noted that, in the wake of successive national lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic, more children attending early years settings are now presenting with additional needs, meaning that now, more than ever, adequate staffing levels and consistency of care are vital. One talked of seeing “children displaying behavioural issues and struggling to settle into daily routines, children needing more time and one-to-one support to play, cooperate with peers, follow daily routines, learn to listen and follow instructions, supporting toileting (children in nappies longer), [and] supporting speech and language” but said that there is “less quality

time for staff to plan, act and observe children’s progress as time is spent supporting basic care needs”.

Another said: “In the aftermath of Covid, children attending our setting have demonstrated high levels of difficult behaviour [and] difficulties with PSE [personal, social and emotional] skills and self-regulation. These children, usually four or five in every session, require one-to-one interventions that might take considerable periods of time to come to a resolution. Not having experienced and knowledgeable members of staff have impeded the resolution of issues and concerns.”



**“Haven’t these children been through enough without us not fully meeting their basic needs such as security, relationships and bonds?”**

A number of providers argued that not only do staffing shortages make it more difficult to positively support children displaying challenging behaviour, they can also have a negative impact on behaviour itself. One respondent stated that limited staff had forced their setting to “restrict the free-flow on some occasions so that all children are in one room rather than spread in/out due to numbers”, and that this, alongside having to employ greater numbers of less qualified staff who have less experience in delivering “meaningful” activities had had a notable impact on children’s behaviour, such as “poor listening [and] not [being] engaged as they should be”.

Another said: “The children's behaviour is definitely affected by having different people working with the children on a regular basis. Children are having more angry outbursts [and] losing key people that are special to them is having a visible affect, as well as lasting issues that have arisen since the pandemic and lockdowns.”



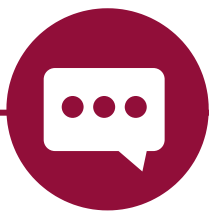
**“Our planning is not as good and this has impacted on the children’s day and their behaviour.”**

Respondents also noted that the low morale and increased stress levels among staff as a result of staffing pressures can often have a tangible impact on the quality of care and education delivered to children.

One said: “Staff morale is low ... this in turn impacts on motivation and well-being, which impacts on quality of engagement and provision.” Another commented: “The team can be stretched and so this impacts on their stress levels so they are not working at their best. It is difficult to find time to play and teach the children when we are short on staff and we are unable to offer that consistent key person approach.”

Another said: “We have advertised and interviewed several times in the last two to three years for crucial senior roles and not been able to fill them appropriately. The lack of suitable staff means we aren't able to adequately provide for children's needs as we

were in the past, and existing staff are stretched and stressed as a result, leading to others considering leaving the profession.”



“Ultimately if the team aren’t happy, it creates a less enriched learning environment for the children.”

Others also noted that staffing shortages had reduced the ability of settings to invest in and make time for training and continuous professional development (CPD) for staff. One said: “We are unable to release staff for training, and we are finding it difficult for experienced staff to be able to coach and mentor new staff or apprentices. Although that may not be a significant impact right now, inevitably the staff will not be able to develop their practice and this is a real concern.” Another stated: “Being able to offer CPD to staff has been difficult, resulting in a lower quality provision.”

A number of respondents pointed out that staffing shortages often mean that managerial staff are required to help with the delivery of

frontline care and education at settings, meaning that they have less time to lead on the wider running of the setting.

One said: “We have had to bring management out of the office on the floor meaning the paperwork side running the business has had to suffer so we can keep the rooms up and running.” Another commented: “Managers are having to support in the room, which has prevented them being able to complete their duties in developing the nurseries. Another pointed out that managers “having to be in ratio much more” reduces the time they are “able to spend on staff well-being, improvement and development”.



“The manager has to work the floor to cover staff shortages, which will impact on the quality of service.”

**A note on ratios**

On 1 October 2021, the *Telegraph* published a front-page story claiming that the government was planning to relax staff-child ratios in early years settings, increasing the maximum number of two-year-olds per adult from three to five.



“We have had the same manager for 25 years who has continually battled to keep us open. It is so sad to see how demoralised she is about the current situation and daily we see the fight in her wane. So many staff like her are walking away from the early years.”

While the Department for Education played down the report stating that “any discussion to changes to ratios would be subject to consultation”, it is not the first time that such a change has been mooted. In 2013, then-early years minister Liz Truss proposed increasing the number of under-twos per staff member in a nursery or pre-school from three to four, and the number of two-year-olds from four to six, as well as increasing the number of under-ones per adult in a childminding setting from one to two, and the number of under-fives from three to four. The plans faced strong opposition from both the early years sector and parenting organisations and, following a cross-sector campaign – Rewind on Ratios – led by the Early Years Alliance, the proposals were blocked by Nick Clegg, then-deputy Prime Minister of the coalition government.

Given the severe staffing pressures currently facing the early years sector, it might be expected that a growing number of providers would be in support of the idea of relaxing early years ratios, as this by definition would reduce the number of staff members needed per child in each setting.

However, the survey findings demonstrate that, despite the significant challenges facing the sector, the vast majority of the early years sector remain firmly opposed to the relaxation of ratios, with **73%** of respondents to this survey opposing ratio relaxation of any kind, and **90%** opposing the specific proposal reported in the *Telegraph*.

Of those opposed to the potential changes set out in the *Telegraph*, but open to other ratio changes, many argued that amending the current rules on how many qualified versus

unqualified early years staff are required at any one time would ease the pressures on settings without necessarily compromising the quality of provision (under the current Early Years Foundation Stage Framework, as well as the manager being required to hold an approved Level 3 qualification, at least half of all other staff must hold at least an approved Level 2 qualification). For example, one respondent stated: “I think the relaxation to 1:5 for babies would be bordering on dangerous but would support counting less qualified people within ratios.”

A number expressed the view that experience, rather than qualifications, should be the key factor in determining whether a member of staff could count in ratios. One said: “I would support the relaxation of unqualified staff to qualified staff, as long as they are experienced and have been working in the setting for six months and [are] over 18 years old.” Another said: “Qualifications are the big issue. We have a member of staff who doesn't have a childcare qualification and probably will not be persuaded to do one. But she is a mum and is educated to degree level. She is a better practitioner than many qualified staff we have had (including all the ones we have had with a childcare degree). But yet she is not counted the same as the qualified staff.”

A smaller number of respondents supported the relaxation of ratios for older children – for example, increasing the maximum number of three- and four-year-olds per adult from eight to 10 for early educators without an approved Level 6 qualification. However, the vast majority of respondents remain completely opposed to any ratios changes, with many pointing out that any relaxation would actually

increase pressure on the workforce, rather than reduce it.

One described the suggestion of ratio changes as “just another stunt and spin” of the government, arguing that “this would only increase the workload of an already overworked and underpaid workforce in the early years even more”. Similarly, another said: “Cutting ratios doesn't solve the problem of recruitment. It will just put more unbearable pressure on a setting that is already at breaking point due to being undervalued and underpaid. Therefore more staff will leave due to stress and then, eventually, there will be no early years sector at all. It seems like it's just another quick fix from a short-sighted government.”

Another respondent commented: “If ratios are adjusted, staff will leave the sector in droves as the pressure and responsibility of working in the sector would be negative in effort versus reward.”

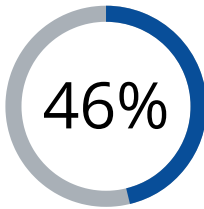


“How stupid to change the ratios so staff can look after even more children. Less people will want to work in those situations.”

LOOKING AHEAD

There is no doubt that the next 12 months and beyond looks set to be incredibly challenging period for the early years, with staffing challenges showing little sign of abating any time soon. Just under half (46%) of respondents said they feel pessimistic about

the prospect of having sufficient staff in 12 months’ time, while around a third (34%) expect a lack of adequate staff to force them to temporarily close rooms in their setting, or the entire setting, over the same period.



of respondents are pessimistic about the prospect of having enough staff in 12 months' time

A number of respondents additionally warned that they may not be able to offer enough places to meet demand going forward if staffing shortages continue. One stated: “If our numbers increase as they have in previous years and we still can't recruit staff, then we will not be able to offer spaces to all the children in our community that want them. Some of these families are vulnerable and due to how rural our setting is and the lack of travel options for these families, the children will then end up not attending any setting.” Another said: “If this trend continues into the spring, then we will have to turn children away as our numbers traditionally increase from March onwards in pre-school.”

Perhaps one of the starkest findings from the survey is that one in six (16%) respondents believe that it is likely that their setting will be forced to close permanently within the next 12 months, though many of the qualitative comments suggests that a lack of adequate staff was only one factor among several, including inadequate funding rates and rising delivery costs, contributing to this. One provider whose setting has already confirmed that it will be closing permanently said that this was due to “low numbers, underfunding leading to having

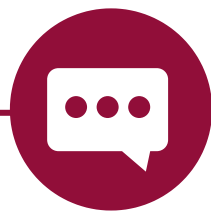
to pay staff ridiculously low wages and the inability to recruit qualified staff.” Another said that their pre-school committee had been forced to close their church-run charity setting “for a number of reasons, including inability to find suitable volunteer committee members and a number of staff leaving”.



“If we lose another member of staff, we face closure.”

One provider said they are considering closing one of their settings, stating: “There are 45 places available in the building [but] lack of staff means that we can only take 15 children. It does not break even at this level.”

Another commented: “I have significant concerns about the sustainability of my setting due to the recruitment and retention issues that we are currently facing. There is a very real possibility that the pre-school will be forced to close at the end of this year despite very best efforts to save it. Early years is a vital sector and it's high time that this was recognised by the government through action rather than words.”



“Unless the funding increases dramatically then I fear settings will close as [we are] unable to recruit staff and pay them what they deserve.”

A number of respondents made the important point that whether or not settings have enough staff to remain operational going forward should not be the only consideration: the ability to recruit and retain the right kind of early educator to ensure a high quality of care and education is also paramount.

One provider said they were “pessimistic that we will find the quality of staff who are passionate about early years and really understand the role”. Another said: “It is not just about sufficient staff – it is about being able to recruit the staff with a deep knowledge of child development and learning, with a love of children and joy in their work, and being able to pay them enough to stay in the job and still afford living costs!”



“I can recruit enough staff to meet ratios and who want to work school hours but not those with skills and motivation to pursue high standard educational programmes for the children.”

Others pointed out that while they were reasonably confident that they would have enough staff to deliver care and education going forward, this means operating in a way that risks putting unsustainable pressure on the existing workforce. One said: “Staff are working overtime and are exhausted. The early years sector is in desperate need of some kind of intervention before it becomes too damaged and becomes unfit for purpose.”





"I have been in early years my entire career and always managed to maintain an adequate work-life balance and not begrudge the extra commitment and work involved. This is no longer the case."

A number of respondents voiced concerns about the stress created for managerial staff in particular. One setting manager commented: "Lack of staffing has resulted in me being diagnosed with stress and high blood pressure but I am unable to go sick as owner/manager and am working 50-60hrs a week as [there is] no one else to get to cover me." Another said: "I am in ratio during the day and working at home in the evenings / weekends to keep the setting open – but this isn't a sustainable option and I can't see myself working in this role past 2022."



"I think we will have sufficient staff, but the management will be completely exhausted and burnt out."

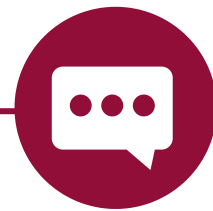
## NEXT STEPS

Despite responses to the wider survey raising a range of issues impacting on the appeal of a career in the early years, when asked specifically what steps the government could take to improve recruitment and retention in the sector, the vast majority of qualitative

responses focused on improving pay.

The Department for Education has previously declined to take responsibility for the existing levels of low pay in the PVI sector, saying in response to reports on levels of relative poverty among the workforce: "Early years providers are responsible for setting pay and conditions for their employees".

However, with government funding (via the two-, three- and four-year-old early entitlement offers) accounting for a substantial proportion of many settings' overall income, many survey respondents argued that pay levels in the sector simply cannot improve without government action.



"Pay better funding rates! It's simple! We can then offer better salaries and trained staff will stay in the sector."

One respondent called on the government to "increase the funding to early years settings so that they can attract well-qualified staff and pay them a decent living wage [and] rely less on volunteers to run such essential services". Another similarly said the government should "increase the level of education funding so that staff can be paid more than the minimum wage in order to show our appreciation for all the hard work the staff put into the early years". Another provider argued that government should increase funding to "bring us into line with the rest of the educational world [and] allow us to

be seen as professionals in our field and to be paid accordingly”.

A significant proportion of survey respondents also argued that the government should do more to proactively demonstrate that it values the early years workforce and the vital work they do. One called on the government to “value the sector and staff as children's educators, not just as childcare providers, value the training and workload we do and pay us a decent wage”, adding that the government shouldn’t “rely so heavily on our goodwill and passion for early years to make it thrive”. Another said that being “highlighted and recognised by government for the role we do and talked about along with education rather than as an after-thought” would have a positive impact on recruitment and retention in the sector. Similarly, another provider commented that the government should “show more respect and have higher regard for who we are and what we do for the next generations”.



**“This job takes over your life and there’s nothing you can do about it; it’s a natural part of caring and teaching the children we look after – but to be totally disregarded by the government is becoming harder to deal with.”**

As part of this, a number of respondents said that the government should focus on changing and improving the wider perception of the early years, and the important role that the

workforce plays in not just caring for, but also educating, young children. One said: “We need to stop calling this childcare and raise the profile of early years education as just that.” Another commented: “There needs to be a realisation that early years practitioners are a highly-trained workforce. This would improve public perception of the early years sector.”



**“I think the government should look at raising the profile of early years and recognise its value.”**

A small number of respondents also argued that there needs to be greater clarity and consistency with regards to the value of early years qualifications. One said: “I trained for EYP [Early Years Professional] Status when it was first introduced as we were told it was equivalent to a teaching degree, this then changed. Every couple of years, the higher qualifications seem to be disregarded and replaced with yet another qualification.”

Some providers specifically called on the government to launch a high-profile recruitment campaign for the early years, with many criticising a perceived lack of effort to attract new entrants into the sector to date. One respondent said: “There does not appear to be anything being done to encourage people into the industry, quite the reverse. And any positive change will take time to filter through and take effect anyway, maybe even years.” Another similarly said: “There is simply not enough effort by the government in attracting

the volume of people into the sector to meet the demands. Education appears to start at school age only in the government's eyes and this needs to change. A full campaign to promote jobs in early years, and it being seen as a respected and valued job, is essential."

A small number of respondents called on the government to create easier routes into the sector. One provider said: "Make it easier for young people to train for a qualification in early years. Young people need less qualifications / lower grades to train to be a teaching assistant. They get better pay (because school budgets are bigger) [and] more holidays (in line with school holidays, and the training is easier."

However, a number of providers also stressed that it was important that early years training makes clear to new entrants into the sector what working in early years actually entails. One respondent said: "More practical experience is essential. Classroom-taught practitioners find the job tough and just leave." Another called on the government to "improve training by ensuring students cover what is needed to equip them for the early years work environment".

Some respondents also called on the government to increase the number of funded training opportunities available to the sector. One argued that funding training to support CPD in early years settings would give staff "more job satisfaction with new gained skills to help with their roles". Another called on the government to "provide appropriate training packages that are affordable to settings that are already strapped for funds".

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this survey paint an incredibly concerning picture of the early years sector. A sustained loss of early educators from the sector combined with a lack of interest in the early years as a prospective career from potential new entrants has placed immense pressure on providers, which shows no signs of easing. The day-to-day impact of this trend has been made worse still by the Covid-19 pandemic and in particular, an increase in short-term staff shortages as a result of illness and self-isolation rules.

Many providers are increasingly reliant on temporary staff such as bank and agency workers to ensure they are meeting statutory ratio requirements. However, as the responses to the survey demonstrate, this is not a sustainable solution given the detrimental impact it has both on setting finances and the consistency – and sometimes quality – of care and education that providers are able to deliver.

If the trends highlighted in this report continue, the ability of providers to deliver care and education services to the children and families that need them are likely to be severely compromised, with more and more providers forced to take steps such as limiting places and placing restrictions on opening hours to manage staffing shortages. In a not-insignificant minority of cases, there is a risk that staffing shortages could force some settings to close altogether.

But ensuring that settings can continue to offer places to all children that need them should not be the sole aim of any strategy for improving recruitment and retention in the early years. Ensuring providers have the consistency and quality of staff to deliver the high-quality care and education needed to give every child the best possible start in life should and must be the priority of any government action on recruitment and retention.

The impact of current staffing shortages, on top of the unique and unprecedented experiences of the past two years, on the mental health and wellbeing of the early years workforce should also not be underestimated, and makes the need for government to address the recruitment and retention crisis a matter of particular urgency.

The Alliance believes that the early years has the potential to be both an incredibly attractive and incredibly fulfilling career prospect – however, urgent action is needed from government to make this ambition a reality.

To address the primary concerns raised in this report, the Early Years Alliance recommends the following:

- **Urgent steps to increase early years salary levels**

While we recognise that the government cannot dictate pay scales for private, voluntary and independent early years settings, with early entitlement funding rates accounting for such a significant proportion of the income of many providers, it would be entirely false to suggest that the government plays no role in the determination of salary scales in the sector.

We recommend that the government:

- Determines and publishes a set of pay ambitions for the sector, setting out what it considers to be a suitable salary range for each role level in the sector, in light of the pivotal importance of early years professionals in supporting children's learning and development.
- Provides early years funding rates that are sufficient to enable providers to pay salaries at those levels (rather than aiming to ensure that settings can pay the national living or minimum wage, as is currently the case), and develops a mechanism that ensures that funding remains at a level that allows providers to pay staff in line with those pay ambition scales year on year.

- **Value and promote the early years sector as an education profession**

Despite a growing understanding of the impact of the early years on a child's life chances, the early years sector is still not recognised by many as part of the education sector, a misconception that has been compounded by the promotion of the early entitlement offer, and particular the 30-hours, as 'free childcare'.

To address this, and as a step towards improving the low morale in the sector highlighted in this report, it is vital that the government ensures that the early years is included in all education announcements, debates and discussions, and that any support schemes or initiatives rolled out to the schools and further education sectors are also rolled out to the early years sector, wherever it is appropriate and relevant. The government should also review its use of language when discussing the sector, with an emphasis on early years provision as 'early education' and on the workforce as 'early educators'.

In the medium-to-long term, the government should also look to run a high-profile campaign to encourage talented and dedicated professionals into the sector. It should be noted, however, that such a step would only be of any real value if the systemic challenges facing the sector – namely, inadequate funding and low pay – are tackled first.

- **Ensure clear and consistent routes into and pathways through the sector, and funded training and CPD opportunities**

In 2018, the Department for Education, working with Cache, the Alliance and other sector bodies, developed an early years careers map which outlined the various career progression pathways available

to those working in the sector. It is vital that the government now actively looks to build upon this work and ensure that the workforce has a clear understanding of the career routes available within early years. Equally important is the provision of the financial support to access these opportunities, and so it remains critical that early years qualifications – alongside regular training and CPD – are adequately funded by government,

Clarity and consistency on the value of early years qualifications is also likely to play a key role in tackling some of the concerns raised in this report. While Early Years Professional Status and Early Years Teacher Status were originally mooted as ‘equivalents’ to Qualification Teacher Status, this has never been the case in practice, and there remain huge differentials in the pay, conditions and status afforded to those holding these respective qualifications. As such, we would recommend that further work is undertaken on early years qualifications with a particular focus on those in leadership roles – namely, the development of a framework that ensures parity between early educators and teachers working in the primary and secondary sectors. Such action would also help to establish that a role in early years is not a step on the way to an alternative career, but rather, an end goal in itself.



“The sector is in a dire situation. The employees are stressed, the government undervalues the role and there is little sunshine on the horizon. It’s my life and passion, but I’m feeling beaten.”

# APPENDIX: FULL RESULTS

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

Nursery: **43%**

Pre-school: **48%**

Childminding setting: **3%**

Maintained nursery school: **1%**

Primary school nursery class: **0%**

Children's centre: **1%**

Out-of-hours club: **2%**

Specialist early years provision: **1%**

Other: **3%**

## How would you best describe your role within your setting?

Both owner and manager: **18%**

Owner: **10%**

Manager: **43%**

Deputy manager: **6%**

Early years teacher or professional / Level 6 practitioner: **3%**

Room leader: **1%**

Level 4 or 5 practitioner: **1%**

Level 3 practitioner: **4%**

Level 2 practitioner: **1%**

Level 2 assistant: **0%**

Unqualified practitioner: **0%**

Apprentice: **0%**

Administrator: **5%**

Other (please specify): **7%**

## How long have you worked in the early years sector?

Less than a year: **1%**

1 – 5 years: **7%**

6 – 10 years: **10%**

11 – 15 years: **19%**

16 – 20 years: **20%**

More than 20 years: **43%**



**How many sites do you / does your organisation currently operate?**

1: **76%**

2 – 5: **17%**

6 – 10: **2%**

11 – 25 : **2%**

26 – 50 : **1%**

More than 50: **3%**

**How easy or difficult is your setting / are your settings finding it to hire suitable new early years staff at the moment?**

Very difficult: **60%**

Quite difficult: **24%**

Neither easy nor difficult: **13%**

Quite easy: **2%**

Very easy: **0%**

**What challenges are you facing? Please select all that apply.**

Lack of applicants for roles: **87%**

Applicants lacking full and relevant early years qualifications: **70%**

Unable to meet the salary demands of applicant: **52%**

Applicants lacking suitable practical experience: **45%**

Applicants not showing up for interview: **43%**

Unable to offer pattern of working hours applicants want: **38%**

Applicants not performing well at interview: **26%**

Other: **5%**

**Is your setting currently recruiting for any roles?**

Yes: **63%**

No: **37%**

**How many roles are you currently recruiting for?**

Average = 2.2

**As far as you are aware, have any staff who have left your setting(s) in the past six months left the early years sector entirely?**

Yes: **62%**

No: **27%**

Unsure: **11%**

*[Of those aware of staff leaving the sector]* As far as you are aware, what were the most common reasons for former staff at your setting(s) leaving the sector? Please select all that apply.

Poor pay: **68%**

Better opportunities in another sector: **57%**

Feeling undervalued by government: **44%**

Job-related stress: **42%**

Difficulty balancing work and their own childcare needs: **35%**

Long working hours: **32%**

Poor benefits (e.g. sick pay): **28%**

Feeling that staffing shortages are compromising ability to deliver quality care and education: **23%**

Safety concerns due to the pandemic: **21%**

Lack of career progression: **16%**

Feeling undervalued within the setting: **12%**

Unsure: **3%**

Other: **10%**

*[Of those aware of staff leaving the sector]* Are you seeing a change in the number of staff members choosing to leave the early years sector compared to this time two years ago?

Yes, a significant increase: **52%**

Yes, a moderate increase: **20%**

Yes, a slight increase: **12%**

No, it's about the same: **12%**

No, a slight decrease: **0%**

No, a moderate decrease: **0%**

No, a significant decrease: **0%**

N/A - was not operating / working in the sector two years ago: **1%**

Unsure: **4%**

Over the past six months, has your setting / have your settings ever had to use bank/agency staff due to a lack of permanent staff?

Yes, all the time: **13%**

Yes, often: **14%**

Yes, sometimes: **15%**

Yes, rarely: **7%**

No, never: **51%**

*[Of those who have used bank/agency staff]* How does your setting's or settings' current reliance on bank/agency staff compare to this time two years ago?

Significantly higher: **38%**

Somewhat higher: **35%**

About the same: **18%**

Somewhat lower: **4%**

Significantly lower: **3%**

N/A - was not operating / working in the sector two years ago: **2%**

*[Of those who have used bank/agency staff]* What kind of impact is your setting's or settings' increased reliance on bank/agency staff having on setting finances?

Significantly negative impact on finances: **49%**

Somewhat negative impact on finances: **33%**

Somewhat positive impact on finances: **1%**

Significant positive impact on finances: **0%**

No impact on finances: **8%**

Unsure : **9%**

*[Of those who have used bank/agency staff]* Looking back over the past six months, what is the highest proportion of bank/agency staff you have had working at your setting at any one time?

Average = 18%

*[Of those who have used bank/agency staff]* Over the past six months, has your setting / have your settings ever tried to use bank/agency staff, but been unable to due to lack of bank/agency staff availability?

Yes, all the time: **10%**

Yes, often: **28%**

Yes, sometimes: **30%**

Yes, rarely: **10%**

No, never: **22%**

Over the past six months, how many times has your setting had to do any of the following due to a lack of adequate staff?

Temporarily limit the number of children able to attend the setting on a particular day or days: **average = 3.6 times (34% of respondents)**

Temporarily close a room or multiple rooms: **average = 2.1 times (24% of respondents)**

Temporarily close the entire setting: **average = 0.4 (17% of respondents)**

Over the past six months, has your setting / have any of your settings ever had to reduce or otherwise restrict opening hours as a result of lack of adequate staff?

Yes: **21%**

No: **79%**

Over the past six months, has your setting / have your settings ever had to limit or stop taking on new children due to lack of sufficient staff?

Yes: 49%

No: 51%

Do you think that any staff shortages you have experienced over the last six months have had a negative impact on the quality of provision at your setting(s)?

Yes: 49%

No: 31%

N/A – I / we have not experienced any staff shortages: 20%

According to reports, the government is considering relaxing adult-to-child ratios for under-twos in nurseries and pre-schools from the current limit of one adult per three children to one adult per five children. Would you support such a change?

Yes: 10%

No, I wouldn't support any relaxation of current early years ratios: 73%

No, but I would support a different relaxation of current early years ratios: 17%

Looking ahead, how optimistic do you feel that your setting(s) will have sufficient staff in 12 months' time?

Very optimistic: 7%

Somewhat optimistic: 22%

Neither optimistic nor pessimistic: 24%

Somewhat pessimistic: 31%

Very pessimistic: 15%

In your opinion, how likely is it that a lack of adequate staff will result in your setting(s), or any rooms in your setting(s), being forced to close temporarily over the next 12 months?

Very likely: 10%

Somewhat likely: 24%

Neither likely nor unlikely: 28%

Somewhat unlikely: 21%

Very unlikely: 18%

In your opinion, how likely is it that a lack of adequate staff will result in your setting / any of your settings being forced to close permanently over the next 12 months?

Very likely: 4%

Somewhat likely: 12%

Neither likely nor unlikely: 22%

Somewhat unlikely: 24%

Very unlikely: 37%

**Are you currently considering leaving the early years sector?**

I have already left: **1%**

Yes, I have already confirmed that I will be leaving: **3%**

Yes, I am actively considering leaving: **35%**

No, I have considered it but I don't think I will leave: **40%**

No, I have never considered leaving: **22%**

***[Of those considering leaving the sector]* Why are you considering leaving the sector? Please select all that apply.**

Feeling undervalued by government: **77%**

Job-related stress: **72%**

Poor pay: **57%**

Feeling that staffing shortages are compromising ability to deliver quality care and education: **53%**

Long working hours: **51%**

Poor benefits (e.g. sick pay): **31%**

Feeling undervalued within the setting: **29%**

Better opportunities in another sector: **26%**

Safety concerns due to the pandemic: **15%**

Lack of career progression: **14%**

Difficulty balancing work and own childcare needs: **10%**

Unsure: **0%**

Other: **25%**

***[Of those considering leaving the sector]* Has your experience of working in the early years sector during the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the likelihood of you leaving the sector?**

It has significantly increased the likelihood of me leaving: **30%**

It has somewhat increased the likelihood of me leaving: **36%**

It has had no impact on the likelihood of me leaving: **31%**

It has somewhat decreased the likelihood of me leaving: **1%**

It has significantly decreased the likelihood of me leaving: **1%**