

Early Years Teacher and Early Years Educator:
a scoping study of the impact, experiences and
associated issues of recent early years qualifications
and training in England

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Executive Summary

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in England received unparalleled policy attention and reform under the New Labour government (1997-2010). During this period, educational provision was massively expanded so that it became available to all three and four-year-olds. Since 1997 there has been a raft of initiatives, developments and policies underpinned by the principle objectives of expansion, affordability, quality and accessibility. This attention continued under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Government (2010-2015) which responded to the Tickell Review of the Early Years Foundation Stage (Tickell, 2011); and the Nutbrown Review of qualifications and training in 2012. The long-awaited publication of an Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017) was released as this report was going to print. The strategy signals that the current Conservative government has retained an emphasis on expansion, affordability, quality and accessibility. This ongoing and intense policy attention denotes the central position that ECEC has come to occupy in education and social welfare policy.

However, inherent within these developments remains a conceptual division between 'education' and 'care' (Dahlberg et al., 2007). While successive governments have emphasised the close relationship between education and care, administrative practice and policy formation continues to effectively compartmentalise the dual aspect of ECEC. This has important implications for the workforce. The present system of staffing is highlighted by Moss (2016) as including a small elite body of teachers in nursery and reception classes, and a much larger body of childcare workers with generally lower levels of training and qualifications but who cover the entire early childhood range (birth to five-years). In effect, there is a two-tier system of ECEC in England. This distinction has implications for public perception, financial remuneration and career progression for people working in the sector. It also has important ramifications for the qualifications and training that are made available to different sectors of the workforce.

The introduction of the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) in 2006 represented a pivotal moment in the reform of qualifications and training available to the ECEC workforce. EYPs were intended to be the future leaders and the 'gold standard' professionals working with children under five (CWDC, 2008). However, EYPS was highly contentious since these graduates were not permitted to work in maintained schools because the status was not deemed equivalent to qualified teacher status (QTS) (Roberts-

Holmes, 2013). This lack of parity between EYPS and QTS further exacerbated the divide within the two-tier workforce identified by Moss (op cit).

The Nutbrown Review (2012) sought to address disparities and weaknesses with the Early Years training and qualification framework in England, including the divisive effects of EYPS. Although many of the recommendations in the review were rejected or only partially implemented, a notable exception was the introduction of two new qualifications: Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) and the Early Years Educator (EYE). However, it quickly became apparent that EYTS was denied qualified teacher status (QTS) and all the associated benefits, including support during a newly qualified teacher (NQT) year and national pay scales. This research was undertaken at a time when EYTs are subjected to the same expectations and demands on teacher training programmes as those in the maintained school sector but enjoy fewer benefits.

Early Years Educator (EYE) was introduced in 2014, for practitioners seeking a Level 3 national vocational qualification. Like EYTS, the EYE qualification has been the subject of much controversy and frustration across the sector, because it required applicants to hold GCSE English and Maths at grade A-C. This acted as a deterrent for many applicants, and presented recruitment challenges to training providers and employers. The Early Years Workforce Strategy (2017) responded to this 'crisis' by revisiting the requirement for applicants to hold GCSEs at grade A-C to a demand for applicants to demonstrate functional skills in literacy and numeracy.

The impact, experiences and associated issues with the introduction of these two new qualifications: EYTS and EYE provides the central focus of the current study. The study seeks to locate the issues surrounding the introduction of these new qualifications within broader debates about training and qualifications in ECEC; debates shaped by policy imperatives to 'raise quality', ensure 'school readiness' (see McDowall Clark, 2016) and measure the effectiveness of the workforce based upon child outcomes. Attention is also given to the investments made in pursuing early years qualifications and the ultimate exchange value they represent within the labour market.

Aims and Scope

The study aimed to map the current training and qualifications context through a review of policies since 1997 and by presenting the debates generated in research literature and through media

representations. By gathering empirical data the study aimed to identify the impact, experiences and associated issues with the newly introduced qualification pathways: Early Years Teacher and Early Years Educator.

The research study set out to specifically address the following questions:

- a) What education and training is available in early years care and education? How do the different programmes on offer compare? How are programmes marketed? What are the intended aims of each programme?
- b) How does the training relate to experiences in practice? How do educators feel about the training they receive and its relationship to their in-work experiences?
- c) Which is the 'best' training route on offer to early years practitioners? How is 'best' defined given the processes involved and the outcomes achieved? How does training impact upon professional trajectories? What lessons can be learnt to inform the future of early years training?

Methodology

The aims and questions outlined were addressed through a small-scale, mixed methods scoping study that captured breadth (in terms of the literature and policy reviewed, range of participants included, and geographical coverage) as well as depth (detailed accounts about the experiences of delivering, receiving and enacting the training and qualifications under investigation). The range of methods included:

1. A Literature Review to include research studies, grey literature, policy texts and media coverage;
2. Collation and analysis of on-line marketing materials for EYTS, EYITT and EYE courses;
3. On-line Survey of Training Providers;
4. On-line consultation space for Training Providers;
5. Telephone Interviews with a small sample of stakeholders (n=4);
6. Three Case Studies with members of the early years workforce, their training providers, and in-work colleagues via a series of focus groups and semi-structured interviews; and
7. A one-day seminar (with stimulus paper delivered by Professor Peter Moss, and break out discussion groups made up of training providers, practitioners, advocacy groups, unions and other key players) to consider the future of early years training and qualifications.

Summary of findings

Intense policy-driven reform

There has been a sustained policy-driven agenda to professionalise the ECEC workforce over the past two decades. This has involved the introduction of new roles and qualifications. However, this prolonged period of policy-led reform has failed to address the lack of parity that graduates working in ECEC experience compared to graduate teachers (with QTS) working principally in the state maintained sector. The Nutbrown Review (2012) recommended an increase in the number of qualified early years teachers, and for Level 3 to represent the minimum qualification for the ECEC workforce. The review also recommended that there should be a renewed emphasis on professional development for the entire workforce. Consequently, new qualifications at Level 6: Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) and Level 3: Early Years Educator (EYE) were introduced.

Policy-driven demands to ‘upskill’ and ‘raise quality’ have witnessed the introduction of these new qualifications, but with insufficient clarity and detailed information about their content and value. The government agenda to raise ‘quality’ through increased levels of qualification has a direct bearing upon the emphasis that is placed on certain qualifications and training over others (i.e. those that are charged with promoting technical competence and delivery of prescribed outcomes above developing critical thinking and reflexivity).

Continued disparities between the state maintained and PVI sectors

Despite sustained reform, and the introduction of new qualifications, there remains considerable variation across the early years sector, specifically between maintained settings and private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings. Although Early Years Teachers may be employed in the maintained as well as PVI sectors, they lack the pay and conditions of those with QTS and cannot be paid as qualified teachers in the majority of maintained settings, which continues to affect their professional status (Nutbrown, 2013; Barron, 2015).

Entry requirements for the new qualifications are contributing to a crisis

The requirement for all members of the workforce to hold GCSEs at grade A-C has resulted in a ‘crisis’ in ECEC in terms of recruiting new members, retaining experienced practitioners, and supporting career progression. Despite the policy-drive to raise qualifications, levels within the early years workforce are

dropping. Most notable is the drop in numbers of Level 3 qualified staff from 83 percent to 75 per cent since 2015 (NDNA, 2016a). Overall staff turnover is higher than in previous years, at 19 per cent with turnover at Level 3 being 21 percent, reportedly due to low wages and lack of progression, i.e. it is not possible to progress from Levels 1 and 2 if the A-C GCSE requirements are not met. NDNA (2016) have also found that employers have reduced staff training budgets as a result of the heavy financial burdens stemming from using agency staff to cover vacancies, keeping pace with the National Living Wage and pension auto-enrolment costs.

This research supported these trends. For example, the A-C grade GCSE entry point for EYE Apprenticeships has negatively impacted upon recruitment and retention of staff. London Early Years Foundation reported an 80 per cent drop in recruitment and a 96 per cent drop in EYE Apprenticeships directly attributable to the requirement for applicants to hold GCSE Maths and English grades A-C upon application. The expansion and affordability agendas pursued by government (i.e. the demand for more childcare *and* the higher entry qualifications) are incommensurate and directly contributing to the ‘crisis’ in childcare identified by the PLA (2016).

These requirements are also having a negative impact upon the recruitment to EYITT and EYTS university programmes. Scott (2016) warned university courses offering training for Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) are facing closure due to low numbers, this was supported by accounts from training providers surveyed in this study. As this report was being written the Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017) was announced and it appears that this ‘crisis’ in recruitment and retention was acknowledged by government. The requirement for applicants to hold or pursue GCSEs was revised; applicants are now required to demonstrate or pursue functional skills in literacy and numeracy.

Curriculum content of training and qualifications

The content of training and qualifications were reflected upon by research participants. At Level 3, the NNEB Diploma in Childcare was looked back upon as representing a ‘gold standard’ because it focused on birth to seven, offered a thorough grounding in theories of child development, provided evidence of rigorous teaching and assessment, and offered trainees diverse experiences of early years contexts (through several lengthy placements). The in-depth observational child studies undertaken as part of the NNEB were held in high regard. The newly introduced EYE, which has been broadly modelled on the NNEB Diploma, was therefore considered (by employers, training providers and trainees) to provide

appropriate course content, a flexible mode of delivery, and appropriate support from assessors, mentors and managers and peers.

At Level 6, the programmes held in highest regard were those that were rigorous and that enabled students to directly connect theory to practice and to develop deeper pedagogical knowledge that was specific to the early years (birth-to-five). Attaining a specialist ECEC degree instilled a greater sense of professional confidence and the capacity for deeper reflection on all aspects of working in ECEC. Training providers surveyed reported feeling concerned that there was less emphasis on play, children's rights and leadership on the EYITT pathway.

Combining work with the pursuit of a Level 6 qualification was reported as a challenge and therefore the geographical proximity of training providers is a significant factor to determine choice. A bigger factor to determine choice of Level 6 pathway though is QTS; there were examples of participants rejecting EYITT and EYTS in favour of PGCE. Although opting for a PGCE ensures greater currency and transferability of the qualification it can lack early years specialism (particularly in relation to birth-to-three) and therefore result in a need to 'top-up'. EYPS came under most criticism for its preoccupation to 'tick-box' technical competence, as one respondent stressed: *'I've not even mentioned that because it was insignificant...just tick boxing what I already do; it had little impact on my practice and way of thinking'*.

Lack of clear information

Another fundamental issue concerns the clarity of information about qualifications, their value and usefulness. The 'full and relevant' qualifications checker on the DfE website was bemoaned by all respondent groups in this study. It was reportedly cumbersome, inaccurate and time-consuming to navigate. Consequently, there was liberal reference to relying on Google as a source of information about the relative merits of different qualifications and training available. Relying on 'Google' as a primary source of (mis)information generates greater confusion and uncertainty as information tends to be ambiguous and partial.

Importance of learning communities, supportive management, investment in CPD

Through the case study investigations in this research the significance of supportive employers and being located within an ECEC community, that shares an implicit expectation that all staff should be continually pursuing further qualification and training, acts as an important catalyst for a highly qualified

staff. Prioritising investment in staff development involves covering the financial cost of fees, providing cover and ensuring that pay scales reflect the different levels and range of qualifications held by staff. Supporting staff to navigate the contradictions and ambiguities within the national framework of qualifications was also important to ensure staff enrolled and pursued recognised, rigorous and valuable qualifications. The case studies underscored the need for clear career structures, organisational support, and sufficient time to invest in professional development.

This research also found that graduate-led Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) can raise the quality of provision. The depth of knowledge about early years theories and philosophies taught on degree programmes can open up ways to view early childhood pedagogy and children's learning more expansively. Effective graduate-led provision can create an environment where the pursuit of higher level qualifications can be recognised as valuable, necessary and attainable.

Taking training and the pursuit of qualifications in-house is another option available to larger ECEC providers. Two of the case studies in this research coached and supervised staff to be well informed about the availability of in-house training. Training packages offered were regarded as an important feature of working for a large organisation as they provide a clear pathway from Level 2 through to Level 7 and directly link to practice.

Across the case studies, being part of a community of practice, with ample opportunities to learn with and from peers has clear benefits for the identification, pursuit, and the successful completion of continuing professional development opportunities was significant. This rests upon the vision and actions of supportive management – whether in a single setting or part of a larger organisation – early years teams that feel valued and supported throughout their careers are better equipped to navigate the wider policy-driven reforms to the sector.

Recommendations

Regulation of training providers, clear and detailed information about training and qualifications

There needs to be greater assurance that qualifications are rigorous, challenging and fit for purpose. This should be achieved through the regulation of qualifications and providers to ensure that what is on offer is recognised, reputable and transferable, and holds parity with statutory sector. More bursaries

and sustained investment should be made available to enable the early years workforce to pursue high quality training/qualifications that are specialist and recognised. The lack of clear information about qualifications, their value to employers, and usefulness to trainees to feel equipped to work in early years must be addressed; there must be unambiguous and impartial information made available to members of an overworked, underpaid workforce who are seeking to enhance their professional development.

Research, Experiment, Innovate

The curriculum content on *all* programmes should be updated to include research to cultivate critical reflection and to ensure quality. The importance of embedding research into training and qualifications and cultivating its place within localised learning communities will (collectively) enhance practice. Qualifications and training should enable members of the early years workforce at all levels to question and engage with the underpinning meanings of all aspects of their work. Furthermore, opportunities to develop a critical awareness, not just of early years pedagogy but also of themselves as members of an employment sector, is crucial if the workforce is to transform how it understands itself and how others understand it.

Learning Communities

There is a need to increase the number of qualified teachers with specialist early years knowledge (but also include graduates from other subject areas, as the quality of provision can be enriched by staff with diverse expertise, as well as a knowledge and experience of early childhood). The workforce benefits from effective leadership that promotes active learning communities. Staff need support to identify and pursue continuing professional development opportunities that are relevant, rigorous and valuable. Learning and professional development must be recognised as continuous. Aligned to Professor Nutbrown's recommendation, all staff should be in constant pursuit of more knowledge and improved practice through critical reflection which can be supported through specialist qualifications.

Being part of a community of practice, with ample opportunities to learn with and from peers, has clear benefits for the identification, pursuit, and the successful completion of continuing professional development opportunities. This rests upon the vision and actions of supportive management – whether in a single setting or part of larger organisation – early years teams need to feel valued and supported throughout their careers.

Shift public (mis)conceptions about childhood

The early years is not (solely) about school readiness and developing children to become competent, worthy citizens. The workforce must be supported to be researchers, adventurers and explorers so that young children can also be understood as researchers, adventurers and explorers from whom we have a great deal to learn (see Murray 2017). To shift the perceptions of the wider public will require concerted effort across the entire sector, from advocacy groups, employer organisations, unions, training providers, academics and every single member of the early years workforce, to push for a re-imagin(in)g of the child, the setting and the worker.

Chapter One: Introduction

'You have people who are naturally fantastic with children and people that learn to be fantastic with children; there are some people there that are naturally fantastic with children and would be your movers and shakers; that make things magical for children in the setting, and some of those people aren't academic. And that's what we're missing... we've lost some of those magical people. We've got people that are learning to be magical, but it's different.' (Senior Learning and Development Manager, LEYF Learning Academy)

The seemingly relentless reform to early years training and qualifications over the past two decades, and specifically in the recent past since the Nutbrown Review: *Foundations for Quality: the independent review of early education and childcare qualifications* (2013), has created a new 'crisis' in terms of recruitment, retention, career progression and public perceptions of the sector. This 'crisis' is characterised by a confusing, inconsistent and partially unregulated and unsustainable qualifications framework, a decline in levels of qualifications and high staff turnover (NDNA 2016a).

This study was commissioned by TACTYC in a quest to map the main issues that the sector is currently grappling with and to consider ways forward. Specifically, TACTYC was keen for the research to explore the newly introduced qualifications: Early Years Teacher and Early Years Educator. This report offers an exploration of the ways in which the concepts of quality and professionalism have been taken up in debates about how to 'raise standards' through the introduction of these new qualifications. The study explored the views and experiences of key stakeholders, training providers and gathered accounts from staff working within nurseries to establish the most valuable and valued forms of training and qualifications currently on offer.

The report is based upon research conducted with over 120 participants from across the sector and includes a review of policy and research literature as well as analyses of empirical data gathered through survey, interviews and in-depth investigations in three case study contexts. It contributes to a growing body of literature that seeks to expose and disentangle some entrenched ideas about the sector and what the 'best' qualifications are, should be, and could be to ensure that the early years workforce is well equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to work effectively with young children. The report

explores how various actors across the early years sector conceptualise the need for, and importance of, professional development and recognisable, rigorous qualifications. To do this an array of powerful illustrative examples from organisations, communities and individuals striving to ‘upskill’ themselves are presented and a series of recommendations are offered.

Report Outline

The report is organised over eight chapters. This introduction is intended to set out the context for the study whilst the next chapter sets out the methodology. Through a review of relevant literature, chapter three is devoted to mapping the policy terrain in which the study is located; special attention is drawn to studies that have informed and shaped popular debates in the field. Key policies and strategies designed to promote quality, professionalism and ‘upskilling’ are introduced and outlined. The chapter commentary provides a link across and between these debates, providing the reader with the opportunity to identify how issues have been taken up in public debate through policy, media and practice.

Chapter four then provides an overview of the main issues from the perspective of a small sample of key stakeholders. This chapter provides an historical overview, drawing attention to key moments in policy that have been pivotal in shaping the training and qualifications landscape in the early years sector. It concludes with a series of recommendations from the four stakeholders which are taken up and discussed in the remainder of the report. Next, chapter five reports on a survey and consultation exercise undertaken with training providers to outline the major challenges and concerns currently experienced in delivering provision to members of the workforce. Within this chapter an analysis of marketing materials is offered to highlight how working with young children and the pursuit of certain qualifications are shaped by policy imperatives (to raise standards, get children school-ready and so on). It raises a number of important considerations and tensions that explain the decline in recruitment to many early years pathways and the likely implications of this for the workforce.

The next substantive chapter, chapter six, reports on in-depth case study investigations. Three diverse contexts within the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) EY sector were included in this aspect of the study. The decision to focus on PVI provision stemmed from wider debates informed by policy, media and research evidence that these providers are generally characterised by lower qualifications and therefore ‘poorer quality’ provision. The case studies are not intended to be representative of the

entire sector, or to necessarily provide examples of 'best practice'. Rather they were selected because they capture creative or innovative approaches to overcome challenges inherent within the current early years training and qualifications available to the workforce. The case studies included an investigation of a single-setting, owner-managed nursery with unprecedentedly high levels of qualifications (including QTS, EYPS, and Masters in Early Childhood) across the staff team and consistent 'outstanding' quality ratings by Ofsted. Another case study focused on the in-house EYE Apprenticeship pathway available to new recruits working within a group of nurseries running as a social enterprise. The third case study focused on a nursery that is part of large international chain, also offering EYE in-house and supporting members of its workforce to pursue EYTS. The three case studies provided an opportunity to explore the newly introduced Early Years Teacher and Early Years Educator qualifications alongside a range of other qualifications that members of the workforce have pursued in the recent past, thereby offering the means to assess the relative strengths of various qualifications. Accounts offered through the case study investigations provided insights into the ways in which the new qualifications are experienced and perceived by members of the early years workforce. The detailed accounts from staff across the three cases provide valuable insights into how qualifications are identified, pursued and achieved in the current system. Through close examination of the narratives of managers, trainers and staff it was possible to identify a range of approaches taken to recruitment, retention and career progression, and to identify a series of important recommendations.

Next, chapter seven, reports on a one-day event that was organised as part of the study. Over 50 participants from across the sector (including representatives from employee unions, advocacy groups, the civil service, HEIs and other training providers, and early years students) attended a seminar with a stimulus paper delivered by Professor Peter Moss which invited the audience to re-imagine the child, the setting and the worker. The day generated lively debate and a series of recommendations that urge a careful consideration for how the sector might shift public perceptions, build upon the existing richness of the sector and challenge ill-informed policy reform. The final chapter synthesises the various strands of the report to offer a summary and a set of specific recommendations to address the many tensions, challenges and ambiguities unearthed in this study.

Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This study employed a mixed methods approach to gather data from a wide range of participants. This chapter outlines the aims and scope, core research questions that the study sought to address, and a rationale and description of each method employed to address the aims.

2.2 Aims and Scope

- To set the study within context by reviewing relevant policy and research literature;
- To provide an overview of the nature of EYE and EYTS (delivery, uptake, success);
- To consider the content of the EYE and EYTS training and its relationship to practice; and
- To identify implications of the training for career/professional development, reflective practice, resourcing and future provision.

The aims outlined are addressed through a mixed method study that captures breadth (in terms of the literature and policy reviewed, range of providers included, and geographical coverage) as well as depth (detailed accounts about the experiences of delivering, receiving and enacting the training and qualifications under investigation).

2.3 Research Questions

- a) What education and training is available to the early years workforce? How do the different programmes on offer compare? How are programmes marketed? What are the intended aims of each programme?
- b) How does the training relate to experiences in practice? How do educators feel about the training they receive and its relationship to their in-work experiences?
- c) Which is the 'best' training route on offer to early years practitioners? How is 'best' defined given the processes involved and the outcomes achieved? How does training impact upon professional trajectories? What lessons can be learnt to inform the future of early years training?

2.4 Methodology

- A Literature Review to include research studies, grey literature, policy texts and media coverage;
- Collation and analysis of on-line marketing materials for EYE and EYTS;

- On-line Survey of Training Providers delivering EYE and EYTS;
- On-line consultation space for Training Providers;
- Telephone Interviews with a small sample of stakeholders;
- Three Case Studies with Trainees and their training providers, and in-work colleagues: focus groups and interviews; and
- One-day Seminar (with stimulus paper delivered by Professor Peter Moss, and break out discussion groups made up of training providers, practitioners, advocacy groups, unions etc.) to consider the future of early years training and qualifications.

2.5 Literature Review

The literature selected for review was identified through systematic searches of academic journals, library catalogues, government websites, and specialist educational media. Combinations of a variety of search terms were used, including ‘early years’; ‘early childhood education’; ‘qualifications’; and ‘training’. Because the policy landscape has changed so rapidly in recent years the search of literature was limited to papers published after 2010. Relevant search results were then restricted to papers that were concerned with the early years sector in England and with an explicit focus on qualifications and/or training of early years staff. The search for literature continued throughout the life of the project and included recommended grey literature from research participants.

2.6 Stakeholder interviews

A list of 30 potential stakeholders was compiled based upon the profile of organisations and individuals and their involvement with the development of training and qualifications in the early years sector. Several key stakeholders were pursued over a prolonged period but ultimately declined to participate in the research. Securing the participation of senior, strategic personnel is challenging and therefore the participation of the four stakeholders included in this study is especially notable; each of the organisations (London Early Years Foundation, Bright Horizons, the Harmonisation Group and the Early Childhood Studies Degree Network) provided a breadth of opinion on the key issues under investigation. The data generated from this strand of the study extended and illuminated the debates outlined in the literature review and usefully informed the direction of the next stage of the study. The four stakeholders were interviewed around a set of key themes related to the remit of the organisation they represented; views on the major policy shifts and developments to the qualifications and training

framework; comparisons of training and qualification pathways; the relevance and rigour of programmes; the uptake and value of training and qualifications; and finally, ideas for the future (see page 108 for interview schedule). The interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and provided extensive, detailed and rich data upon which chapter four is based.

2.7 On-line survey, discussion forum and marketing materials

41 training providers were invited to participate in the survey; these were providers approved to deliver Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT) according to the www.gov.uk website. Others were invited to take part through a general mailing list for early years training providers. In total 31 out of 41 providers responded to the survey; all of which were Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). Most (77 per cent) were currently delivering the EYITT, and around a quarter were also delivering Early Years Educator training. A large proportion, around 60 per cent, had previously delivered the Early Years Professional Status.

The survey was intended to be quick and easy to complete, and included a short series of open questions in relation to Early Years Educator, Early Years Initial Teacher Training and Early Years Professional Status/Early Years Teacher Status:

- * Who does/did this training route? Who was the typical student?
- * What reason do/did students have for choosing this training route?
- * What difficulties are/were there in delivering this training route?
- * What barriers are/were there in recruiting to this training route?

Answers to these questions generated data which provided insights into: challenges encountered in recruitment to programmes; typical student profiles on the different pathways; and the difficulties and challenges encountered in delivering the programmes (see the survey on page 107). A summary of the responses to these questions is reported in chapter five.

An online forum for training providers to discuss their experiences of delivering different early years training routes was also available following completion of the survey. The discussion forum was set up via: <http://eytraining.freeforums.net/>. Discussion topics included:

- Ofsted inspection of EYITT;

- Lead teachers in maintained settings;
- Recruitment to training pathways;
- Status and pay of EY workers;
- Relationships between training routes and quality; and
- Thoughts and ideas for the future.

Anonymity was assured, however there was very little take-up among respondents. Five participants created an identity for use in the online discussion forum but went on to contribute limited posts in relation to the discussion topics created. The lack of activity persisted despite two email reminders sent to training providers over the duration of the data collection phase. The lack of participation in the online discussion forum may be attributable to various factors including having provided sufficient detail in the survey, lack of time, discomfort in interacting in an online discussion forum, scepticism about the retention of anonymity, and/or uncertainty around engaging in anonymous online discussions with individuals whom they are likely to know in face-to-face contexts.

In addition to the survey and discussion forum a selection of marketing materials (made available by training providers to prospective students) was subjected to analysis. EYTS and EYE courses were identified via the Department for Education list of early years training providers. The search process involved visiting each provider website to identify materials aimed at prospective students. If there were no relevant course-specific materials (e.g. flyer/brochure on EYTS) the relevant full prospectus was downloaded or requested by email. Through this initial search, 22 publications were identified from a total of 41 providers' website (again, those approved to deliver EYITT). Of these, eight publications were selected for more in-depth analysis on the basis that they were:

a) designed to attract potential applicants and therefore provided information about the promoted benefits of pursuing the course; and

b) specific to the qualifications of interest to this research (rather than general publications about the university or about the whole education department).

Of the eight publications, six related to the EYTS qualifications and two related to the EYE qualifications. The small sample of marketing materials for EYE and EYTS were selected and examined to consider the messages being conveyed about working in early years, and the purpose, scope and reasons for

pursuing the course. The policy discourses outlined in the literature review were identified within the marketing materials. Findings and discussion of this exercise are reported in chapter five.

2.8 Case Studies

Based upon the review of literature and the identification of key issues, as well as the concerns identified in an analysis of stakeholder and training provider data, the case studies were focused upon a closer investigation of the PVI sector. Wider debate surrounding the relative quality in PVI provision, and the degree to which PVI places an emphasis on the importance of training and qualifications, alongside the on-going critique of the sector more generally, seemed worthy of further investigation. Penn (2011) is amongst many commentators (see Ball 2013 for example) to directly question the motives of PVI providers and of governments that promote private sector involvement in education provision.

Penn (2011) points out that the government has actively promoted Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) to provide capital for new projects in health and education. Consequently, government has withdrawn from directly providing many social welfare services and instead has encouraged business entrepreneurs or social enterprise organisations to deliver services on a business model, partly funded and regulated by the state. Penn goes on to argue that reliance on the for-profit sector in early years is problematic given that for-profit care is volatile, dependent on local markets for uptake of places, expensive for parents, and frequently poor quality. She claims that there is substantial evidence to suggest that it fails to offer parents increased choice, or more flexible provision. She argues that the childcare market sector warrants more focused attention and emphasises the need for enhanced monitoring, closer analysis of its impact, and evaluation of its contribution to child wellbeing, and to the wider social good. This view of PVI in early childhood services appears to conflate private-for-profit with private-not-for profit and so homogenises a very diverse subsector of the early years.

The Pre-school Learning Alliance (2016) stresses that the PVI sector accounts for most ECEC provision currently available in the UK, and furthermore that the PVI is a very diverse sector with most providers being owner-managed, single-site nurseries that make very little profit/surplus. The PVI sector includes a vast array of nurseries, children's centres, pre-schools, playgroups, many of which are notable for pronounced philosophies – that would appear to sit in tension with a primary objective for generating profit. In his stimulus paper (see chapter seven of this report) Peter Moss, like Penn, was critical of 'business-models' in ECEC. Conflating PVI providers in this way and calling into question 'impact and

contribution to the wellbeing on young children, and the wider social good' seemed an important issue to explore further in this research.

Staff development and the pursuit of qualifications is expensive, so this research sought to identify the priority placed upon, and strategies employed by nurseries in the PVI sector to support staff development and specifically the pursuit of EYE and EYTS. Therefore, three very distinct cases were identified for inclusion: 1) a single-site, owner-managed nursery with untypically high levels of qualifications across the staff team; 2) a group of EYE Apprentices located at the training academy of a London-based social enterprise with 38 nurseries; and 3) a nursery which is part of a large internationally owned private chain that provides in-house training and qualifications including EYE Apprenticeships.

In total 34 participants across the three case studies were interviewed in either one-to-one semi-structured interviews or via focus group discussions. Views and experiences were sought about early years training and qualifications; respondents were asked to compare different pathways and to reflect on the course content of programmes they had either considered, pursued or completed. The precise questions asked are included in the appendix, pages 110 and 112: broadly, views were gathered about personal experiences of identifying, pursuing and completing qualifications and training. Fieldwork visits were made to each setting and in addition to gathering qualitative data relevant background documents were also collected (e.g. Ofsted report, prospectus, training materials).

2.9 One-day event

The study concluded with a one-day seminar. Invitations were sent to over 50 individuals and organisations directly involved in the training and qualifications of the early years sector in varying capacities. Representatives from the civil service, qualification authorities, national early years charitable bodies and advocacy groups, higher education institutions, employee unions, employer organisations, and children's centres were proactively invited. The event was then advertised more widely whereupon individuals could reserve a space via Eventbrite on the university webpage, although places were capped at 50 to ensure manageable and in-depth discussion would be possible. In June 2016, Professor Peter Moss presented a stimulus paper at the event, hosted at Middlesex University. In the paper, Peter Moss outlined his vision for the child, the centre and the worker drawing upon the *Reggio Emilia* approach to early childhood care and education. The audience were then organised in to

four discussion groups and the day concluded with a closing plenary. The day operated on Chatham House Rules whereby all participants agreed to keep the content of discussions confidential, all participants were given a Participant Information Sheet and asked to sign a consent form (see page 114). Confidentiality and anonymity has been maintained through the reporting of the day by not identifying any individual and presenting an account of the discussions thematically. The day generated lively debate and through thematic analysis a series of recommendations were identified (reported in chapter seven).

2.10 Ethics

The study was approved by the Middlesex University Education Ethics Committee and ethical measures taken were in line with the guidelines offered by the British Education Research Association (BERA, 2014). Informed consent was sought from all participants, with the project explained to participants verbally and in writing when invited to take part (see page 116). Completion of the survey was taken as a form of written consent, while separate written consent was sought and obtained from participants in the case studies, interviews and seminar (see page 114). Data was stored securely and has been anonymised in reporting the findings wherever possible. Participants were made aware of the potential limits of anonymity through the information sheet and were informed about the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

2.11 Summary

The mixed-method approach employed in this study enabled the generation of rich, detailed, co-constructed and iterative data that has usefully provided a nuanced account of the issues facing the sector in respect of qualifications and training. Furthermore, a series of important recommendations have been generated via each strand of the study, which are reported throughout the report and specifically mapped out in the final chapter.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Since the late 1990s early childhood care and education has experienced relentless change and policy attention within England (Lightfoot and Frost 2015, 404). Based upon shifts in policy over the last twenty years, there has been a gradual but sustained shift towards professionalising the early years workforce – ‘professionalisation is associated here with moves towards creating a graduate early years workforce’ (Lloyd and Hallet 2010, 2). As well as policies increasing access to childcare provision and early years schooling this shift has been based upon ‘the aim to have graduate leaders in every full daycare setting’ (Payler and Locker 2013, 126).

This review considers policy changes from 1997 onwards – outlining how policy and legislation have altered the qualifications and training pathways within the early years sector; it then focuses on the literature around a number of key areas, including ‘quality’; the importance of early years provision; and the cost and benefits of current/recent early years qualifications.

3.2 Meeting the childcare challenge

Under the New Labour Government (1997-2010) there was a drive towards the professionalisation of the early years workforce, at first through the introduction of a new employment status ‘Senior Practitioner’ which was related to an Early Years Foundation degree. By 2007, 360 students had qualified as Senior Practitioners, but this role was ‘reconceptualised and replaced’ by the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) in the 2006 Childcare Act (Lloyd and Hallet 2010, 7-9). Early Years Professionals (EYPs) were described as ‘the future leaders ... [and] ‘the gold standard’ for professionals working with children under five’ (CWDC 2008). However, from the outset the EYPS was a ‘flawed attempt at professionalising the early years workforce’ (Lloyd and Hallet 2010, 19) as the EYPs were not allowed to work in maintained schools – owing to the fact that the status did not hold equivalency to qualified teacher status (QTS) (Roberts-Holmes 2013, 341) – a qualification required to teach in the state maintained sector in England. Indeed, rather than improving the overall professionalisation of the early years workforce, the lack of parity between EYPS and QTS meant that the divide between teachers and other early years practitioners was further exacerbated (Lloyd and Hallet 2010: 19).

3.3 Shaking the foundations of quality

Perhaps encouraged to act by the inherent problems of EYPS, the Coalition Government of 2010-2015 commissioned an independent review of early education and childcare qualifications in 2011, carried out by Professor Cathy Nutbrown and published by the DfE in 2012. The review was uncompromising in its recommendations and conclusions:

I am concerned that the current early years qualifications system is not systematically equipping practitioners with the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to give babies and young children high quality experiences ... A new long-term vision is needed for the early years workforce, with a reformed system of qualifications to help achieve this. In working towards this vision, a balance must be struck between supporting existing good practice and challenging the sector to ensure provision is high quality in all settings (Nutbrown 2012: 5).

Nutbrown recommended a sweeping series of reforms to the qualifications, training, and career development of the early years workforce, including increasing the number of qualified teachers with specialist knowledge of early years (particularly in leadership roles); making a Level 3 qualification the minimum for all practitioners working in early years; ensuring that qualifications (at both Level 3 and Level 6) were rigorous and challenging; and instigating a renewed focus on professional development for all staff, supported by employers (Nutbrown 2012, 11-12). Perhaps of most interest to many early years professionals was the formal identification of disparities between teachers (i.e. those with QTS working in the early years) and EYPs despite both being graduate positions, as Wild et al. summarise:

Staff with QTS, the highest qualification for those working with children aged 3–7 years, had a career structure and a regulated pay scale. However, those with Early Years Professional Status (EYPS), who had been trained to work with children aged 0–5 years, did not. They did not have similar status recognition to those with QTS because EYPS was not considered to be a qualification, nor – despite sometimes being suggested as equivalent – did EYPS entitle the holder to the same benefits of career and pay provided by QTS (Wild et al., 2015, 231).

3.4 Maintaining the foundations of (in)equality?

The Government's response, in 2013, was published in a paper entitled 'More Great Childcare' (DfE 2013). It rejected the majority of the proposed changes which vexed many: 'equally frustrating for the early childhood sector was the Government's outright rejection of most of the proposals in a review it had itself commissioned' (Lloyd 2015: 149). The paper's major change was the introduction of two new qualification statuses: Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) to replace EYPS; and the Early Years Educator

(EYE) role (a new Level 3 qualification). The Department for Education stated that ‘it is our aspiration that over time, group childcare will increasingly be delivered by Early Years Teachers and Early Years Educators ... we hope parents will come to recognise these titles as benchmarks of quality’ (DfE 2013: 7). The sector’s response to the ‘More Great Childcare’ paper was lukewarm at best; indeed Professor Nutbrown herself criticised the outcome: ‘most of my recommendations had, in effect, been rejected’ (Nutbrown 2013: 3). Chief amongst the concerns was the disparity between the early years qualifications and QTS, as Nutbrown remarked ‘because my recommendation on QTS was not accepted, the hoped for parity with primary and secondary school teachers will not be realised’ (Nutbrown 2013, 7). While the new EYT role carried the same entry requirements as teachers in schools it ‘carries neither Qualified Teacher Status nor the same pay as school teachers’ (Hillman 2015: 19) – making it a less attractive option for prospective students: ‘EYTs are not the graduate-led early childhood workforce with the parity and status of other qualified teachers within the education sector, as envisioned by those campaigning for an EYP or pedagogue’ (Wild et al. 2015: 242).

Despite the recent level of reform there is still considerable variation across the early years sector, specifically between school-based settings and PVI settings. Hillman (2015: 27-28) notes that ‘a much higher proportion of staff in the maintained sector is qualified to Level 6 (degree level) or above’ – i.e. of those that do have qualifications, staff in maintained schools are likely to be qualified to a higher level. This is at odds with the argument that the new qualifications introduced by the Government were intended ‘to move decisively away from the idea that teaching young children is somehow less important or inferior to teaching school age children’ (National College for Teaching and Leadership 2013: 6). Nonetheless, Early Years Teachers do work across the maintained as well as PVI sectors, ‘though they still lack the pay and conditions of those with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and cannot be paid as qualified teachers in the majority of maintained settings, which (as Nutbrown has argued) continues to affect their professional status’ (Barron 2016: 327).

3.5 Educational Excellence Everywhere?

Under the Conservative Government of 2015-onwards the early years policy landscape continued to change: in 2016 the DfE launched a white paper entitled ‘Educational Excellence Everywhere.’ This document (setting out the broad vision of education in England) barely mentions early years, however it does outline changes to QTS and the former minister with responsibility for early years (Sam Gyimah) noted the possibilities that this opened:

The schools white paper includes proposals for the reform of QTS and this provides exciting avenues for us to explore and we will do so. But we must also not lose sight of the fact that the majority of early years teachers work in the PVI sector where QTS is not required, but where specialist graduates can support improved quality (Gyimah, 2016).

It should be noted that there has been a change of both Education Secretary (Justine Greening replacing Nicky Morgan) and the minister with early years responsibility (Caroline Dinenage replacing Sam Gyimah) since the publication of the white paper and as such there is still a great deal of uncertainty surrounding the future direction of education policy more widely, and early years policy specifically. During late-2016 it was expected that a new early years workforce strategy would be launched (although again, this was announced by the current minister's predecessor): 'I hope that this focus on recruitment, retention and progression gives you a sense of what I see as the scope for the workforce strategy and I look forward to sharing more with you later in the year' (Gyimah, 2016). The strategy was released as this report went to press and broadly indicates a continued emphasis on expansion, affordability, quality and accessibility.

The early years workforce and its advocates have, in general, not met these recent policy changes with much enthusiasm. In April 2016 CACHE (the Council for Awards in Care, Health and Education), a body delivering qualifications across the care and education sector, launched a campaign 'Save our Early Years' which was backed by, amongst others, the Preschool Learning Alliance and PACEY (the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years) (Crown 2016). The campaign was directly targeted at the Government's requirement that all Level 3 EYEs had at least a Grade C in GCSE English and maths (and that in order for staff to count in staff-child ratios they must have at least this Level 3 qualification). CACHE claimed that this was a particularly damaging move for apprentices (evidenced with large drops in the number of apprentices starting Level 3 courses) and would lead to a workforce primarily comprised of staff trained only to Level 2 (Crown 2016).

In addition, the lack of parity between EYTS and QTS has been widely criticised (including by Professor Nutbrown, above), and trainees are encouraged to write to their MPs in protest: a template letter distributed amongst trainee groups states that 'we believe that as long as the qualification does not result in achieving QTS then we will never be seen as the equal of qualified teachers' (Unwin 2016).

In 2016, the education trade newspaper 'Schools Week' reported that the implications of recent changes to the early years sector have had very real, and worrying consequences:

'But Schools Week has been told some university courses offering training for Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) are facing closure due to low numbers ... Deborah Lawson, general secretary of Voice the union, told Schools Week the low numbers mean 'the sector is heading towards a recruitment crisis equal to that which we are experiencing in teaching'' (Scott 2016).

It should be noted that although there has been widespread criticism regarding the move to EYTS, this disapproval of the Government's attempted drive towards professionalism is not new: Payler and Locke's research in 2013 noted that participants felt that the EYPS qualifications 'rather than raising the status of early years ... risked replacing an experienced workforce, who had achieved their positions of authority after years of practice through an apprenticeship model of training, with less experienced staff' (p.133).

3.6 Qualified Workforce: Quality Provision?

In addition to the importance of early childhood education more generally, there is evidence that better quality provision can be provided by better qualified staff. The OECD's review of early childhood education and care suggested that better educated teachers with specialised training 'are more effective in providing stimulating staff-child interactions' and 'qualified teachers are better able to engage children, elicit their ideas and monitor their progress' (OECD 2011). Both the Nutbrown review and the 'More Great Childcare' paper recognised this; however, they proposed differing responses. The Nutbrown Review 'stresses the importance of training the early years workforce in high-quality settings and supported by highly qualified staff' while the Government response emphasises that a high-quality workforce would free 'high quality' providers to offer a greater number of places in settings, thus allowing a market solution to the increased need for available early childhood provision' (Wild et al. 2015, 241). Wild et al. (op cit.,) go on to make the observation that, whereas Nutbrown focused on 'quality provision being an investment in the child's future well-being', the 'More Great Childcare' report was instead concerned with 'economic investment' (Wild et al. 2015, 241) as a mechanism to achieve leaner child adult ratios, school readiness and academic performance of our youngest children.

Hillman (2015: 8) argued that there was 'a strong relationship between the level of staff qualifications and the quality of early years education and childcare'. The Effective Provision of Preschool Education

(EPPE) project (Sylva et al. 2004) and the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) project (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002) (longitudinal research projects concerned with effectiveness of early years provision) both found that ‘there was higher overall quality provision where there was evidence of strong leadership and a trained teacher acting and where a good proportion of staff were graduate and teacher qualified’ – making ‘a clear connection between highly qualified staff and high quality service for children and families’ (Roberts-Holmes 2013, 340-1). In their wide-reaching evaluation of the Graduate Leader Fund (Government funding enabling PVI providers to employ graduate level staff) Mathers et al. (2011, 2) found that ‘the qualification level of the whole staff team was significantly related to quality, particularly in the more ‘educational’ dimensions of provision for pre-school children’. They went on to note that:

Settings which gained a graduate leader with EYPS made significant improvements in quality for pre-school children (30 months to five years), as compared with settings which did not. The evidence also suggests that EYPS provided ‘added value’ over and above gaining a graduate (Mathers et al. 2011: 2).

3.7 Beyond Quality...

It is important to acknowledge that the term ‘quality’ is much contested (Osgood and Giugni, 2016): it is ‘neither neutral nor self-evident, but saturated with values and assumptions’ (Moss 2016: 10). Moss goes on to stress that quality is a constructed concept, and indeed it is often used as a proxy for ‘good’ education, which is also ill-defined:

We can only evaluate early childhood education – make meaning of it and a judgement of value – by first deciding what we think is ‘good’ education, and deciding that depends on our answers to political questions, answers that will never be unanimously agreed (Moss 2016: 12).

To conceptualise what ‘good’ or ‘quality’ early childhood education might be necessitates asking what and who should it be for? There is much debate about the purpose of early years provision; whilst the school-readiness agenda captured in policy discourse stresses the need to prepare young children for primary school there are numerous counter positions, many underpinned by philosophical conceptualisations of the child, that view childhood as more than simply preparation for adulthood. These counter arguments stress the distinction between early childhood *education* and *care*. For example, Trevarthan (2011) argues that early years institutions should encourage learning, but clearly differentiates this from ‘schooling’:

Preschool nurseries should encourage children to learn from adventurous play in a rich environment ... children too young to benefit from classroom schooling are eager participants in peer communities with their own meanings, arts and techniques (p.175).

Yet it is evident that 'school readiness' is a key priority for Ofsted, as stressed in a report published in 2014. Ofsted's conceptualisation of 'school readiness' is framed by ideas that young children must be ready to conform to the specific demands of a defined school routine and curriculum, rather than as a process of co-creating learning spaces and activities, and building relationships. The early years workforce is judged against government defined measures of 'quality', which in turn are determined by a narrow definition of 'school readiness' and specific measures of child outcomes at developmental stages. For these reasons debates about 'quality' in early childhood persist and remain heavily politicised (see Jones *et al.* (2016) and Cannella *et al.* (2016) for further elaboration). These broader debates about 'quality' have a direct bearing upon the expectations of the early years workforce, the ways in which their performance will be assessed, and therefore the emphasis that is placed on certain qualifications and training over others (i.e. those that promote technical competence and delivery of prescribed outcomes over developing criticality and reflexivity).

3.8 A level playing field?

The differences between the maintained and PVI sectors are further emphasised through the link between qualifications and quality. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the House of Lords Select Committee on Affordable Childcare found that 'the maintained sector employs a greater proportion of staff at a higher level of qualification than the PVI sector' and that 'provision in the maintained sector is correspondingly found to be of higher quality on average than that in the PVI sector' (Select Committee on Affordable Childcare 2015: 10).

Not all literature supports the view that a better qualified workforce will automatically lead to better quality provision. Sims-Schouten and Stittrich-Lyons (2014) criticised the Government's persistent emphasis on the links 'between qualifications for the early years workforce and high-quality early years care and education'; their research with trainee early years practitioners found that participants were often 'very defensive in their talk of their abilities when it comes to working with children' which they attributed to 'the Government's continued focus on their lack of skill and motivation prior to doing the course' (Sims-Schouten and Stittrich-Lyons 2014: 51). However, in general the link does seem to be

supported by a weight of evidence. The impact of staff quality appears to be particularly important for disadvantaged pupils: Pascal and Bertram (2013) found that altering the mixture of staff working with disadvantaged children (to give those children access to highly trained practitioners) could lead to improved educational and health outcomes. Indeed, the same authors argued in a later paper that ‘a well-trained early years’ workforce, with high levels of qualification and access to ongoing professional development, is vital to close the achievement gap between children from poorer homes and their peers’ (Bertram and Pascal 2014: 48-9). This view is supported by evidence from Ofsted’s research, which showed that disadvantaged children made the strongest progress in early years settings that had highly qualified and trained staff (Ofsted 2014). The Select Committee on Affordable Childcare also found that ‘high quality early education for three and four-year-olds has the potential to improve outcomes for all children and especially so for the most disadvantaged’ (Select Committee on Affordable Childcare 2015: 9).

3.9 Exchange value of qualifications in the early years ‘market’

The individual costs of pursuing early years qualifications and the ultimate exchange value they represent within the labour market is a source of much discussion and represents the remainder of this review. One of the key criticisms of early years qualifications – which severely impairs the value that such qualifications hold, is, as has been pointed out already, the lack of QTS equivalency. Both EYPS and EYTS¹ do not generally enable practitioners to lead practice in the maintained sector and, as Lloyd and Hallet remarked of the EYPS, these new qualifications are positioned ‘almost in opposition to existing qualifications’ (2010: 80). Nutbrown’s review of the status of early years qualifications and training highlighted the lack of parity with QTS, and one of the key aims of her review was ‘to end the disparity that many people holding EYPS were concerned about’ (2013: 7). The Government’s response and the introduction of EYTS, however, did little to remedy this situation or assuage the worries of early years practitioners:

Yet again, those who work with young children are offered a lesser status (and, we should realistically anticipate, poorer pay and conditions than those who work with older children) but a title that makes them appear to have the same role and status (Nutbrown 2013: 7).

¹ Early Years Teachers with EYTS can work in maintained settings. However, only those who meet the legal definition of a school teacher with QTS can lead teaching in a maintained nursery school or a nursery class in a maintained school for children aged three and over.

Closely linked to this disparity between EYTS and QTS, the level of pay on offer for early years workers (particularly those qualified to graduate level) reinforces the differences between these two routes. A recent Sutton Trust report recommended that increased pay would 'reduce staff turnover, helping to provide the stability and continuity in staffing which is so crucial for children under the age of three' but would also, significantly, 'improve practitioner status and aid recruitment' (Mathers *et al.* 2014: 7). As well as creating disparity between the early years and the maintained school sectors through the qualifications themselves, the status of the early years profession is further degraded by this disparity of such working conditions. This has clear implications for the quality of provision in early years settings: the recruitment crisis mentioned above (Scott 2016) is only likely to worsen when the incentives to undertake early years training continue to lag behind QTS routes:

It is a false economy to fail to invest to a level sufficient to ensure high quality provision and therefore improved outcomes. We therefore recommend that the Government reviews the current distribution of resources within the overall budget for early education and childcare support, and considers how resources are prioritised to ensure that all settings, whether in the PVI or maintained sector, are able to employ well-qualified and trained staff, to deliver the child outcomes which the policy was designed to achieve (Select Committee on Affordable Childcare 2015: 10-11).

3.10 Continuing Professional Development

A further related aspect is the continuing professional development (CPD) on offer to early years workers. Osgood (2012) has previously noted that the opportunity for professional development is vital, over and above mandatory technical training. However, the current CPD landscape in England is 'noticeably characterised by the limited extent of employer involvement, and a reliance on formal training courses, with minimal use of onsite mentoring, blended and online learning' (Hordern 2013: 107), in contrast to the majority of other OECD countries (OECD 2012). Hordern goes on to put forward the idea that this might indicate the framework for development of early years staff does not encourage 'employers and practitioners to take responsibility for CPD in the context of ongoing practice improvement' (2013: 107). Ofsted have previously identified that the best settings use data on child progression to shape the professional development of their staff (2014: 18), but it remains far from clear whether responsibility for staff CPD resides within settings or whether it should be addressed more broadly.

While the importance of CPD is relatively accepted, the OECD evidence (above) indicates that provision in England still has some way to go just to reach the level found in other comparable nations. International evidence suggests that CPD interventions which are directly integrated into an early years setting's practice 'with a focus on reflection that leads to changes in practice and curricula (feedback component) are effective'; while initiatives that 'build upon practitioners' needs and participation are found to be successful in increasing pedagogical awareness and professional understanding' (Peeters *et al.* 2015: 1-2). Meanwhile, recommendations from a small-scale study with early years educators centred around the creation of a learning community to foster professional development activities, points out that 'specific support, in terms of planned intervention and dedicated structures, activities and tools' were key in terms of inspiring and engaging practitioners (Lightfoot and Frost 2015, 415). When this perspective is combined with the fact that Fairchild's research showed that one of the main barriers to CPD was 'getting time off from work' (2012: 3) it is clear that the early years training route (when viewed holistically as encompassing CPD) is not supported by employers and settings as well as it might be.

These issues all feed in to a broader discussion around professionalism within the early childhood education sector (one of the main drivers behind government reform over the past twenty years). Research from a longitudinal study on EYPS in 2012 showed that the award had produced mixed results in terms of professionalisation: while a majority of those with EYPS said that it had improved their own sense of professional status, two-thirds 'felt that other professionals had little understanding of EYPS' and '91 per-cent felt that, in general, people outside the early years sector did not understand it' (Hadfield *et al.* 2012: 5-6). While Sims-Schouten and Stittrich-Lyons (2014: 51) argued that 'early years practitioners are professionals by default (regardless of undertaking a HE degree)' without the recognition of those outside the sector, this assertion counts for little. Indeed, the aforementioned authors' research with early years workers found that participants often stated that they simply 'worked with children' when quizzed on their role – suggesting that how they constructed a professional identity was somewhat limited (p.51):

Instead of constructing themselves as the ultimate professionals who are in the unique position of drawing on extensive practical knowledge and experience, whilst embarking on academic study, they talk about themselves in terms of 'low confidence' and 'little knowledge' (op.cit: 51).

After the introduction of EYPS there had been hope that the new qualifications framework would help further imbue the workforce, and the perceptions of the workforce, with a sense of professionalism. However, as Roberts-Holmes (2013: 349) pointed out, although the EYPS had an emphasis on pedagogical leadership, ‘these emerging early years graduate leaders have been predominately located within the PVI sector which through a process of market forces may inadvertently serve to undermine that newly developing professional status’. There is no evidence that the introduction of EYTS has, or will, do anything to change this. Chalke (2013) argued that while specialist teachers (and by proxy, specialist qualifications) within early years were important, moving towards a new professionalism within the sector would require more:

While it is vital we have early years specialist teachers, that is only half the battle for changing the professional identity and consequently the conditions of all those working with young children. I argue that it is important to seek to capture and promote aspects of a ground-up professionalism such as: the pedagogical approach that allows recognition of work with the child, as well as with their parent and carers; the recognition of the mindful requirements of an ethic of care; and the importance of reflexivity for professional practice (Chalke 2013: 219).

The myriad policy changes that have taken place in England have failed to attend to such aspects and therefore fallen short of their desired aims. Although the landscape of early years qualifications and training has certainly changed over the last twenty years, the hierarchy between professionals working in schools (usually teachers with QTS) and those working in early years, persists, and has important implications (Chalke 2013: 211). The lack of parity between both EYPS and EYTS and QTS has meant that those working in early years settings feel devalued and this is likely to have contributed to the growing shortage of trainee practitioners within the sector. Furthermore, the low pay often associated with early years roles and, in some cases, lack of embedded professional development opportunities paint an unjust and deeply problematic picture.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This review of literature indicates that there has been a sustained policy-driven agenda to professionalise the ECEC workforce over the past two decades. This has involved the introduction of new roles and qualifications including Senior Practitioner, which was quickly replaced by Early Years Professional (EYP) – both charged with leading practice and raising standards across the sector. However, a prolonged period of policy reform failed to address the lack of parity that graduates working

in ECEC (EYPS) experienced compared to graduate teachers (with QTS) working in the state maintained sector. In 2011, the government commissioned an independent review by Professor Cathy Nutbrown which set out a series of recommendations to reform qualifications in ECEC, most notable was the call to increase the number of qualified early years teachers, and for Level 3 to represent the minimum qualification for the ECEC workforce. The review also recommended that there should be a renewed emphasis on professional development for the entire workforce.

However, in 2013, the government of the day rejected many of the recommendations set out in the Nutbrown Review, although new qualifications at Level 6: Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) and Level 3: Early Years Educator (EYE) were introduced. EYTS was met with much controversy because it lacked qualified teacher status thereby maintaining many of the inequalities that have blighted the ECEC workforce when compared to the maintained statutory school sector. At the time of writing the long awaited Early Years Workforce Strategy, promised following the publication of the government's most recent white paper: Education Excellence Everywhere (DfE, 2016), was still to be announced. In lieu of the strategy however was the demand that new recruits to the workforce must hold GCSE grades A-C in Maths and English, and there was continued uncertainty about whether EYTs would have QTS. These two factors have contributed to a 'crisis' characterised by recruitment, retention and progression problems across the sector (NDNA 2016a).

Despite sustained reform considerable variation across the early years sector remains, specifically between school-based settings and private, voluntary, independent (PVI) settings. Hillman (2015) noted that staff in the maintained sector are more typically qualified to Level 6 (degree level) or above. Also important is the fact that whilst Early Years Teachers are employed in the maintained as well as PVI sectors, they lack the pay and conditions of those with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and cannot be paid as qualified teachers in the majority of maintained settings, which continues to affect their professional status (Nutbrown 2013; Barron 2015).

The literature revealed that the early years workforce is routinely judged against government defined measures of 'quality', which in turn are determined by a narrow definition of 'school readiness' and specific measures of child outcomes at developmental stages. Broader debates about 'quality' have a direct bearing upon the expectations of the workforce, the ways in which performance is assessed, and therefore the emphasis that is placed on certain qualifications and training over others (i.e. those that

promote technical competence and delivery of prescribed outcomes above developing criticality and reflexivity).

The literature reviewed presents a dynamic landscape where disparities between professionals working in schools (usually teachers with QTS) and those working in early years, persists, with important implications (Chalke 2013). Public perceptions of the workforce, structural inequalities including poor pay and inadequate professional development opportunities renew concerns about recruitment, retention and quality across the ECEC workforce.

Chapter Four: Stakeholder Views

4.1 Introduction

Following on from the review of literature was a series of semi-structured interviews with a small sample of key stakeholders in early childhood education. Each of the four participants held long careers in early childhood, spanning more than 25 years as practitioners, trainers/educators, assessors, leaders but currently occupying roles with strategic remits. All had been directly involved, to varying extents, with the Nutbrown Review and related consultation exercises. Collectively the stakeholders contribute to policy debates in early childhood through a range of mechanisms from public events, networking activities to publishing position papers and engaging in face-to-face interchange with ministers.

The four stakeholder organisations included:

1. London Early Years Foundation (LEYF) is the largest charitable childcare social enterprise in the UK with 38 nurseries comprised of 670 staff and 60 apprentices. LEYF began life as the Westminster Health Society in 1903 with the aim of providing health education and training to local residents living in poverty. Over time it developed to provide nursery provision and nursery nurse training, and then became an NVQ assessment centre in the 1990s. In 2006 it became a charitable social enterprise and by 2009 was renamed LEYF to reflect its London-wide remit. LEYF provides in-house training and professional development opportunities as well as making use of external provision.
2. Early Childhood Studies Degree Network (ECSDN) is an influential network of providers of early childhood degree programmes. It was established in 1993 to provide a critical perspective and a forum for the advancement of early years policy, initiatives and legislation by participating in national and international debate and consultation.
3. The Harmonisation Group is a recently established (2015) consortium of Higher Education Institutions involved in the delivery of early childhood programmes (EYPS, EYTS, EYITT, EYE). It was formed in response to the most recent policy shifts in early childhood education and training that has resulted in a reduction in the number of providers and the dissolution of consortia and partnerships. The inclusion of Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT) in the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) inspection framework during 2014/15 enhanced the need for a forum.

4. Bright Horizons is one of the biggest chain providers of private day nursery provision in the UK and Ireland with over 200 nurseries (and hundreds more globally). As an organisation it claims to have a 'world class workforce' comprised of 'highly qualified, motivated teams that work collaboratively in an environment that encourages professionalism, growth, diversity and a strong sense of purpose' (Bright Horizons, 2016). Bright Horizons provide training opportunities to its staff from Level 2 Apprenticeship to Level 7 Leadership programmes.

The views that were expressed by the four stakeholder interviewees representing their organisation were informed by their personal careers and professional trajectories in early childhood but also by their position in relation to key policy developments in early childhood training and qualifications more broadly. The stakeholders were asked to provide a brief overview of their involvement and experiences of early years training and qualifications over time. They were also invited to reflect upon the Nutbrown Review, specifically its recommendations and subsequent impact. As individuals with strategic insights, the stakeholders were asked to outline the key strengths offered by differing training options available to the early years workforce, at different career stages, and to identify what they considered to be the major issues currently facing the sector and to suggest examples of effective practice (see page 108 for interview schedule).

4.2 Does qualified mean quality?

The interviews offered wide-ranging discussion about the perceived correlation between qualifications and quality in early childhood, with reference to much of the literature outlined in chapter three, especially the EPPE research (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.* 2002) that stressed that the relationship is incontestable and significant. Given the plethora of qualifications and statuses that have characterised the early years field for many years there was a general sense that it was important to achieve greater clarity about the various pathways on offer and to establish the degree of parity between alternative routes. But all acknowledged that the current early years training and qualification landscape was perhaps the most cluttered and confusing it had ever been. The constant rate and pace of change to the range of qualifications available to the workforce was a cause of great concern and frustration.

4.3 NNEB: 'The Gold Standard'?

All of the stakeholders discussed the NNEB Diploma in Nursery Nursing (Level 3) and how it has become widely revered in recent debates about what constitutes a 'good quality' early childhood qualification.

Although there lacked universal consensus on whether the NNEB should be hailed ‘the gold standard’ certain aspects of the programme were felt to constitute rigour and quality, as one stakeholder explained:

“... the NNEB was the option for people wanting to work in childcare as an alternative to teaching. It was a full-time course delivered over two years (with the Norland NNEB being the platinum route). NNEB required trainees to engage deeply with the practical application of theory, to experience a range of placements, undertake extensive observations and prepare detailed child case studies. It provided a thorough grounding for people wanting to work with young children.”

But all acknowledged that the NNEB Diploma existed during a very different political and economic era when aspiring nursery nurses were fully funded to pursue full-time programmes of study. With policy intensification came demands for greater efficiency in the delivery, assessment and award of qualifications. The elements of the NNEB Diploma held in high regard included: the concern to understand child development from birth-to-seven; and practical, detailed case studies that effectively enabled students to put theory to work in order to develop a depth of understanding that is missing from contemporary Level 3 programmes.

4.4 Education, Education, Education

All four stakeholders looked back to 1997 as a pivotal moment when the early childhood workforce attracted unprecedented and intensified policy attention. The Labour government’s pledge to invest in early childhood provision, and the ensuing professionalisation agenda as outlined in *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (DfE 1997), required that early years trainers, employers and staff had to engage with demands made by politicians in a way not experienced previously. The government investment in early childhood education and care services was felt to come at a price, since the accelerated targets for expansion ‘left a great strain on quality, with candidates rushed through on NVQ programmes with less rigorous standards’.

4.5 Graduate or Graduate-led profession?

In 2004, the government set targets for all early years settings to be graduate-led. There then followed debate about whether this was ambitious enough, or too ambitious, given the accelerated way in which

the targets were to be met (i.e. through fast track Early Years Professional Status, potentially deploying graduates from unrelated fields of study with little or no practical experience of working with young children). The stakeholders broadly shared a view that having graduates in a staff team was beneficial to the quality of early childhood pedagogy and care but only where the degree was sufficiently specialist and informed by practice. Other measures that were put in place to achieve the goal of increased numbers of graduates in the profession were viewed more favourably than EYPS. A particular example quoted was the Graduate Leader Fund, which had enabled 40 per cent of staff at LEYF nurseries to gain degrees, which might otherwise have been a struggle.

The removal of the Graduate Leader Fund was thought to have resulted in individual staff members self-financing Foundation Degrees or taking on Student Loans to pursue degree programmes or dismissing the possibility of gaining a degree altogether. Employers can of course determine whether to fund staff from their budgets, but even in large, profit-making chains such as Bright Horizons, this is decided locally by the managers at each nursery since they hold their own budgets. This means that equality of opportunity to pursue degrees is compromised and at the behest of localised decision-making. As one stakeholder expressed the situation:

“Recognition of qualifications in terms of pay is determined by individual nurseries, what they prioritise: it’s up to the owner-manager how they recognise qualifications and how they support staff – and that, sadly is largely determined by the market.”

Throughout this research, as reported in chapter six, examples exist of individual PVI nurseries investing heavily in staff development and identifying ways and means to ensure that staff who wish to pursue higher qualifications are enabled to do so, but this was far from the norm across the sector according to the stakeholders (and as mapped out in the previous chapter). One stakeholder highlighted that the EYTS includes ‘Employer enhancement’ in the form of support for day release, rather than requiring students to attend programmes in the evenings. Furthermore, the course incurs no student fees and so effectively recruits and retains applicants (as outlined in chapter five and further illustrated in chapter six).

The interviewees questioned the consistency of quality across HE programmes, especially the practical relevance of some degrees, and an unhealthy preoccupation with outcomes on others. It was vehemently argued that degree programmes should introduce students to appropriate theories that can

be usefully applied to practice, furthermore degrees should be demanding and rigorous. Where degree course content was considered too abstract, or overly instrumental (i.e. 'little more than ticking boxes'), one respondent asked a set of probing questions:

“Can anyone really prove to me that as a result of studying a degree the pedagogy is stronger? Is there sufficient evidence that having a degree makes a significant difference to the experience of the children? What does it mean when somebody says they have a degree? How does that translate into their practice?”

The stakeholder interviewees representing universities were much more confident that the higher-level qualifications, including degrees, were of demonstrable value because they create space and opportunities for students to work with theory to “understand the why, not just the how, of practice”. Although they also recognised that it was neither desirable nor necessary for all, or the majority, of the workforce to be educated to degree level:

“Not everyone is going to be a graduate professional; because for some, they don’t want to be; they want to work with children; they want to work in a vocational way, academia does not interest them and that is absolutely fine and experience should be recognised and command a decent level of pay too.”

Hierarchies relating to different qualifications held by members of a staff team were reflected upon and therefore the need for clear qualification structures, pathways and parity across the sector was called for. The introduction of the Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) and the absence of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) was a source of great frustration and resentment. At worst, it was viewed as a deliberate strategy by government to undermine and devalue the pursuit of Level 7 qualifications by early years staff as it rested upon economic imperatives that would provide continued justification for low salaries; and at best it was considered “*disastrous, badly thought-through and inequitable*”.

4.6 Affordable (or) quality?

The Tickell Review (2011) followed not long after by The Nutbrown Review in 2012, were embraced optimistically by all four stakeholder interviewees, each of whom had actively engaged in the consultation exercises and sought to ensure that their concerns and suggestions were made known. Following lengthy and thorough exchanges of opinion about how best to determine the ways in which quality could be improved, and the workforce supported to further professionalise, it became apparent

that the government was primarily concerned to identify the most cost effective ways to expand provision, but as one stakeholder bluntly stated: *'quality is not possible if it's done on the cheap'*. This view was shared by others who stressed that to raise the qualifications of an entire workforce requires sustained and thoughtful investment; they argued that quality by its very definition cannot be 'affordable'; it takes dedicated commitment and investment from the state (as in Scandinavian countries) and a recognition of the depth of knowledge and expertise required to work with young children and their families effectively.

"The intention of the Nutbrown Review was good; we need to understand what drives good quality, but there is the expansion policy to contend with, and that forces people (childcare employers) to retreat to what they know but without a clue what all the different qualifications mean."

Bright Horizons was represented on the panel of The Nutbrown Review and The Tickell Review that preceded it. According to the stakeholder, there was a strong argument to aspire to a return to the NNEB National Diploma to address issues of quality at Level 3. Hence this became a recommendation put forward by Tickell in her review. Subsequently, Nutbrown invested considerable time and energy seeking to understand the strong attachment that many in the sector held to the NNEB National Diploma. As part of the review process the syllabus of NNEB was compared to existing Level 3 pathways on offer at the time. With its firm focus on birth-to-seven, grounding in theories of child development, and evidence of rigorous teaching and assessment, alongside diversity of experience (through several lengthy placements) it was deemed unrivalled by work-based Level 3 models (typically NVQs) where often assessors held the same level of qualification as the student, and the quality of provision was questionable (which was reiterated by case study participants, as reported in chapter six). Therefore, The Nutbrown Review made the recommendation to introduce the Level 3, Early Years Educator (birth-to-seven) and to push for improvements to the quality of teaching and assessment at Level 3.

4.7 Apprenticeships

As outlined in the previous chapter, the A-C grade GCSE entry point for Apprenticeships is deeply problematic for the early years sector and has had a demonstrably negative impact upon recruitment and retention of staff. For example, LEYF reported an 80 per cent drop in recruitment and a 96 per cent drop in Apprenticeships directly attributed to the requirement for applicants to hold GCSE Maths and English grades A-C upon application. This is further exacerbated by the need for more staff to satisfy the

demands to deliver 15 hours, recently increased to 30 hours, of free provision. All stakeholders asserted that the current scenario caused by the government's demand for more childcare *and* the higher entry qualifications, was contributing to a 'crisis' in childcare. Again, this was felt to be the result of ill-informed and short-sighted policy-making that failed to fully comprehend the complexities of early childhood provision. Whilst all stakeholders shared the view that the workforce must be aspirant, fit for purpose, and delivering the highest standards of education and care to young children, all were sceptical that possessing a specific set of GCSEs upon entry could assure this. One stakeholder suggested that a more effective approach would be to consider introducing functional skills in numeracy, literacy and ICT, specifically relevant to work with young children in early childhood contexts, as she explained: *"We would be better having a set of functional skills that are designed to enable us to create staff who are confident and competent in the mathematical learning that children need in an under 5's setting."*

This is an issue that has been taken up by Save Our Early Years Campaign (www.saveourearyears.org.uk) supported by many sector organisations, including LEYF. The campaign calls for government to reverse its decisions that all Level 3 Early Years Educators (EYEs) must have at least a Grade C in GCSE English and maths to count in staff ratios, and that no equivalent at Level 2, such as Functional Skills, can be allowed. The campaigners are concerned that there will be a significant shortfall in the number of Level 3 EYEs, which according to the stakeholders interviewed for this research, appears to be the case. The campaigners are also concerned that the GCSE policy directly threatens the quality of care in early years settings, and that childcare costs for parents will increase. It also puts at risk the Government's manifesto pledge to give working parents 30 hours free childcare for their three- and four-year-olds.

Members of the Harmonisation Group were also reportedly troubled by the A-C entry point in Maths, English and Science for EYITT and held the view that it would be more fruitful and effective for applicants to demonstrate academic attainment and competence via other methods. The participant described the widespread use of equivalency.com which provides on-line resources and training, and assessment to prove equivalent competence. This approach does not require classroom instruction or the need to sit a set of GCSEs that have already been negatively encountered by these students, and for whom the likelihood of success a second time around is highly questionable. Equivalency.com allows students to pursue the training at their own pace and then undertake a skills test. HEIs have set up workshops to assist applicants to pursue this method of attaining the necessary core skills. Nevertheless,

recruitment on to university programmes has been severely adversely affected. Amongst the members of the Harmonisation Group there was debate about whether equivalency testing could demonstrate parity and some continued to insist the students should have GCSEs grade A-C upon entry².

Bright Horizons recognised during the Nutbrown Review that requirements for GCSEs in Maths and English at Grades A-C would be an enormous issue:

“It was something that many in the sector wished to bury their heads in the sand about and hope it would disappear. But Bright Horizons recognised that there was a clear government agenda pushing it and that it was not going to go away.”

In anticipation of the English government’s insistence for new applicants and existing staff to hold GCSE grades A-C, Bright Horizons registered with the Joint Council for Qualifications Tutors so that the organisation could be formally registered as an academic centre for GCSE exams.

4.8 Regulation of training providers and awarding bodies

The expedient ways in which universities, training providers and employers respond to government demands are captured in some of the examples above, i.e. using resources such as equivalency.com and taking GCSE assessment in-house. But the issue of how the increasing range of organisations involved in working to satisfy the demands of rapidly and constantly shifting political imperatives raises a set of important considerations. The stakeholders each stressed that they were concerned by the lack of regulation of independent training providers, making reference to the DfE’s list of ‘full and recognised’ qualifications/providers they stressed that the on-line system to determine whether courses and providers are recognised was cumbersome and confusing.

To overcome some of the perceived dangers, complexities and uncertainties about the choice of qualification and provider, both LEYF and Bright Horizons have developed programmes of in-house training. Stakeholders from both these organisations stressed the variable and inconsistent practices of the Awarding Bodies of Level 3 qualifications, where some include Level 2 and 3 units whilst others include Level 2, 3 and 4 units. As employers, LEYF and Bright Horizons emphasised that it was impossible to know the variation between different qualifications at the same level offered by different providers.

² EYTS is the only training that permits a GCSE equivalent rather than full GCSEs that are required at Levels 3, 4, 5 and degree level for all post 2014 qualifications. EYITT providers often signpost applicants without GCSEs to organisations offering possibilities to attain equivalents, such as equivalencytesting.com

For individual members of the early years workforce, and those aspiring to enter the sector, identifying appropriate qualifications and training providers is a confusing, time consuming and expensive undertaking (as discussed in more detail in the next chapter). There are serious questions to be addressed about parity and quality of seemingly equivalent qualifications.

Bright Horizon's approach to addressing this has been to develop in-house training at Level 3 by applying for direct grant status with the Skills Funding Agency to deliver Apprenticeships stemming from concern about the quality of teaching and assessment available more generally. The EYE Apprenticeship at Bright Horizons was developed by a cross-functional group comprising representatives from across Bright Horizons, including educators working directly with children, to determine which Awarding Body to use. They reviewed three Awarding Bodies and each presented its programme to the company; the Awarding Body offering a Level three qualification that comprised units at Level 2, 3 and 4 units was considered the best quality and to offer the appropriate level of rigour for Level 3 educators to work towards and ultimately achieve. LEYF decided to take Apprenticeships in-house and this was the focus of one of the case studies reported in the next chapter.

4.9 Investment in PVI

As the largest providers of ECEC, the stakeholders argued that government should recognise the significance of the PVI sector and the fact that most nurseries in this sector are single-providers run by owner-managers (Pre-school Learning Alliance 2016). The economies of scale found in organisations such as Bright Horizons and LEYF make certain approaches to recruitment and staff development possible by bringing aspects in-house as described above and illustrated in chapter six. The vast majority of PVI nurseries however, are heavily reliant upon the market for training and development opportunities available to staff. A recently published NDNA Workforce Survey (NDNA 2016a) reveals that levels of qualifications within the early years workforce are dropping (numbers of Level 3 qualified staff and above have dropped from 83 percent to 75 per cent since 2015). The overall staff turnover is higher than in previous years, at 19 per cent with turnover at Level 3 being 21 percent, reportedly due to low wages and lack of progression, i.e. it is not possible to progress from Levels 1 and 2 if the A-C GCSE requirements are not met. The survey also found that the majority of employers who responded have reduced staff training budgets as a result of the heavy financial burdens stemming from using

agency staff to cover vacancies, keeping pace with the National Living Wage and pension auto-enrolment costs.

In this research, we found that individual members of the workforce are typically responsible for the identification, funding and pursuit of training and qualifications, quite often in their own time outside of working hours. Therefore, stakeholders stressed a need for higher standards of quality assurance for small employers (releasing and/or supporting their staff to pursue further qualifications) and for the individual members of the workforce who are often self-financing and squeezing the pursuit of qualifications into already overstretched and demanding lives.

At the time of the research Ofsted required that 55 per cent of staff should be qualified to Level 3, and that there should be graduate leaders in each nursery setting. Stakeholders stressed that such demands should be facilitated by serious and sustained investment and through the careful regulation of the training provision market to ensure that the pursuit of qualifications is worthwhile and that the qualification awarded is recognisable and acknowledges the heavy investments made by trainees and their employers. Successive governments over the past two decades have aimed to increase the levels of qualification across the sector, which is generally welcomed, as this stakeholder quote illustrates:

“We have always operated on an 80 per cent or above Level 3; and one graduate in each setting in a leadership role, as a minimum. And the rest are working towards. I’ve always had those kinds of standards because I think it is important that we raise the status of the sector and we raise expectations placed upon any staff member working with children.”

For staff working in settings that lack the resources and economies of scale to provide in-house training and/or commit to heavy investments in staff development, qualification levels are more variable. Small PVI providers need financial investment and clear direction on how to raise the qualifications across their staff teams. However, investment alone will achieve little until the largely unregulated training provision available, which creates a confusing, uneven and inequitable market place, is addressed. All four stakeholders stressed that if employees in a poorly paid sector are to pursue qualifications from Level 3 to Level 7, the courses should be fit for purpose, rigorous, recognisable and reputable. At present the workforce is offered a vast array of qualifications (many unrecognised) from countless providers (many unregulated). Following heavy personal investment (in terms of time and money) they risk completing courses with qualifications that lack status and parity. This situation is further

compounded when early years students realise that exactly the same demands have been made of them as of teachers in the statutory sector, but this is reflected in neither pay nor status, and lacks transferability. The stakeholders each voiced frustrations that the recommendations within the Nutbrown Review that sought to establish clarity, parity, and rigour in the pathways available to the early years sector were dismissed and there has consequently been a reactionary, piecemeal and largely unregulated implementation of reforms which has generated greater confusion and complexity.

4.10 Stakeholder Recommendations

The four stakeholder interviewees were asked to make a series of recommendations for training and qualifications in ECEC. All staunchly argued that Early Years Teacher Status (Level 6) should hold QTS and therefore achieve parity with comparable teaching qualifications that are recognised in the statutory sector. With respect to the newly introduced Early Years Educator (Level 3) qualification there was agreement that there should be a greater focus on birth-to-three-year-olds both within curriculum content and on-placement (as had been the case in the 'gold standard' NNEB training). Meanwhile, replacing the requirement for GCSEs grade A-to-C with in-work assessment of functional skills was considered an effective way to address the 'crisis' in recruitment and progression yet still ensure that staff demonstrated numeracy and literacy relevant to work with young children.

More generally, the interviewees identified a need to update the curriculum content on all programmes to include (action) research, arguing that systematic reflection on early years practice engenders criticality and hence will improve the quality of ECEC provision. The four stakeholder interviewees all expressed concerns about the lack of regulation of both training provider and qualifications that currently exists on 'the open market'. Finally, a recommendation for sustained investment was voiced, specifically in the form of bursaries which would enable members of the workforce to pursue high quality, specialist, recognised training and qualifications.

Chapter Five: Training providers

5.1 Introduction

Given the small-scale, and therefore limited scope of this study, it was important to recognise the extent to which the contributions of all major stakeholder groups could be effectively captured and represented. To ensure that the views and experiences of training providers were included in the study we undertook key interviews with individuals who represented the strategic views of stakeholders (as outlined in the previous chapter; the Harmonisation Group and the Early Childhood Studies Degree Network are important representational bodies that speak on behalf of Higher Education institutions with responsibility for delivering Early Years qualifications. Meanwhile, LEYF and Bright Horizons, as large employers, are also responsible for the delivery of in-house training and qualifications to the early years workforce from Apprenticeship to post-graduate Leadership). Therefore, the survey, the on-line discussion forum and the analysis of marketing materials available from training providers aimed to capture a more generalised account of the views, experiences and practices of a wider group of training providers. These methods were intended to capture a broader sense of the core issues that face the sector at the current time, and the fundamental challenges experienced by providers in their attempts to deliver various training and qualifications to the early years workforce.

5.2 On-line survey

The survey was intended to be simple and therefore quick and easy to complete. Space was available for respondents to include open responses, which many took advantage of. 41 training providers were invited to participate in the survey; these were providers approved to deliver EYITT according to the www.gov.uk website. Others were invited to take part through a general mailing list for early years training providers. In total 31 providers responded to the survey. All of these 31 providers were Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). Most (77 per cent) were currently delivering the Early Years ITT, and around a quarter were also delivering Early Years Educator training. A large proportion, around 60 per cent, had previously delivered the Early Years Professional Status. The survey asked respondents to address the following questions in relation to EYE, EYITT and EYPS:

- Who does/did this training route? Who was the typical student?
- What reason do/did students have for choosing this training route?
- What difficulties are/were there in delivering this training route?
- What barriers are/were there in recruiting to this training route?

5.3 Selection of marketing materials for analysis

EYTS and EYE courses were identified via the DfE list of early years training providers. The search process involved visiting each provider website in order to find materials aimed at prospective students. If there were no relevant course-specific materials (e.g. flyer/brochure on EYTS) the relevant full prospectus was downloaded or requested by email. Only downloadable material was included in the analysis, rather than including websites. Through this initial search, 22 publications were identified from a total of 41 providers' website (again, those approved to deliver EYITT). Of these, eight publications were selected for more in-depth analysis on the basis that they were:

- a) designed to attract potential applicants and therefore provided information about the promoted benefits of pursuing the course; and
- b) specific to the qualifications of interest to this research (rather than general publications about the university or about the whole education department).

Of the eight publications, six related to the EYTS qualifications and two related to the EYE qualifications. To enable detailed analysis, when a document exceeded two pages, only the first two pages were considered. It was on these initial pages that images tended to appear and these were taken as particularly important in attracting potential applicants and conveying messages about the course and its intended audience.

5.4 Summary of the findings from the training providers

The table below maps out the findings from the survey questions and provides the means to compare Early Years Educator with Early Years Initial Teacher Training and Early Years Professional Status. The responses to the discussion topics are also captured in this summary table.

Table 1: Training Provider Survey Responses

	Early Years Educator (EYE)	Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT)	Early Years Professional Status (EYPS)
Who does/did this training route? Who was the typical student?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leavers with an interest in childcare • Practitioners in childcare • Career changers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduates wanting a career change • Experienced practitioners in employment and with a degree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similar to EYITT with the difference of some people starting the qualification without a degree because of the option to top up to degree level alongside EYPS qualification
What reasons do/did students have for choosing this training route?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting encourages qualification because of Ofsted requirements • Students are interested in working with children and/or progressing on to a teaching qualification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting leadership in the sector including opening their own nursery • Seen as a fully funded professional development option • Student's desire to extend knowledge and skills • Perceived enhancement of employment prospects, pay, terms and conditions • Undertaken as a stepping stone to QTS Qualification to recognise expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement by setting when there was a target for every setting to have an EYP • Funded degree top-up alongside qualification • Building confidence in working with children • Stepping stone to further qualifications – PGCE, MA
What difficulties are/were there in delivering this training route?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time pressures on students working full time • Superficiality of assignments • Finding suitable placements • Losing students to apprenticeships • Late arrival of new qualification frameworks • Supporting students into employment because of the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EYTS is not an equivalent to QTS – individuals with EYTS cannot lead practice in a maintained setting • Integration of the Ofsted inspection framework into the course • Finding adequate mentors in settings • Expectations of students around assessment – thinking it will be similar to EYPS assessment requirements • Completion of the skills tests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EYPS not an equivalent to QTS and a lack of clarity around status • Finding suitable placements • Changes to standards and assessments • Time pressures in completing the qualification

	Early Years Educator (EYE)	Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT)	Early Years Professional Status (EYPS)
	GCSE requirements for entering work in the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time away from setting to do placement • Finding suitable placements • Lack of advertising on a national scale about the qualification, therefore lack of clarity around what it means and who it is for • Students bring very different levels of experience working with children • Lack of confidence in the status across the sector • Move away from the value of play, children's rights and leadership 	
What barriers are/were there in recruiting to this training route?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GCSE requirements – although these can be studied for alongside the qualification, they require additional funding and time. Without GCSE grades, students will find entry into the profession impossible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of status, not equivalent to QTS • Perceived lack of career pathway and prospects that are different from Level 3 • Lack of national advertising • Requirement to pass skills tests • Finding suitable mentors in settings • Insufficient funding support for individuals • Only open to graduates, no route to gain a degree alongside the qualification (as with EYPS) • Placement requirements are difficult to fulfil • Difficult to guarantee employer release, particularly among small employers who depend on the presence of experienced members of staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of future prospects e.g. no prospect of improvements to pay • Lack of clarity around role that EYPs have in the setting – particularly when expectation to have a graduate in every setting was removed N.B. Recruitment considerably easier to EYPS than to EYITT

5.6 Main issues identified by training providers

5.6.1 Recruitment

As rehearsed elsewhere in this report in relation to EYE, the biggest issues affecting recruitment were the demand for applicants to hold GCSE Grades A-C in Maths, English for EYT (and Science for EYITT); and the lack of parity that EYTS has with comparable pathways for entry into the statutory sector. Training providers were well versed in the debates outlined in the literature review and recounted again by the stakeholders. Whilst they were committed to delivering good quality, rigorous programmes to a wide range of students the persistent question underlying responses concerned ‘the uneven playing field’ and ‘constantly shifting goal posts’. For example, EYE Apprenticeships insist students have GCSE Maths and English but Apprenticeships in other sectors will accept Functional Skills. The recurring example of QTS, as characterising the inequitable way in which early years qualifications are framed, was also a cause for deep concern amongst the training providers.

5.6.2 Lack of funding

Although training providers recognised that various funding streams are available to cover course fees, bursaries for the highest calibre entrants, and contributions to cover costs incurred by employers to release staff members to attend programmes, these were considered generally inadequate. Training providers reported that many students struggle with the demands of employment (in a low-paid sector) and study, further compounded when access to funding is denied because of narrowly defined eligibility criteria.

5.6.3 Complexity and confusion

As illustrated in the literature review in chapter three, and evidenced again in the case studies in chapter six, members of the early years workforce are confronted with a complex and seemingly contradictory array of demands and options in the identification and pursuit of early years training and qualifications. The availability of four routes to achieve Early Years Teacher Status provides an example of this. The training providers surveyed appeared to have a firm grasp on the rationale underpinning the different routes and the suitability for different students to be channelled accordingly, but recognised that prospective students (and their employers) would not be likely to have such a keen understanding. In summary, the EYITT has four routes: Graduate Entry (full-time, and Schools Direct); Graduate Employment-based (part-time); Undergraduate (full-time); and Assessment Only (three months). All

entry requirements to the EYITT routes are the same as for Primary ITT and insist that candidates must have achieved GCSE A-C in English, Mathematics and Science; hold a Degree from a UK HEI; have taken part in a rigorous selection process, and passed a professional skills test. So, whilst the range of pathways recognises existing qualifications, knowledge and practical experience that candidates bring, there was felt to be a lack of information publicly available to clarify the changes, so that employers can be knowledgeable about the benefits, and applicants can recognise the value to their practice and to the status of the sector more broadly.

5.6.4 Information Sources to Prospective Students

As outlined in the table above, there was insufficient information available to the workforce to allow them to make informed decisions about the suitability and relevance of different pathways. The existence of this gap is further supported by the accounts provided by members of the workforce in the case studies in chapter six. To establish the accuracy of information available to prospective students, this research included an analysis of a sample of marketing materials for early years training provision. The materials related to two types of qualification: the Early Years Educator (EYE) and the Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS), both of which were selected for analysis. For each of these training routes, an analysis was undertaken on how experiences of working in the early years were discursively constructed and supported by specific images within the marketing materials (i.e. how did the materials convey messages about what working in the early years involves). Secondly, the messages about the workforce conveyed in the materials were scrutinised. Specific questions about whom the course was intended for, and reasons for pursuing the course were addressed.

The marketing materials for Early Years Teacher Status tended to stress the age of the children, for example all images showed children over two years; although the text often mentioned ‘babies and children’ there was clearly an emphasis on older children. Such images alongside phrases such as: ‘high quality early years education and childcare can have a powerful impact on young children, preparing them for school and later life’ tended to underscore the importance of teachers in early years to ensure school-readiness, high quality and impact upon later life outcomes. Each of these concepts has generated lively debate (Dahlberg *et al.* 2009; Cannella *et al.* 2006; Jones *et al.* 2016) but in the materials they are presented as apolitical, entirely reasonable and fundamentally core to the role of EYTS in early childhood settings. Also, noticeable within the marketing materials for EYTS pathways were recurring images that seem to conflict with popular approaches taken in early years education and care.

For example, there was an image of children in uniform, seated neatly on a carpet in front of an Interactive Whiteboard, patiently waiting to respond to the teacher's questions by holding their hands up. This was not typical among the images but clearly the decision to include it was intended to target a specific audience and to construct a set of ideas around what EYTS practice might resemble. There was very little mention of play but liberal reference to 'high quality'.

The marketing materials analysed intended to underline a broader mission to improve the standards of early years provision in the UK, furthermore the constant reference to 'high quality' suggests that standards in practice are in need of improvement. Repeatedly, the early years are described as a fundamental stage of life, which provides a set of building blocks for the rest of the life course. Some documents mention 'school readiness' explicitly; others refer more generally to 'later life'. This would suggest that prospective EYTS students should aim to have a demonstrable impact on young children that will extend beyond the early years. It is particularly noticeable that across the documents there is no explicit mention that applicants would benefit from a desire to work with or enjoy young children. The marketing materials do not offer specific explanation of the qualification in relation to employability. While the EYE marketing materials explicitly state that the qualification 'enables you to work with children', the EYTS documents implicitly suggest that settings will respond to a need for 'high quality' practitioners and presumably seek to employ EYTs to achieve this.

The marketing materials make use of policy language that is readily deployed in *More Great Childcare* and *Education Excellence Everywhere* with terms and phrases such as 'high quality', 'lead practice, influence change', 'raising standards', 'impact on future generations', 'being accountable', 'responsible for child development'; these terms, whilst apparently innocuous, are used to construct a certain set of ideas about the purpose and role the EYTS serves and the type of person well-placed to take on that role and pursue the qualification. The narrow construction of the EYTS created within the marketing materials in many respects embodies the 'neo-liberal subject' that Davies (2003), Osgood (2006) and Dahlberg et al. (2009) have written about previously. The alignment with government policy discourses (Osgood 2009, 2010) for standardisation, accountability, measurability, school-readiness and the primacy of developmentalism in early childhood (Burman 2007) are all present in these materials.

Meanwhile, by comparison, the marketing materials for the Early Years Educator promote an account of early childhood as a discrete phase in its own right rather than a preparation for school and what is to

come. For example, images of children convey messages of early childhood as shaped by active, messy, sensory experiences. The second document features a single large image, shot from behind a young child and an adult holding hands and walking on the grass on a sunny day. The image is suggestive of care, guidance but also of child-led activity, since the child appears to have grasped for the adult's hand and is holding on to just a couple of fingers. The employability emphasis across both documents is strong. Both stress that the qualification enables EYE students to enter the workforce and work with children. Furthermore, the expectations that employers will recruit EYE as members of the early years workforce are central; there is no explicit mention of a future mission or outcome, nor where the qualification might lead in terms of career trajectories, transferability to parallel sectors, and there is no reference to enjoying being with children.

These examples of marketing material, aimed at prospective students to EYTS and EYE programmes, are intended to activate a certain set of expectations and aspirations; to convey certain messages about what working in early years is like at EYE and EYTS levels. Furthermore, they are imbued with policy imperatives, and so convey many of the messages outlined in the literature review about the purpose of early childhood education and the specific definition of quality that is readily deployed but rarely questioned, and so on. These materials also effectively distract attention from the issues highlighted in the survey, interviews, focus groups and observations in this study concerning the inherent inequities of early years qualifications to comparable professional groups, the rate and pace of change, under funding, and demands for accelerated change. The next chapter engages in a more in-depth exploration of these issues by reporting on three case study investigations with early years educators, teachers, trainers and managers.

Chapter Six: The Case Studies

6.1 Introduction

The next stage of the research involved more in-depth exploration of the issues outlined via the review of literature, stakeholder interviews and survey of training providers. It was clear that, as the largest provider of education and care to young children, the PVI sector was where the tensions, ambiguities and frustrations outlined in this report thus far were most acutely felt. Therefore, three case studies were identified and selected on the basis of innovative and effective ways in which the support and professional development of the early years workforce are being undertaken. The case studies are not intended to be representative of the entire sector, or to necessarily provide examples of practice that should be emulated elsewhere. Rather these case studies offer valuable insights into some of the strategic approaches, localised delivery, and learning communities that exist within the PVI sector. They also vividly illustrate the frustrations and challenges that early years practitioners encounter when endeavouring to identify, pursue, engage in, and recognise the value of further training and qualifications. The participants spoke candidly and recounted their commitment to the early years, the importance of being highly trained, and the difficulties and pleasures involved in the pursuit of (appropriate) qualifications.

Whilst there are themes and issues that cut across the three case studies they are presented separately in this chapter in order to capture the specifics of each case. The chapter concludes with an overarching discussion of the main issues that span across the case studies and which usefully inform understandings about professionalism from the ground up (Chalke 2013). Across the case studies there are several identifiable features that are shared across these very different contexts. Each case study exemplifies clear strategic vision; supportive and informative management; commitment to rigorous practice (informed by research); the creation of learning communities (Dahlberg et al. 2012); and practical/financial support to enable the pursuit of professional development.

6.2 Case Study One

Founded and opened in the late 1980s, The Red House Children's Centre is a private single-setting nursery in the suburbs of Bristol. Like many private day nurseries, it is located in a converted Edwardian house. It is open all year and offers full-day care and sessional care to over 100 children. The nursery receives funding for the provision of free early education to children aged two, three and four years.

Unlike most PVI nurseries though, the qualification levels rival those in the maintained sector; across the 28 staff, half hold a degree in early years or education; four have Masters degrees, six hold EYPS, seven QTS, and 12 hold early years qualifications at Levels 3, 5 and 6. Despite charging average fees the nursery pays its staff higher than average salaries commensurate with levels of qualification, experience and responsibility. The nursery has achieved consistent outstanding Ofsted ratings since inspections were introduced in 1996. The well-qualified staff work closely together; Ofsted noted that the teamwork has a marked and highly positive impact on the provision for children, especially on their communication skills, and their personal and social development. The inspection report went on to stress that the high level of professional development has a positive effect on children's achievement because staff understand early years pedagogy, and encourage children to explore freely. As a result they make impressive progress in all areas of learning and are well prepared for statutory schooling.

The time spent by researchers at this nursery involved meeting all the staff, many of the children and some parents. It also included participation in routines such as snack time and generally being invited to become immersed in the ebb and flow of the day (both inside and outside). What was striking was the professional confidence of all staff, at all levels, and the supportive environment that made time and space for creative pedagogical and innovative management practices. A firm commitment to embedding research as a key feature of the nursery, which appeared to directly underpin this collective confidence was also evident. A specific proportion of the role of a member of the teaching team was allocated to undertaking and developing research to inform practice, to experiment and to innovate. All staff are engaged in a culture of research which was reported by the Ofsted inspector as enabling them to 'reflect upon their practice'.

The Ofsted inspector also noted an 'exceptional programme of staff development' including close links with other professional organisations and research projects, which has a strong impact on the effectiveness of the nursery. There was also clear leadership, evidenced through rigorous supervision of staff and monitoring quality of teaching and learning, to enable staff to improve their practice.

In many respects this nursery appears to encapsulate much of the good practice in respect of quality provision, continuing professional development, professional confidence, learning communities and so on that was outlined in chapter three, and underscored by the stakeholders in chapter four.

Interestingly, this owner-managed, single-setting PVI nursery shares many of the same characteristics as most private day nurseries, but is distinguished by the very high level of qualifications and the on-going

commitment to professional development that appears to directly translate to high quality of provision. It is noteworthy that staff at this 'exceptional' nursery share similar experiences and frustrations with others across the sector in terms of identifying suitable programmes of study, balancing the practical demands of (often full-time) work and part-time study, the costs of pursuing higher level qualifications and so on.

The case study investigation at this nursery was undertaken over two days, with much of the time spent engaged in the day-to-day activities on offer to the children. It also involved a focus group discussion with eight staff members, and one-to-one interviews with a further six staff members. The participants were engaged in lively, open discussion and offered detailed accounts of their career trajectories, decisions to pursue programmes of further and higher education, the challenges they encountered and the frustrations experienced as a result of the constant policy shifts and uncertainty about the value of different awards.

6.2.1 Learning within a community

During the focus group discussion, the correlation between high levels of qualification, practical experience and professional confidence was debated. The staff were very aware that the quality of the provision on offer at the nursery was cultivated within the team, through the creation and sustainment of a learning community that was enriched by the knowledge and diverse skills that each member of the team brought to bear. As a relatively new recruit, from a Drama and Performing Arts background, one participant noted the learning community he had entered:

"That's got to be a connection with what XXXXX is saying, with getting everybody together with all those theoretical minds, but it's also getting everybody together on a different level with different backgrounds and different interests on things and everyone then feeding in, so there's a bit of woodwork interest here or drama here, or art here, or music there, and that then everybody feeds on each other's talents and that all works together to offer something more, something richer than it would have otherwise been."

The leadership team at the nursery had invested considerable time and dedication in cultivating such a community, and 'critical reflection' was 'more than popular buzzwords'; rather, opportunities for critical reflection were built into the collective and individualised professional development activities at the

nursery. All staff were required to engage in research on their practice, to question how children learn, and why they practice the way that they do, to question and deliberate upon all aspects of their work, to grapple with the complexities of working with young children and their families and to learn from each other in a supportive environment. As a long-serving member of the staff team noted:

“In a nutshell we don’t use the EYFS to guide our practice. We take elements from our practice to satisfy key parts of the EYFS that we need to do. But it is linking it with the conversations we have with each other...We’ve always had outstanding Ofsted’s but that is down to things like the teaching team, the practice, the environment and our social skills. When they (Ofsted) come in they can very much talk to anyone in the teaching team about how we do this or that; and it’s all there. They go and talk to the practitioners and they can see they are spending time with the children but it’s also being able to communicate and articulate what we’re doing, why we’re doing it and that it is there.”

Staff at the nursery shared a commitment to constantly advance their understandings of childhood and early years pedagogy and to identify creative ways to work with children and families. It was this shared commitment to learning (both their own and the children’s) that provided the culture for the continued pursuit of qualifications, even when the qualifications on offer were confusing or narrowly focused. The staff members seeking to identify programmes of study in the current market held conflicting views about the degree of choice and the flexible modes of delivery:

“It’s confusing, it’s awkward. You don’t know which one to do, at first you think ‘lots of choices: brilliant!’ but then it can also be a pain. I think it’s a problem but it’s just knowing who to ask, where to go. It’s having those training providers to go to and sit down with, and go right, this is what I want to do, and be given particular advice. I think left to your own it can be daunting.”

6.2.2 Identifying training and qualifications

Some staff were clearer about the options available to them and how to identify training providers. Several reported having undertaken extensive research about the reputation of providers via their wider early years networks and with the support and guidance of the management team. Despite the seemingly endless choice of courses and providers, for most the single biggest determining factor was the location of the provider and the practical logistics involved in pursuing qualifications alongside working full-time. Most of the participants pursued programmes of study (from EYPS, Degrees to Masters) with local Higher Education Institutions. A small number made reference to the increasing

possibilities available for on-line and distance learning but this was considered problematic because the onus was placed on the student to self-motivate and determine the rate of progress. One participant had intermitted on an Open University Foundation Degree because he found it impossible to balance the competing demands of full-time work, family life and part-time study:

“I thought that it (distance learning) would be more flexible, but the commitment required and the deadlines are just the same as if I had studied at a local uni. Really I need to work part-time and study part-time but I just can’t afford to do that.”

Other concerns raised about on-line provision regarded the certainty with which they could feel reassured that the providers were reputable and recognised. Several staff made reference to the DfE ‘full and relevant checker’ but reflected on how cumbersome and convoluted it was to use. Furthermore, on-line pathways were rejected because they lacked the social interaction of pursuing study at college and university, important as it represented another learning community of which they become part, and can contribute to and benefit from. However, the on-line features of some university courses, such as email support from tutors and submitting coursework via Turn-It-In, were welcomed.

6.2.3 Constant change

“It’s like there are millions of different options, pathways and statuses; like how do you decide which one to do? Only to find in a year’s time they have changed it all again. I know there are some teachers in the nursery but they couldn’t get into a school with their qualification. It’s just a huge mess!”

Much of the discussion dealt with the apparently ‘constantly shifting goal posts’. As a strong team and a learning community the staff regularly shared experiences of different training and qualifications pathways that had been considered or had been successfully completed. They reflected upon what has been mapped out in chapter three, i.e. inconsistencies over time, particularly since the late 1990s, and the on-going debates about whether Early Years should be a graduate profession or not. The group was well versed in the shifts in political priorities and reflected upon the fact that this has meant that some members of the workforce have disproportionately benefitted from funding, support and clear recognition for the value of pursuing qualifications, whilst others have faced a confusing, contradictory landscape which seems to be constantly shifting, and of funding streams drying up (e.g. Graduate Leader Fund and bursaries). The turbulent landscape did not go unnoticed by some of the newest recruits:

“I haven’t decided which route I’m going to take, whether to do QTS or EYTS, I can get funding for one of those but that was a few months ago so that might change now...”

6.2.4 Our staff is our biggest asset.....

The case study nursery invested financially in the professional development of its staff. The management team offered advice and support to all members of the staff on the options available to them, but of course they, like everyone else in the early years sector, are faced with the challenge of unravelling the complexity, and trying to ‘second guess’ the next development, initiative, or reform that will be made to the training and qualifications landscape. Nevertheless, staff recounted being helped to identify the full range of qualifications from degrees and Masters programmes to EYPS, EYTS, and PGCE; all of which the nursery offered to support staff to finance and pursue.

Views on the range of professional development programmes undertaken and their usefulness to practice were wide ranging. Those who had pursued undergraduate degrees and Masters were generally positive about the course content and felt they had developed deeper knowledge and the capacity to critique and problematise all aspects of their work. Many recounted how post graduate study in particular had enabled them to critically assess workforce reform and to understand that the early years as a sector is crafted and refashioned by successive governments to satisfy political imperatives rather than necessarily stemming from a concern for children to flourish from high quality early years experiences. Higher levels of study also instilled greater professional confidence to critically engage with inspection regimes and curriculum frameworks; it can provide a healthy scepticism and the capacity for deep reflection. One example provided was the mythology surrounding the Scandinavian model of early years provision:

“You hear all these romantic ideas about Scandinavia and the actual, the reality is quite different. I went on a course, a lecture about Denmark and it was refreshing because it wasn’t just all the wonderful things. It actually showed you some of the realities and the challenges that they have. You hear, you are given the impression that there is more freedom in some of these places and that they are less bound by meeting targets, standards and that gives more opportunity to be a creative teacher, so we had a chance to look at the programmes and compare. So you are introduced to the complexity and have the chance to question.”

All staff involved in this study stressed the importance of a firm connection between early years theory and practice. Although combining study and work was demanding, a number of participants stressed that it is only by working directly with children, colleagues and families whilst studying that theory comes to life. Most held the view that the theory-practice divide is lessening in early childhood practice, or certainly that was the case in this nursery where putting theory to work and routinely engaging in research was enculturated into daily practice. The learning community that the nursery provided in many respects enriched experiences of degree programmes because staff were able to take examples from practice into university, engage with theory to achieve a greater depth of understanding, and to then bring it back to the nursery for further collective reflection, thereby deepening the learning even further.

Despite the exceptionally high qualification levels at the nursery and a stated commitment to pay staff the entry level pay that teachers in the statutory sector receive, there was nevertheless recognition that the levels of pay, transparent career progression and benefits such as a pension were absent in the PVI sector more generally. Staff were aware that in order for their qualifications to be transferable outside the PVI they would need to pursue qualifications that were intended for statutory school teachers (PGCE, QTS) which then placed them at a disadvantage in the early years sector because the courses lacked the necessary specialism:

“I just Googled to find out; but it wasn’t black or white; you know ‘this course offers this and this is what you’ll achieve at the end of it’; it was actually really difficult to make an informed decision.”

One participant had studied for a PGCE following a BA Early Childhood Studies degree, only to find that whilst the qualification had QTS and would enable her to teach in schools, the content of the course was limited to three-to-seven year olds so there was a glaring gap in her knowledge regarding two-year olds. She remains convinced that she pursued the right pathway, as it has QTS, is transferable to the statutory sector and has wide public recognition. Nevertheless, the process of identifying a suitable programme was bewildering:

“There were just so many options that I didn’t really know where to start, there was university based options, there was also Schools Direct which was unsalaried. I needed to get paid at the same time I was doing it, it was quite unclear actually when I was trying to find teacher training which was the best option and what they all meant, at the end of it, how equal? You come out

with QTS but why are they all so different and different ways of studying for the same qualification. And then the one I did didn't give me what I needed because I work with two year olds, so I had to find something extra offered by the Local Authority to fill the gap."

Others reflected upon the EYTS, QTS and lack of parity with the statutory sector as being deeply problematic and inequitable. In effect they were required to be savvy consumers in an education qualifications market place:

"I looked into that and talked about that a lot because I didn't understand what the point of that was, if it wasn't going to gain QTS even if you are going to study the same thing. In the end I decided to go for a PGCE because it just made more sense."

"On their (DfE) website it actually directs you to EYTS instead of PGCE and it's very hard to tell what they're talking about. I nearly accidentally applied for it. They say like the 'earliest teachers', it seems like it's going to trap you."

"It seems relatively undervalued. It is valued within the early years profession in a sense, but it means nothing to anybody else. You say 'I'm a qualified teacher, I'm an EYTS' it's a teacher status but it's not actually any sort of status anywhere else. Why spend a year doing EYTS? Just go straight for the PGCE and get teacher status and that's it...there just doesn't seem to be any sense to where the government is going with this."

The need to be discerning consumers in an education qualifications market-place was incredibly demanding, so much so that making decisions about which pathway to pursue when the recognition and value of various qualifications were in a constant state of flux can result in frustration and ultimately inertia:

"I did a Module at [local university] about 4 years ago with the hope to then extend that to kind of build up to a Masters, but the university wasn't very proactive. It took over a year to find out how I had done on that module; and every time I tried to find out about further pathways I didn't get anything. Then time just went on...every now and then I toy with the idea of looking at a way but often I don't know where to go to look because there's so much out there."

Building on the literature reviewed in Chapter 3, and the stakeholder views in Chapter four, the staff at this nursery generally regarded EYPS as a source of great frustration. Six staff at the nursery hold the EYPS because they were required to pursue it due to the political imperative at the time, but they shared the view that the status was neither especially challenging nor useful for practice, and ultimately lacks credibility:

“I’ve not even mentioned that because it was insignificant...it was particularly poor quality amongst all my training courses. Just tick boxing what I already do; it had little impact on my practice and my way of thinking compared to other courses.”

6.2.5 View from a teacher new to the English System

A very recent recruit to the nursery from continental Europe provided some especially interesting insights. Prior to joining the nursery, he had worked as a Teaching Assistant in a number of nurseries across the UK. He came to the UK with a Primary Teaching Degree from a Spanish University, with specialism in Physical Education. Upon deciding to come to the UK to work in education it became apparent that his teacher qualification would be instantly transferable and he was therefore awarded UK recognised QTS. In the process of establishing the transferability of his degree he encountered the complexity of the early years qualifications landscape and reported feeling completely perplexed by the English system:

*“Here you have qualifications you can get through university, college or diploma. You have a lot, and I mean **a lot** of things, and Qualified Teacher Status is so confusing....I think there should not be so much confusion here. You have lots of different things but it could be made simple. You want to be a teacher then you should get a teaching qualification.”*

Despite training to teach in the primary sector this participant was confident that his skills, knowledge and expertise would be transferable to the early years sector. However, upon taking up TA positions in nurseries he quickly realised the specialist nature of early years pedagogy. As he stressed: ‘*very young children are sophisticated learners, they are so eager to discover and explore.*’ He also found the fairly standard expectation for members of early years workforce to work full-time and study part-time to be problematic. Early years practice is mentally, emotionally and physically exhausting; he considered this expectation for underpaid staff to study in their own time unreasonable. His reflections, as a new member of the early years workforce, recruited from outside the English education system helpfully encapsulates some of the fundamental issues with training and qualifications in the early years: the

need for simplification of pathways; a need for greater clarity; and support for staff to have sufficient time to pursue rigorous, reputable and instantly recognisable qualifications.

6.2.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

An exploration of the leadership practices, learning community culture and practical measures that enable staff at this nursery to be significantly more qualified than the average PVI nursery has highlighted a range of factors that make the pursuit of qualifications both desirable and possible. This case study has forcefully illustrated that a supportive employer and a community that shares an implicit expectation that all staff should be continually pursuing further qualification and training acts as an important catalyst for a highly qualified staff. Of course, such ambition must be practically feasible and it was made possible at this nursery by prioritising investment in staff development. This involved not only covering the financial cost of fees but also providing cover and then ensuring that pay scales at the nursery reflected the different levels and range of qualifications held by staff. Of course, the wider contradictions and ambiguities outlined elsewhere in this report, in respect of the national framework of qualifications, were acutely felt by members of staff at this nursery but they were supported to navigate them by their managers and colleagues.

In summary, the recommendations offered by staff at this nursery were relatively straightforward. Although nobody made direct reference to the Nutbrown Review (Foundations for Quality 2012), what was being collectively suggested resembled what had been recommended by Professor Nutbrown. Staff suggested the following:

- Streamline and reduce the number of qualifications; provide greater assurance that the qualifications on offer are rigorous, challenging, fit for purpose; regulate qualifications to ensure what is on offer is recognised, reputable and transferable (i.e. holds parity with the statutory sector).
- Increase the number of qualified teachers with specialist early years knowledge (but also include graduates from other subject areas as the quality of provision at this nursery had been enriched by staff with drama, arts, music, foreign languages expertise, as well as a knowledge and experience of early childhood).

- All staff stressed the importance of a good quality foundational Level 3 qualification. The importance of good quality, relevant (i.e. early years) placements was stressed. All staff should hold this level qualification as a minimum.
- Effective leadership and a learning community such as that in evidence at this nursery to provide all staff with the support they need to identify and pursue continuing professional development opportunities that are relevant, rigorous and valuable.
- Recognise that learning is on-going i.e. all staff should be in constant pursuit of more knowledge and improved practice through critical reflection which can be supported through relevant qualifications.
- There is a need to shift public perceptions about childhood. The early years is not (solely) about school readiness and developing children to become competent, worthy citizens. Rather young children should be understood as researchers, adventurers and explorers from whom we have a great deal to learn.

6.3 Case Study Two

The second case study to form part of this research included a nursery from the national chain of Bright Horizons private day nurseries. The intention was to consider how the strategic visions and staff development arrangements described by the stakeholder and outlined in chapter four, played out at one of its nurseries. Bright Horizons identified a nursery that it considered broadly typical of those it operates. The PVI nursery included in the study was, like case study one, located within a converted house on the edge of a large city. It was registered in 1999 to offer full day care to approximately 70 children from birth to five-years. The provider is in receipt of funding for the provision of free early education for children aged two, three and four years. The nursery was inspected by Ofsted in winter 2012 and rated 'Good'. Of the 26 staff, 10 hold relevant qualifications at Level 3 or above. The manager holds a degree and EYPS, and a small number of more senior staff were pursuing degrees in early childhood studies at the time of the research. The vast majority of the staff pursue in-house training towards Level 3. The levels of qualification across the staff team reflect those across the PVI sector more broadly (as discussed in chapter three). The staff team are supported by an Early Years Teacher who works with several Bright Horizons nurseries across the local area to improve practice and support the professional development of staff teams.

The fieldwork visit to this nursery took place on a single day to minimise disruption and limit the time

needed to cover staff taken out of contact with children in order to participate in interviews and a focus group discussion. The nursery is fairly typical of many full day nurseries in that it is spatially organised so that children in different age groups are placed in different rooms, and separated by closed doors. During the fieldwork visit the focus group with six members of staff was conducted in the staff room, and a further five one-to-one semi-structured interviews were conducted in an office space. Therefore, there was little opportunity to engage with children or parents or to gain a fuller overall sense of the nursery as a community of practice or learning community. Time between interviews provided an opportunity to look at the information on display in the entrance hall which included a summary of the goals and mission of the nursery, the current curriculum focus (Autumn), an overview of the Early Years Foundation Stage and brief biographical details about staff members, as well as the latest Ofsted report. This recognised that “management monitor staff and give support to a high level. This helps staff to improve their practice and focus on delivering good care and education to children”, and that “all staff are passionate about improving children's experiences and helping them progress as well as possible”.

6.3.1 The value of (higher) qualifications in PVI nurseries

The manager of the nursery was amongst the first cohorts of graduates to undertake the EYPS. She had a degree in an unrelated subject but had a keen interest and held some experience of working with young children, having worked part-time in nurseries when pursuing her degree. There was lengthy discussion during the focus group about whether early years should be a graduate or graduate-led profession and opinions were split. Whilst there was recognition that higher level qualifications should elevate perceptions of the sector there was very little first-hand experience of this amongst the graduates in the team:

“I think we are viewed negatively. When I was doing my EYPS and I was working in the pre-school room I already had a degree and I had parents asking me why I was studying, like: ‘so you’re telling me you’re smart enough to get a degree and you’re going back to university to work in childcare!?’ I do think it is changing, that was 2009, but people do still tend to look down on people who work in nurseries; assume that you’re doing it because you can’t do anything else.”

Whether higher levels of qualification were necessary in early years was debated and re-emerged as a difficult issue in the one-to-one interviews. Many recognised the benefits to practice that can be gained from studying theories and philosophies of early childhood education. The deputy manager at the

nursery was in the second year of a BA in Early Childhood Studies at the local university and she recounted the benefits of studying and the ways in which it directly informed her practice and supported her team to think more deeply about how children learn:

“I’ve brought stuff back from uni and I’ve suggested to my room that we try different things out to see if it actually works and it does. So there is that opportunity. You gain the knowledge of how children learn and then you can apply it. Actually, it’s not routine, it’s the child actively learning, it’s the environment, so we can deliberate on that and reflect on why things are happening and how to make them happen differently.”

One of the staff members from the deputy’s room confirmed the value of sharing degree level knowledge with the entire staff team and the impact it had upon pedagogical thinking:

“Our deputy is doing it [BA Early Childhood Degree] at the moment and there’s a lot of work involved but she comes in with a lot of different ideas that she learns from uni, so it’s more in depth, she has a deeper understanding, she will come back and say ‘you were doing this theory just then’...it gives you more of an explanation for why the children are doing what they do because you don’t necessarily know. So she [the deputy] does feedback and that is really beneficial.”

Others though were concerned that such elevated levels of study were beyond their capabilities and therefore felt that whilst degree level and post graduate qualifications had a place within nurseries it was unnecessary for it to become a normative expectation or aspiration for all staff. A number of the staff interviewed, with lower levels of qualification (typically Level 2) recounted the lack of confidence they felt to pursue further study but also recognised that there were greater expectations for all staff to move forward in their careers. This was most acutely felt by those who had to (re-)sit GCSE Maths and English for Level 3 progression, but after failed attempts they were feeling very despondent. One educator, who held a GCSE grade C in both Maths and English was acutely aware of the struggle many of her colleagues were experiencing at repeatedly failing resits in these exams. She echoed the sentiments raised by the Stakeholders in chapter three regarding a call for functional skills that would be a much more appropriate demand for the sector and more commensurate with other Apprenticeships:

“I’m quite lucky. But obviously there are people that sit exams and they don’t get on to Level 3; and they just can’t do it. But maths is funny because it’s not really used; they want GCSE C or

above in Maths but that sort of maths you don't use everyday, certainly not in the early years. You need basic maths definitely, but you don't need what's on a GCSE test paper."

The anxiety induced by the demands for GCSE A-C in maths and English and the on-going, sector wide expectations for higher qualifications has important implications for retaining staff at all levels, as noted by the manager:

*"You don't have to have a degree to work in childcare. It obviously makes you better, it improves the sector if you have higher qualifications, but Levels 2 and 3 are what you **need**. If all staff are required to have higher and higher qualifications, we would lose a lot of highly skilled practitioners who would not have the academic capabilities to go on to university but who are absolutely excellent at their work."*

This tension is well rehearsed and underscores the difficulties that emerge when the starting point is the minimum level of qualification designated necessary to deliver good early years provision. It relates back to discussions set out in chapters three and four about 'affordable quality' being mutually exclusive ambitions. In order to achieve high quality early years provision, heavy investments would need to be made into staff development and the majority of the workforce would need to (aspire to) pursue higher level qualifications. The quote from this manager underlines that where economic imperatives determine what is possible rather than what is desirable for the early years, the quality of provision and the status of the workforce will continue to suffer. This was something the manager later reflected on:

"I took the decision to work in early years because it is my passion. I could have earned significantly more money with my qualifications elsewhere but the early years is the reason I get out of bed every morning. But if you are looking at the sector as a whole, and you insist everyone has to have a degree then you have to start paying salaries to reflect the training and commitment they've made to provide the best quality."

6.3.2 In-house Training

As outlined by the Stakeholder from Bright Horizons in chapter four, the company offers its staff a range of in-house training and qualification opportunities from EYE Apprenticeships up to Leadership programmes at Level 7. All staff at the case study nursery were aware of this training provision and much of it was held in high regard. For example, EYE Apprenticeships were thought to be an effective

means of combining theory and practice through a work-based learning route, with the advantages of having regular, on-going support from a nursery manager, more senior members of staff, and the Early Years Teacher in post to serve a cluster of Bright Horizon's nurseries who stressed that the current arrangement under the EYE: *"...gives me the chance to work more closely with practitioners who are eager for knowledge and want to progress and get involved in training, to give them ideas and things to do."* The Apprenticeship model was viewed favourably compared to being periodically evaluated by an external assessor, which could only capture a snapshot of practice.

The Level 3 Early Years Educator was thought to be a vast improvement to the Level 3 Children and Young Peoples Workforce Diploma. The Early Years Teacher with responsibility for supporting several Bright Horizons nurseries in the local area had prior knowledge and experience of NVQ assessment. She praised EYE as a hopeful development for staff working towards a level 3 qualification:

"The Diploma was just not fit for purpose, now there is the Early Years Educator which seems to be a far better qualification with more importance placed on underlying knowledge and how that relates to everyday practice with children."

The deputy leader of the Toddler Room at the nursery had successfully completed the Level 3 Early Years Educator pathway with Bright Horizons and was overwhelmingly positive about the course content, flexible mode of delivery and the difference it had made to her practice. The in-depth case studies (a legacy from the NNEB Diploma model) were noted for the opportunities they provide for in-depth consideration of the ways that children learn and develop:

"Going to those classes I learnt a lot, they were beneficial. They build on your confidence and you have to stand up in class, and you get to study, like do six-month research into one child and do a presentation at the end of it. That builds our confidence up because you have to stand up and talk about it in front of everyone."

The in-house training available to staff was generally regarded to be an advantage to working for a large organisation such as Bright Horizons. Staff reported feeling reassured that the training offered must be rigorous because the reputation of the company rested upon staff holding qualifications that corresponded to the industry standard. Further reassurance was experienced because the stress of researching, identifying and pursuing training and qualifications from independent providers was alleviated. For many the Bright Horizons training package was considered sufficient; whilst this assures a

degree of loyalty to the company it also potentially closes down awareness of the wider training and qualifications landscape and what alternative possibilities might exist:

"I don't know what the other options are to be honest. It's not something I've looked into doing. I know you can try and do on-line courses and things like that. I have seen advertising on TV and through the internet but I've never looked into it any further."

In order to develop a more critical awareness about the early years as a workforce it would be beneficial to create opportunities for staff to be introduced to some of the complexities that characterise the sector including the policy imperatives underpinning the introduction and constant reform of qualifications and pathways. None of the staff were aware of the Nutbrown Review when it was mentioned during the interviews. The point of reference for the staff is very parochial, which as the next section goes on to explore, presents certain risks.

6.3.3 'Googling' potential training providers and qualifications

Some staff anticipated career trajectories beyond Bright Horizons at some point in the future. This tended to be linked to the demands of motherhood and the need for employment that better fitted with school term times and the length of the school day. Several spoke about aspiring to work in the maintained sector, mostly as Teaching Assistants rather than nursery teachers:

"I think the pay and things are different in a school. I guess it's funded by the council; I think it is completely different from working in a nursery from what I've looked up on-line, Google tells you everything...I think it is also really hard to get into because there are lots of people with children who are going for TA jobs."

In considering possibilities for the future they had undertaken some preliminary on-line research and quickly became overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information, choices, lack of clarity around the value of various qualifications and training options and whether they were transferable to the maintained sector. Some newer recruits to the nursery had also Googled to identify the range of possibilities open to them in the pursuit of qualifications:

"I found a Level 3 on the internet which I thought I could do. It's 14 modules over a year...I would quite enjoy doing that because that's from home, in my own time, at my own pace but I'm not quite sure how that stands; if it's employable. If you need to do it in a setting where there's

children, you need to be hands on, or what...I don't know if it's an employable certificate. But you do pay for that one. I think it's £350 but I would like to know what's at the end of it. I don't know who runs it but it would be nice to have the lady, the tutor on the end of the phone to help as well, that sounds good to me."

This quote illustrates some of the dangers that lurk in the largely unregulated (on-line) training provider market. A personal investment of £350 for a member of the early years workforce on the national living wage is a significant commitment with no assurances that the provider is regulated or that the qualification will be 'full and relevant'. This member of staff was being carefully coached and advised by the leadership team of the training options available to her within Bright Horizons but when individual staff members look further afield it becomes patently clear that they could easily become the victims of an unregulated market.

6.3.4 Conclusions and Recommendations

This case study investigation has highlighted a number of important factors that make the pursuit of early years training and qualifications an aspiration and an achievable reality for staff in a PVI nursery. Through coaching and supervision the staff were well informed about the availability of training from Bright Horizons. The training package available is regarded as an important feature of working for the company and provides a clear pathway from Level 2 through to Level 7, which was both recognised and valued by staff. The knowledge and expertise within the graduate leadership team at the nursery (the manager, deputy manager and Early Years Teacher) were effectively used to support the practice of staff with lower level qualifications. Although the staff did not make any explicit recommendations on how the training and qualifications within the early years sector could be improved it is possible to identify a number of key issues from this case study that usefully inform the debate:

- In-house training can be a useful means to engage staff in training. It can also alleviate the stress and confusion of self-identifying 'full and relevant' providers and qualifications. It can however limit critical awareness of wider workforce issues and reinforce parochial views of working in the early years.
- A clear qualifications pathway directly linked to a career pathway is helpful to staff and provides motivation for continuous professional development.

- Graduate-led provision can raise the quality of provision. The depth of knowledge about early years theories and philosophies taught on degree programmes can open up ways to view early childhood pedagogy and children's learning more expansively.
- Effective graduate-led provision can create an environment where the pursuit of higher level qualifications can be recognised as valuable, necessary and attainable.

6.4 Case Study Three

As outlined in chapter three, LEYF is a large London-based social enterprise in the early years sector that extends early years provision to families in areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation. As a social enterprise, all profits are reinvested back into the business to continuously improve the quality of provision on offer. LEYF has steadily expanded since becoming a social enterprise; it currently employs nearly 700 staff, across 38 nurseries and has a range of structures in place to support professional development in-house at all stages, through the LEYF learning academy. Staff also engage in training and qualifications externally at independent training provision and at universities.

6.4.1 Attracting the next generation

The case study undertaken as part of this research intended to focus intently upon one aspect of LEYF provision in response to the issues highlighted throughout the review of literature, from discussions with key stakeholders and from the survey of training providers. As an organisation committed to recruiting new staff to the workforce it was decided to take this aspect as the focus of in-depth investigation. Case study three therefore sought to gain insights into the ways in which Apprentices can best be supported as they are initiated into a workforce and a career that is framed by inconsistent policy reforms, persistent low-pay and a lack of public recognition for the complexity and importance of the early years. As stressed in chapter three, recent policy developments in early years training and qualifications, notably the requirement for GCSEs in Maths and English upon entry to the profession, have actively deterred new recruits. With falling numbers of Apprentices, the study was eager to identify effective practices around the recruitment, professional development and support for the next generation of early years educators.

6.4.2 Becoming a LEYF Apprentice

On the LEYF website there is a section dedicated to the recruitment of Apprentices. An overview of what is required of applicants includes: Level 2 (or lower) in childcare/working towards Level 3 Early Years Educator Qualification; a predicted Grade C+ in GCSE Maths and English; and 'energy, enthusiasm and a desire to make a difference'. In return, successful applicants will become 'members of a passionate team enabling children to be the best they can'. In a section entitled: What's in it for you? the website goes on to outline the benefits of the LEYF Apprenticeship: work placement in a LEYF London nursery; a 12 -14 month long programme; 50 days of training working with under 5s; £9,000 annual salary (£750 per month) in year one; 30 per cent Oyster discount for year one; minimum wage in year two; and a guaranteed interview for a practitioner post upon successful completion of the course.

As new recruits to LEYF, the Apprentices are introduced to key features of the organisation, as set out on the website and reiterated through induction. The organisation has also developed its pedagogical approach with seven core elements. For full details visit: <https://www.leyf.org.uk/our-approach-to-learning/>. Broadly, the approach includes a focus on 'leading for a culture of excellence' which involves 'believing in what we do and living our values every day'. It includes a spiral curriculum, which aims to 'extend and support children to reach their potential'. The curriculum is informed by academic research, partnerships with international early years organisations and internal action research. LEYF stresses the importance of enabling environments, i.e. using the nursery space, indoors and out, to create exciting learning opportunities and harmonious relationships: building loving relationships between staff, children and parents. There is also emphasis placed on safety, fitness and health which is achieved via nutritious home-cooked food, encouraging children to be active and keeping them safe. Connections to the local community via a multi-generational approach is central to the LEYF philosophy, and specifically building relationships with parents is highly prized; the importance of 'home learning' i.e. conversations with parents to extend and enrich children's development between home and nursery is a core feature of the LEYF Apprenticeship programme. LEYF stresses the importance of its shared vision, purpose and framework, which is conveyed in its mission: Changing the World One Child at a Time.

The case study sought to explore how this clear organisational philosophy was transmitted to new recruits on the Apprenticeship programme. The research also sought to identify how the LEYF approach intermingles with the broader early years training and qualification landscape. The case study investigation at the LEYF Learning Academy was undertaken over two days. It involved a tour of the

academy, casual conversations with various staff members, a series of formal interviews with senior staff, and a focus group discussion with eight Apprentices currently pursuing the Early Years Educator pathway, in-house with LEYF. The organisation has a partnership with two training agencies to provide Apprenticeships for a group of 18-24 year olds (which are assessed by the training provider). An additional training group with over 24 year olds is assessed by LEYF because their age puts them outside the Apprenticeship assessment criteria. LEYF pays each apprentice £9000 per annum salary, rather than the recommended £5000; the additional £4000 is covered by the organisation. The Apprentices spend four days each week based in one of the nurseries and come together once a week for day-long training sessions.

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with three central individuals with core roles in relation to the LEYF Academy. The first interview was with an in-house trainer who has responsibility for designing and running continuing professional development courses with an oversight of the Apprenticeship programme; he has worked within LEYF in various capacities over the past two decades. A similarly long-serving member of the organisation was the Senior Learning and Development Manager who started her career with LEYF as nursery manager, but now has overall responsibility for the Academy and for the content of the training programmes. A more recent recruit, having worked for LEYF for the past three years, was the Director for Children and Families. This participant has strategic overview of LEYF nursery provision and acts as Line Manager to six area managers, who in turn have responsibility for the line management of 38 nursery managers.

Each of these interviewees works directly with the Apprentices, and with LEYF staff more generally through the LEYF Academy, providing continuing professional development and other in-house training programmes. They work with external providers and programmes that are also included in the training offer extended to staff e.g. paediatric first aid and Level 3 in Leadership and Management. There was an identifiable shared commitment to the social enterprise; it was evident that staff regarded themselves to be an integral part of the LEYF brand, with each making liberal reference to LEYF's philosophy, mission, purpose and values during interview. As outlined in the introduction to this case study, LEYF's recognisable 'brand' is clearly articulated to prospective trainees but it was further reinforced elsewhere on the website, through social media and throughout the physical spaces within the Academy (e.g. it was mapped out on the wall of the room in which interviews were conducted). To summarise, LEYF considers its main ambition to be: changing the world one child at a time; and its purpose is: together

with families and communities, to enable each child to be the best they can through wonderful experiences that enrich and extend learning. The values the organisation promotes include being inspiring, brave, nurturing and fun. There is a powerful drive and intention to be a strong self-sufficient organisation with a clear brand and identity. Furthermore, the extent of in-house training enables LEYF to distance itself from the inconsistencies and ambiguities evident in the early years training and qualifications 'market place' more broadly. Senior staff interviewed were acutely aware of the wider debates and reflected critically on missed opportunities, such as the recommendations in the Nutbrown Review:

"For me, the biggest change was the opportunity lost in the Nutbrown Review...it was a change that could have happened and it would have made, I think, a lot of people in the sector happier...we had a rare degree of consensus. So for me that was the biggest change. People don't think of it as a change but it was a change because I think we're heading in a direction we've abandoned."

The reference to 'a rare degree of consensus' is interesting to note as the early years sector has long been recognised as fragmented and for (perceived) divisions across the sector tending to prevent a united voice with which to challenge ill-formed policy reform (as outlined in the literature review and attended to previously by the authors of this report, see Osgood, 2004, 2012, and further debated in chapter seven). The interviews indicated that one response to this apparent factionalism within the early years sector was to strive to cultivate a culture of excellence within a single organisation.

Further sources of frustration concerned the wider shifts in early years policy and funding, specifically reduced funding for Apprentices and a general lack of clarity around the equivalence of vocational training in England. As has been rehearsed repeatedly throughout this report, one of the greatest frustrations for the sector was the expectation for young people who have struggled to achieve academically in statutory schooling to then face demands to perform academically as part of a vocational pathway. The constantly shifting goal posts and uneven playing field referred to previously was also raised by the interviewees at LEYF: the LEYF trainer made reference to 'alphabet soup' when reflecting upon the seemingly endless tinkering to the titles/awards in early years:

"And then they mess around EY, EYT, EYP, EYPS, EYTS, I've forgotten, I've lost count of all the acronyms...I think you have to be a kind of insider to follow that stuff, otherwise it's just alphabet soup."

The in-house trainer offered some critical reflections about the organisation from an operational perspective, considering the implications of reduced income based on the funding formula for PVIs. He urged that there was need to “... take a step back and ask what’s the right qualification and pay structures that enable the child to experience (the same level of outcomes) regardless of which setting they attend”. This perhaps echoes the sentiments offered by the manager at the Bright Horizons nursery in case study two, when she questioned what qualifications are desirable and what are necessary. This also relates to the ‘affordable quality’ tension outlined in previous chapters. Social enterprises, whilst committed to reinvesting profits nevertheless need to generate surplus income, and so much of the decision-making is informed by financial imperatives. To ensure that the child remains at the centre of decision-making, LEYF must carefully balance how to reinvest money wisely (into staff development) to ensure the greatest returns on that investment (in the form of child wellbeing, wonderful experiences, enrichment of learning and so on) whilst also being mindful of the sustainability of its nurseries.

Unsurprisingly, and related to concerns outlined above, funding arrangements and staff pay were recurring issues raised by all interviewees. Each shared the view that career structures, expectations, roles and responsibilities differed considerably between the PVI sector and schools. For example, staff qualified at Level 3 would not assume leadership in a school but this is a routine expectation in the PVI sector, and therefore in LEYF nurseries. There was reference to the role of EYTs and the lack of parity with teachers in the statutory sector: “I think of it in terms of teachers and non-teachers. I think EYT has no traction within the sector”. As a social enterprise, it was unsurprising that the interviewees tended to focus on the financial realities of endeavouring to invest in staff development whilst taking account of the wider funding limitations imposed on the sector. The interviewees reflected on the strategic approach the organisation needed to take in terms of balancing funding income, salaries, costs of provision and fees charged. There was both a demonstrable commitment to address shortfalls in funding and to work within the parameters created by government policy. Whilst LEYF is vociferous in debates with policy makers about the incongruence of certain demands (i.e. GCSE requirements) and recruitment/retention (as outlined in chapter four) there was also pragmatic conformity to those demands.

6.4.3 Working within policy constraints and pursuing organisational ambitions

Senior staff in the organisation reiterated their commitment to LEYF’s values and pursued a desire for staff ‘to enable that parent to be the best parent they can be while supporting the child to become the

best they can be'. Placing the child, parent and community at the centre of the organisational philosophy necessitated staff at all levels to adhere to the same priorities. In-house training is a very effective means to ensure that all staff recognise the core goals and philosophy of the organisation and are enabled to collectively work to realise those ambitions. LEYF pays higher salaries to staff than other providers locally and promotes a 'LEYF way of doing things' based on its own model of training. As the Director for Children and Families stressed:

"If you're at LEYF and you're a manager you need to be a community leader, a business leader and a pedagogical leader. Some people describe it more complexly or simply but for me you have to implement this because otherwise you're going to fail and actually you're a community asset that needs to be there for generations and the community needs you doing well."

Central to the realisation of the LEYF philosophy is the recently introduced Early Years Educator role, which was described as: *"almost like a breath of fresh air"*. The EYE was considered much more focused on early years in contrast with previous Level 3 pathways such as the Diploma for the Children's and Young People's Workforce which covered birth-to-nineteen. The specialist focus on early years and the apprenticeship mode of delivery were thought to be very effective in translating and embedding LEYF philosophy within the next generation of early years staff to join the organisation.

6.4.4 Value of vocational, work-based training

There was also careful reflection on the value of vocational, work-based training routes. The fact that Apprentices spend a considerable proportion of their week in practice was considered a key strength and an important means of working with theory, albeit retrospectively:

"So academic education will come to theory, we can manipulate the theory, we're happy to analyse, assess and evaluate the theory and then to apply it. In vocational education I think it's sometimes the other way around. We can practise, we take feedback, we use all our theoretical knowledge to evaluate our practice and then we try something."

"We're trying to use, to get them (Apprentices) in the frame of 70/20/10 principle. 10 per cent of the learning is in the classroom, 20 per cent of the learning is based on reflection and feedback and 70 per cent is by doing it and thinking about it."

There was a clear view shared by the interviewees that LEYF, as an organisation, has a clear sense of the expectations held for practitioners. This in turn informs the function of the training academy and the design of course content, which is squarely based upon the core values of the organisation. The content of the training and the opportunities, encapsulated in its spiral curriculum, places a focus on excellence, enabling environments, harmonious relationships, security and health, home learning and a multi-generational approach. In many senses these priorities overshadow the importance of a given qualification per se. Whilst staff are supported to pursue degrees and use academic study to feed into their practice it is generally viewed as personal development rather than core training:

“A lot of our staff are involved in actual research and projects...So people have to actualise their learning, the development and the things they are interested in. Stuff like that happens all the time with the research projects led by practitioners.”

In many respects the continuing professional development opportunities and in-house training acts as an organisational quality assurance mechanism. The interviewees reflected upon the endless and extensive changes to early years qualifications over the last ten years. Whilst this can place individual members of the workforce in precarious positions (when the value and recognition of different qualifications alter over time with very real implications for employment prospects, career progression and so on) LEYF sought to mitigate such dangers by ensuring that the quality and rigour of the training available to its staff remains stable over time:

“I think the standards slipped quite a bit. You get qualifications too easily and too quickly and I don't think they're embedded, but at LEYF and WCS before LEYF we made sure we kind of kept up the almost gold standards of the NNEB even although we were working towards the awards that were there.”

Further reference was made to the NNEB Diploma training particularly in respect of perceived quality, depth and rigour. The variety and length of placements and adequate time to practise skills were felt to be core strengths. Whilst LEYF has endeavoured to maintain the essence of the NNEB model there was recognition of a reduction in both time and funding available for apprenticeships having inevitably impacted upon the breadth and depth of Level 3 training. LEYF was also concerned by a lessened health emphasis in current EYE training *“I think the health components have been lost”*. For an organisation, such as LEYF, a firm commitment to well-being, nurturance and health jarred with the Ofsted preoccupation with education and school readiness.

Apprentices are viewed as a core part of the early years workforce at LEYF. The interviewees stressed that they are treated with the same level of respect and inclusion as all staff in the organisation. In fact apprenticeships were viewed as ‘the future’:

“The apprentices are amazing. That’s where the status of the profession really annoys me the most. We all started somewhere... ..We now have managers in outstanding settings who were apprentices.”

On completion of training they will be equipped with the skills and practical experience that LEYF holds in high regard. Furthermore, they will be offered employment dependent upon an ability to demonstrate the ways in which the training has informed their practice.

The interviewees were also confident that the in-house nature of the EYE Apprenticeships at LEYF would provide the necessary assurances that this future workforce was fit for purpose and well-versed in the LEYF philosophy and values.

The EYE Apprentices will go on to pursue the in-house continuing professional development training on offer. This training is intended to ensure that the whole staff group at LEYF ‘knows the basics’ but in many senses the Apprentices will have a head start having pursued the EYE pathway at LEYF:

“So we are really focusing on those core subjects, the observations, the planning, the building relationships and the child development”.

6.4.5 The LEYF ‘family’

The intentionality of the Apprenticeship pathway as outlined thus far was identified by the Apprentices themselves. They were very aware that the training was framed by the LEYF philosophy and that certain features and values were deliberately foregrounded. This Apprentice reflected on what she considered to be the relative quality of the LEYF Apprenticeship training compared to that experienced by a peer working in early childhood who had pursued mainstream training provision:

“She doesn’t know anything and it really worried me that this is someone who’s going to be a practitioner and going to be looking after another parent’s child. This is the person who’s going to be responsible for a child’s development and stuff like that. This shocked me. She is qualified technically now. And I’m not. And she came to me for... And I helped her. I thought I knew a lot more than she did.”

The Apprentices reported feeling well supported through their training. They felt confident in the abilities and knowledge of their trainers and felt '100% prepared, sure about this course'. Reflecting on the course content and the LEYF values generated some interesting insights about the importance of hands-on experience and working as part of learning communities:

"The apprenticeship is good because I know people who have gone to college to do the Level 3 and haven't actually had any hands-on experience and they've realised after two years that it wasn't for them. Whereas for us we're in it. We have been here for a year and we know we have first-hand experience on how it has to be done, we've got it, we can handle it, and this is what we want."

Not unlike the learning community outlined in case study one, there was a clear sense that this cohort of Apprentices felt part of a cohesive group that came together to share experiences and offer reflections on their practice, the challenges they encountered, their uncertainties and triumphs. Several participants referred to '*feeling like part of a big family*'. Clearly the LEYF philosophy and values not only underpinned the training but coursed through the structure and history of the organisation and was eagerly taken up by these new recruits.

The content of the training programme, specifically the successful marriage of practice and theory was discussed at length during the focus group and also during the interviews. The trainer recalled:

"The amount of times they come back to the classroom, they go, do you know what? We did this and that and it was exactly what you were saying...they've been immersed in it and they understand it and they've lived it so when we're talking about the theoretical side in class they can actually understand what we're talking about."

One Apprentice mentioned that she had an A-level in Psychology but that it wasn't until she was immersed in the Apprenticeship that she grasped how to put theory to work. She could identify theory through her practice with young children, families and community from her work at the nursery. Others shared this conviction that practice demonstrably assisted them to understand the theories and philosophies underpinning their work.

The child study of two children at different ages was viewed as important and valuable to gain deeper understanding of child development and early years practice. This was further enhanced by the helpful

feedback provided by the assessor, which was also communicated to their managers. Although the Apprentices did not refer specifically to having a mentor in the way that the interviewees had described it, the extensive support received in practice and with written work was mentioned: *“Here we’re getting help with the written assignments and the course but there she’s helping us with the practical side along with the other practitioners”*.

The Apprenticeship pathway provides the necessary skills, balance between theory and practice and adequate support, but the group nevertheless reflected on some of the challenges they encountered when seeking to combine training, working long shifts four days per week and balancing the demands of their own lives: *‘It is quite overwhelming at times’*. Despite this there remained high levels of enthusiasm and commitment, and crucially the cultivation of high ambitions for long and successful careers working with young children. They recounted aspirations to become Social Workers, First Aid trainers, Primary teachers or Early Years teachers, and even ultimately to assume the top job in the organisation.

6.4.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

This case study investigation has illuminated a range of interesting issues that make the pursuit of EYE Apprenticeships an attractive option to young trainees new to the early years sector. Particularly striking is the clear articulation of an organisational philosophy and set of values that informs both the training and practice. As new recruits to the early years workforce, the Apprentices at LEYF Academy felt a sense of belonging, clear purpose and generally well supported in their enculturation into the ‘LEYF Family’ of early years nurseries. Like the other case studies this investigation highlighted several important issues:

- In-house training engages existing staff but crucially in the case of apprenticeships it provides an opportunity to shape the early years workforce of the future in ways that are aligned to organisational philosophy and values.
- Providing practical support in the form of enhanced starter salaries, assistance with travel costs and the prospect of permanent employment in the future engendered a great sense of loyalty and self-worth.
- The apprenticeship pathway (broadly modelled on the NNEB model) was argued to develop the necessary skills for work with young children by *“focusing on those core subjects, the observations, the planning, the building relationships and the child development”*. Apprentices were required to

undertake in-depth studies of children, which facilitated knowledge of child development from birth and to recognise the link between theory and practice. Although intense, the arrangement to be in practice 4 days and study 1 day ensured the apprentices felt adequately supported and received 3-way feedback from mentors, assessors and nursery managers.

- Like the other two case studies there was clear evidence of a learning community. However, the LEYF learning community was cultivated from a very clear organisational philosophy and strategy that was effectively communicated and instilled at all levels. The Apprentices were acutely aware that their experiences at LEYF had a specific hallmark.
- As with Case Study Two, the approach taken by this large organisation provided staff with a sense of security, belonging and therefore loyalty to their employer. Becoming well versed in the philosophy, practices and values of a specific organisation acted as a form of protection from the (often unregulated) training and qualifications market.

6.5 Cross-cutting Themes

These detailed accounts of three quite distinct case studies have provided valuable insights into how early years providers and trainees encounter the wider chaos associated with the pursuit of training and qualifications. Through a close examination of the narratives of managers, trainers and staff/trainees it has been possible to identify what makes a difference to early years practitioners in terms of recruitment, retention, and career progression. Each case study has intentionally highlighted the specificities within each local context but nevertheless some striking factors across them have emerged:

- The importance of embedding research into training and qualifications but also cultivating its place within localised learning communities as a means to (collectively) enhance practice.
- The importance of theory. Each of the case studies has underlined the importance of developing the capacity for staff at all levels to understand beyond the what and how, to the why of practice and to be able to articulate this. Education that enables members of the early years workforce at all levels to question and to wrestle with the underpinning meanings of all aspects of their work is vital. Furthermore, opportunities to develop a critical awareness, not just of early years pedagogy but also of themselves as members of an employment sector, is crucial if the workforce is to transform how it understands itself and how others understand it.
- Being part of a community of practice, with ample opportunities to learn with and from peers has clear benefits for the identification, pursuit, and the successful completion of continuing

professional development opportunities. This rests upon the vision and actions of supportive management – whether in a single setting or part of a larger organisation – early years teams need to feel valued and supported throughout their careers.

- Another fundamental issue concerns the clarity of information about qualifications, their value and usefulness. How this is approached varied across the case studies; the strategy taken by Bright Horizons and LEYF in many senses protects staff from having to negotiate the minefield that is the wider early years training and qualifications market. But not all providers have the option to deliver in-house training and qualifications so there remains an urgent need to address how the workforce can become informed about the professional development options available. It is not acceptable for ‘Google’ to be the primary source of (mis)information; there must be unambiguous and impartial information made available to members of an overworked, underpaid workforce seeking to enhance their professional development.
- The case studies also underscored the need for clear career structures, organisational support, and sufficient time to invest in professional development.
- Finally, as has been rehearsed in many debates, over several decades, there remains an urgent need for government and the public more broadly to recognise the expertise, value and importance of early years in the form of appropriate investment and respect.

Chapter Seven: One-day Event

7.1 Introduction

The preceding chapters have outlined the major issues informing key debates circulating within and across the early years training and qualification landscape at the present time. A wide body of literature, stakeholder and training provider views, and the first-hand accounts of members of the workforce have illuminated numerous challenges and complexities; throughout reference has been made to interesting examples and possible ways forward. However, a core element of the study was to create an opportunity for a range of early years stakeholders to collectively debate the issues and to engage in some ‘blue skies’ thinking about the ways in which early years training and qualifications could be re-imagined. Related to this endeavour are a plethora of contemporary texts that inform our re-conceptualisations of ‘quality’ and hence our figurations of the workforce (for example, see Cannella et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2016). To open debate and facilitate ways to reimagine the workforce, a core part of this study included a one-day seminar. In June 2016, Professor Peter Moss presented a stimulus paper to an invited audience at an event hosted at Middlesex University.

Around 50 representatives from higher education institutions, unions, employer organisations, advocacy groups and children’s centres attended the event. The event began with a welcome and introduction to the day; participants were introduced to the study; its aims and objectives; and anticipated outcomes (i.e. a keynote paper to be delivered at the TACTYC annual conference, a full research report, a briefing paper, and a series of journal publications, all of which will provide TACTYC with an evidence-base from which to engage in dialogue with government about ECEC training and qualifications). Attendees were then assigned to one of four groups: Froebel, Reggio, Montessori and Te Whāriki. Professor Moss then presented a stimulus paper, which invited the audience to consider their image of the child; their image of the early childhood centre; and their image of the early childhood worker. Following the paper presentation, the pre-formed groups were convened in separate spaces to engage in lengthy discussion, and the day concluded with a closing plenary.

7.2 The stimulus paper

The stimulus paper was entitled: ‘*What do we want for our early childhood workforce? Images, qualities and conditions*’. In the presentation Moss contended that over the past 20 years there have been endless missed opportunities in early years; stressing that there had been a failure to create an

integrated, universal and democratic early childhood education, with a well-qualified, highly valued and mixed gender workforce at its core. Instead of transformative change he argued that there has been endless tinkering, producing more of the same, not least a continuing dependence on scandalously low paid and low qualified women 'childcare' workers in a marketised and largely privatised sector. In his presentation he encouraged the audience to engage in utopian thinking and critical debate about the current situation and to engage in hopeful dialogue about what might be possible.

The paper began with three fundamental and linked political questions: What is our image of the child? The early childhood centre? And the early childhood worker? By drawing on the philosophy and practice of Loris Magaluzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia, Moss offered his answers to these questions. He then went on to consider the qualities needed for his preferred image of the early childhood worker, and identified what is needed to foster and sustain those qualities. He recognised throughout that there are many possible (and often conflicting) answers to these political questions, each producing its own set of qualities and conditions. He stressed that there was a need for public debate about alternatives, without which there can be no democratic politics of education – only the dictatorship of no alternative.

7.3 Image of the child

Moss argued that we need to begin with a careful consideration of how we view the child; what childhood is taken to mean in our society is fundamental if we are to resist further 'tinkering' with an inadequate early childhood system. He drew on the Reggio Emilia schools' image of the child as 'rich':

There are rich children and poor children. We (Reggio) say all children are rich, there are no poor children. All children whatever their culture, whatever their lives, are rich, better equipped, more talented, stronger, and more intelligent than we can suppose...if we start from the concept that all our children are rich children, and all need acknowledgement, all need great respect, much more than we can concede today, we are creating them with the capacity, the talents, the resources that must emerge because children possess these qualities (Cagliari et al. 2016: 397).

He went on to stress that the 'rich' child is born with one hundred languages and must be viewed as a protagonist and active subject who is a competent being seeking to make meaning of the world in which s/he forms part. All children have the capacity to learn and are citizens with rights and crucially they are born with limitless and unknowable potentiality.

7.4 Image of the early childhood centre

Moss's vision of the early childhood centre refuted that it should be understood as a business, and a place to apply technologies to children to achieve predetermined goals and readiness for school. Instead he argued that it should be viewed as public space and place of encounter for all citizens. Furthermore, the centre can provide a multi-purpose community resource capable of many projects with limitless, unknowable potentiality. Education, care and learning in such a context are viewed in the broadest sense.

7.5 Image of the early childhood worker

An early childcare worker, according to Moss (and supported by many others: Ailwood 2008; Osgood 2012) is not a substitute mother, nor a technician, nor a reproducer of pre-defined knowledge. Like the child, the teacher must be seen as rich:

The rich children are those requesting rich intelligence in others, rich curiosity in others, a very high and advanced capacity for fantasy, imagination, learning and culture in others (Cagliari et al. 2016: 397).

An early childcare worker must be rich in capacities to co-construct knowledge, values and culture. As a critical and rigorous intellectual s/he has the capacity to think critically about wider cultural, ecological, political, social and economic conditions. To realise this image involves questioning and challenging dominant discourses, power relations and injustices. Through research and experimentation, the early childhood worker as critical intellectual can debate and examine choices made and wonder at what other choices might be made. She does this as a democratic professional engaged in participatory relationships and alliances. This early childhood worker foregrounds collaborative, cooperative action between colleagues and other stakeholders and by engaging and networking with the local community.

An active and constructive child stimulates the teachers to place more attention on the organisation and opportunities than on predefining objectives...The role of the teacher is removed from the fallacy of certainties and reassumes the responsibility to choose, experiment, discuss, reflect, and change, focusing on the organisation of opportunities rather than the anxiousness to pursue outcomes, and maintaining in their work the pleasure of amazement and wonder (Fortunati 2006: 34 and 38).

As this quote illustrates, and as Peter Moss stressed in his presentation, maintaining the capacity to marvel, to wonder should be a fundamental quality for a person working with children.

7.6 Conditions of possibility

The paper concluded with a summary of the conditions necessary to realise the ambitions for the workforce to comprise rich children and rich workers. As Moss has argued throughout his career, a fully integrated early childhood system which removes the binary education/care model is essential. He went on to stress that the workforce should be fully integrated and based on EYTS representing 50 per cent of the workforce. Graduate education and continuing professional development opportunities should be rigorous, strong and recognisable; and pay and status for the early years workforce should be commensurate with school teachers. Such a system should not be determined by the financial market but by adequate funding which is tax-based and linked to qualifications. Finally, the rich children and rich workers would be guided by a loose *framework* of curriculum, pedagogy and modes of evaluation.

7.7 Debate and discussion

The stimulus paper had the desired effect upon the audience; throughout the presentation vigorous nodding and avid note-taking were visible. The break-out discussion groups were convened purposely so that there was a diversity of participants in each. All the groups nominated a scribe and detailed notes from each group were recorded throughout the two hours available to discuss the image of the child; image of the early years centre; and image of the early years worker. The discussions in each of the groups were far ranging and lively, and participants eagerly took up, extended, contested and questioned the threads of Moss' vision for the early years. The day concluded with a closing plenary made up of nominated representatives from each group.

Whilst there was broad enthusiasm for re-imagining the early years through the framework offered in the stimulus paper the discussions raised a number of important points for consideration, summarised in the remainder of this chapter.

7.8 Transforming societal images of the child

There was an overwhelming sense that the image of the 'rich child' as outlined in the paper was one universally shared by those in attendance. There was also a view that most people involved in working

directly with young children tend to view childhood in this way; very young children are respected as competent, creative divergent thinkers; fluid and unknowable with an inherent inquisitiveness about the world and communities of which they form part. However, the regulation of childhood from external forces, through expectations for conformity to dominant discourses (including normative development, school readiness and so on) creates a situation where this inherent view of children and childhood is routinely undermined and challenged daily. So, the question to emerge was: how can the early years sector shift the wider discursive constructions of childhood? How can the sector, as the best placed experts on early childhood, push back against the dominant views of children that are reinforced by school teachers, parents, politicians? How can societal views be transformed from 'human capital to be crafted and shaped into enterprising neoliberal subjects' to 'rich' children?

7.9 Rich early childhood centres

As the case studies in chapter six illustrate, there are clear examples of early childhood centres capturing the image offered in the stimulus paper. For example, case study one provided illustrations of staff acting as critical intellectuals exercising their capacity to engage with, question and challenge dominant discourses, power relations and injustices. In case study one and case study three there was also a pronounced commitment for all early childhood workers to undertake research and experimentation, as part of their studies but also as a routine feature of their daily practice. There was an identifiable commitment to examining choices made (about training and qualifications, but also about the appropriateness of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum and 'the way it has always been done' approach to many early years practices such as age segregated rooms). The learning communities identified within the case studies also illustrate examples of democratic professionals engaged in participatory relationships and alliances which foreground collaborative, cooperative action between colleagues and other stakeholders. Other examples discussed at the one-day event, where this had occurred, included Sure Start Children's Centres across the country and Pen Green Children's Centre. These integrated services were thought to provide exemplars of democratic professionalism, which were embedded in local communities and had research, innovation and experimentation at the core.

There was some healthy debate about how democratic approaches to early childhood practice might play out in early childhood centres. There was a concern that 'democratic' might be misinterpreted as 'non-hierarchical', which might then present certain challenges to realising rich early years contexts. There was general consensus of a need for clear career structures, strong (but respectful and inclusive)

leadership, the cultivation of learning communities and space for team-teaching. Whilst the ambition for 50 per cent EYTs (with full QTS) as outlined by Peter Moss, was met with some scepticism, there was also a sense that moving away from graduate-led provision would mitigate the ‘heroic individuals’ discourse that attributes any positive change in a setting to a qualified teacher without recognising the collective contribution to transformation made by an entire staff.

Leadership was debated within the groups and whilst clearer career structures such as those proposed in the Nutbrown Review were thought to be what the sector needs there was also debate about what ‘leadership’ is. For many leadership was aligned to Moss’ conception of ‘rich’ teachers; those who have the capacity to think critically and act politically and mindfully. One participant spoke of the need to shift from an emphasis in leadership discourse from ‘follow me’ to ‘swim with me’; so that entire staff teams might embrace wonder and uncertainty in the pursuit of rich early years provision.

7.10 PVI does not mean profit-making

The call for early childhood centres to not be ‘businesses’, as set out in the stimulus paper, was met with some concern. Since the PVI sector is currently the largest provider of early years care and education in England the desire for a state funded, publicly owned early years sector seemed unimaginable to many. Furthermore, a view reverberated across the discussion groups that PVI does not necessarily mean profit-making. Several participants on the day argued for the importance of social enterprise models, and for a recognition that many PVI nurseries reinvest any ‘surplus’ into staff development and therefore improve the quality of provision. This point relates to wider debates about government investment in early years provision, where policy pledges such as 30 hours free provision, are made by the state but insufficient and inequitable public funding is made available and so fails to cover the costs of extending the provision in the PVI sector (Leitch, 2016). Elsewhere in this report reference has been made to ‘shifting goal posts’ and ‘un-level playing fields’ where government policies directly undermine and disadvantage PVI providers.

Therefore, a view was stressed in response to the stimulus paper, that there should be a far deeper understanding about how Private, Voluntary and Independent provision is being represented in debates about early years care and education. It was suspected that in most debates a narrow definition was used that assumed *all* private sector models are run along business lines by seeking to maximise profits and minimise costs (e.g. investment in staff).

7.11 Demands for compliance

The tendency to crash land from blue skies thinking was frequent, and many participants found themselves repeatedly drawn back to the harsh realities of the contemporary early years context. Many stressed the overpowering need for compliance in the early years; from health and safety concerns with the organisation of space and potential risks involved in engaging members of the local community with young children; to curriculum compliance in the form of delivering measurable outcomes and so on. Finding space and opportunities to think ‘outside the box’ and identify creative ways to work in the in-between spaces was felt to be one of the biggest challenges. Identifying the leakages between discourses/frameworks and practice (Osgood and Giugni 2016) represents a space where early years workers can create the opportunities to question, experiment, and innovate and so become the ‘rich’ early years worker Moss envisions. The importance of creating learning communities, embedding research into pedagogical practice and continuing professional development, were tangible ways to make staff feel supported to identify the leakages, work creatively and view the EYFS curriculum as a framework rather than a doctrine.

7.12 Learn to unlearn

Although policy-driven reform was widely critiqued for failing to grasp the realities of implementing early years provision, there was also a perverse comfort and security to be found in inspection frameworks, curriculum frameworks and training pathways. The demands to perform against standardised expectations provided a certain degree of public accountability (i.e. parental judgements based on the latest Ofsted Inspection report; recognition of ‘teacher’ as a valid title/qualification). For many though this represented little more than the baseline and furthermore such mechanisms could be used to generate critical discussion and kick start creative, collective debates about how to move beyond standardisation and performativity (see Osgood *et al.* 2016 for examples of this in action). For example, in a recent issue of *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* (Jones *et al.* 2016) a PVI children’s centre recounted their approach to reconfiguring quality by working beyond standardised expectations to produce a strategic plan formed from a detailed narrative account of life at the nursery from the perspective of a fictional child. The story captures much of what Moss set out in the stimulus paper and illustrates the rich intelligence, curiosity, capacity for fantasy and imagination that this staff team exercised in the pursuit of moving beyond narrow demands for standardisation. They collectively focused ‘on the organisation of possibilities rather than the anxiousness to pursue outcomes’. Taking

such apparent risks to identify leakages, to reconfigure ideas about quality and how to present them in strategic plans, illustrates how policy can be enabling when it is viewed beyond a need for mere compliance.

7.13 Parents as partners

Much of the discussion time was devoted to how the early years sector can better work with parents. There was a recognition that many parents develop neo-liberal mind sets with an unhealthy preoccupation with performativity and competitive individualism. The government demands for the 'schoolification' of the early years, with increasing assessment of child progress and outcomes, and a heightened emphasis on school readiness, only serves to deepen this preoccupation. Aligned to Moss' vision for the early years centre, the discussion groups attended to the ways in which parental views about early learning might be transformed. Reference was made to parental resistance to testing children at ever younger ages, and a call among parent groups for more opportunities for play, time outdoors, time away from screens etc. Drawing on Malaguzzi's ideas about the image of the child, the early years sector could more effectively work with parents to pursue the shared ambitions and overcome anxieties about early childhood in contemporary society. Possibilities for making early years centres public places that function as multi-purpose resources opens up possibilities for multi-generational, community-based educational encounters. Several participants recounted community activities they had coordinated where the entire neighbourhood, but especially older residents, were welcomed in to the nursery with untold benefits and unanticipated learning for all involved. Sure Start Children's Centres were considered very effective at engaging parents and creating public spaces/places of encounter; therefore there are abundant examples of effective practice creating rich early childhood centres, with the full engagement and support of parents to transform public images of childhood and the early years workforce.

7.14 Collective Collaboration

Related to the points made above was a recognised need for advocates and whistle blowers to speak up on behalf of the early years sector. Whilst many were representatives from organisations vociferous in policy circles, campaigning hard against ill-conceived policies (such as baseline testing at two years old, adult:child ratios and so on) there was a sense that there needed to be greater cohesion. The Nutbrown Review and the government's refusal to implement the vast majority of recommendations was cited by

many as an outcry and a travesty yet the sector remains in disarray. The early years sector needs mechanisms to share and learn from each other, rather than reinscribing divisions and hierarchies. Many, debating over the course of the day, stressed that for the imagined child, centre and workforce to become realities, the sector must push back, and wherever possible resist, challenge and question, but also identify ways to reconfigure, be creative, and collectively unite. There are numerous organisations, networks, associations and powerful individuals working across the sector. In order to create a place for the 'rich' child to flourish, the sector must exercise its capacity for imaginative and creative ways to work together.

7.15 Chapter Summary: ruptures and leaky possibilities

The one day event provided an important opportunity within this study to debate and consider ideas for the future direction of training and qualifications for the ECEC workforce. To facilitate this, Professor Peter Moss presented a stimulus paper to over 50 representatives from across the field of ECEC. The paper was framed by the work of Malaguzzi, and outlined a vision for the future that rested upon imagining the child, the early childhood centre and the early childhood worker as 'rich'. A rich child is conceptualized as having the capacity to learn; as a citizen with rights and born with limitless and unknowable potential. Meanwhile the rich worker is a critical intellectual, exercising a right to debate and examine choices made and to wonder at what other choices might be possible. The early childhood centre is rich when it is conceptualized as a public space and a place of encounter for all citizens. The paper concluded by arguing for integrated ECEC with early years teachers representing half the workforce; graduate education and continuing professional development opportunities that are rigorous, strong and recognisable; and pay and status equal to that awarded to school teachers. Such a system would be publically funded and linked to qualifications. Finally, the rich children and rich workers would be guided by a loose *framework* of curriculum, pedagogy and modes of evaluation.

The paper stimulated lively debate and there was broad consensus (specifically about the image of the 'rich' child) but there were some points of departure. Prevailing policy discourses, particularly those outlined in chapter three: quality, school readiness and normative development, were felt to regulate and contain ECEC and make fully realizing the 'rich' worker challenging. Despite conformity (and some degree of comfort) to those wider external forces there was nevertheless felt to be evidence of the rich worker and rich centres (the case studies reported in chapter six provide examples of strong learning

communities, democratic professionalism, and demonstrable commitments to research, experimentation and critical questioning).

The proposal for ECEC to be publically funded through taxation generated animated discussion. As the PVI is the largest provider of ECEC provision in England it was impossible to imagine a reversal of this situation; it was suspected that a narrow definition of PVI was being deployed that construes all private sector models as 'businesses' seeking to maximize profits and minimize costs (including investment in staff development, training and qualifications). Viewing PVI provision in this way was considered inaccurate, unhelpful and divisive. Rather, recognising the creative approaches taken by individual settings, groups of settings (as outlined in chapter six) and across the sector more broadly can create opportunities for ECEC to collectively identify what reform is necessary. The Nutbrown Review was recognised as a rare moment when the sector came together, felt genuinely consulted about how to develop training and qualifications and so raise quality. Whilst the outcomes of the review saw the introduction of EYTS and EYE, the sector continues to experience disparity with the state maintained sector; and there has been an identifiable crisis in recruitment, retention and progression. Therefore creating or seizing opportunities to collectively (re-)imagine the future of ECEC are crucial if the richness that Moss envisions is to become reality.

Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Introduction

While it is vital we have early years specialist teachers, that is only half the battle for changing the professional identity and consequently the conditions of all those working with young children...it is important to seek to capture and promote aspects of a ground-upwards professionalism such as: the pedagogical approach that allows recognition of work with the child, as well as with their parent and carers; the recognition of the mindful requirements of an ethic of care; and the importance of reflexivity for professional practice (Chalke 2013: 219).

The literature reviewed for this study illustrated that the myriad policy changes to early years training and qualifications in England, over the past two decades, have been relentless and have resulted in a confused and inequitable landscape. Despite recommendations for greater clarity, rigour and robustness, offered in the Nutbrown Review (2012), the way in which those recommendations were either dismissed or only partially implemented have exacerbated the hierarchy between professionals working in schools and those working in early years, with important implications. The lack of parity between sectors has meant that those working in early years settings feel devalued and this has contributed to a growing shortage of trainee practitioners, and retention issues within the sector (NDNA 2016). Furthermore, the low pay often associated with early years roles and, in some cases, lack of embedded professional development opportunities, are further causes for concern.

8.2 Research Questions

Taking this context as its starting point, this study sought to address the following questions:

- a) What education and training is available to the early years workforce? How do different programmes compare? What information is available to the workforce about the different programmes? What are the intended aims of different training and qualifications available to the workforce?
- b) How does the content of programmes relate to early years practice? How do members of the early years workforce feel about the training they receive and its relationship to in-work experiences?
- c) Which are the 'best' training routes on offer to the early years sector? How is 'best' defined given the processes involved and the outcomes achieved? How does training impact upon

professional trajectories? What lessons can be learnt to inform future early years training and qualifications?

d)

To address these questions the research employed a range of methods to generate a rich body of data from which the issues could be more deeply understood and from which a series of recommendations could be made. Following on from a detailed review of current literature, which enabled the identification of core issues, the research gathered the views of training providers, employers, managers, nursery staff and a wide range of key stakeholders.

Across the datasets the issue of quality persistently resurfaced. Within policy there is a constant demand to 'raise the quality' of early childhood education and care, and the suggestion that this can be achieved by increasing the qualification levels of the workforce. But this research has highlighted a set of complex tensions that has come about through policy reform underpinned by economic imperatives. Attempts to raise the qualification levels of the workforce have been undertaken in an ad hoc and instrumental way (i.e. to increase the levels of qualifications as efficiently as possible and as cheaply as possible) without sufficient regard to the regulation of the training on offer, the practicalities of pursuing and completing programmes, or on the demands placed upon individuals and entire settings.

Policy demands for 'affordable quality' came under attack in this study for failing to recognise that developing and enhancing the quality of the workforce necessitates a sustained and committed investment. If Nutbrown's recommendations from 2012 had been implemented in their entirety the workforce would, by now, have a clear sense of the training and qualifications pathways available, feel assured of rigour and relevance of provision, and crucially recognise themselves as valuable professionals, equal to those working with older children. The piecemeal and reactionary unfolding of government reform over the past four years has instead created a confusing, inconsistent, in places unregulated, and unsustainable framework – destined for yet further reform as the realities of 'affordable quality' become apparent. The most recent workforce survey published by the National Day Nurseries Association (2016a) reports a marked decline in levels of qualifications (where there had been a consistent upward trend), and higher staff turnover which was directly attributed to the requirement for staff to hold GCSE A-C in maths and English. A spokesperson from NDNA was quoted in a press release about the survey:

We have been campaigning for years for adequate investment in the sector to attract and retain good candidates to improve and in some places, maintain good quality provision. Low pay is the legacy of years of underfunding for 'free' places which must be addressed. But a change to the GCSE requirements will give the sector the boost it needs in the meantime to reverse the worrying downward spiral. We look forward to the Department for Education's forthcoming workforce strategy which we want to address the GCSE requirements, provide progression pathways, address training accessibility and affordability and make early years an attractive career of choice for bright, vocational candidates (National Day Nurseries Association 2016b).

These sentiments are reinforced throughout this study, with constant reference to a crisis in childcare, downward spirals, uneven playing fields and moving goal posts. The participants in this research felt strongly that there must be decisive action by government to revoke many of the ill-conceived demands being made of the sector. Whilst generating evidence to support this bleak picture, this research was also concerned to identify ways in which the sector might move forward. It is perhaps unsurprising that many of the conclusions and recommendations from this research relate directly to the recommendations made in the Nutbrown Review and a need to breathe fresh life into campaigns to insist they are acted upon. Whilst much of this report is devoted to accounts of creative and effective ways to ensure quality of early years provision through the development of staff, the broader issues remain. Whilst training can be taken 'in-house', and as the case studies in this research have demonstrated, can effectively 'upskill' the workforce and develop deep critical thinking, this is made easier through economies of scale or localised commitments on the part of single-settings to make costly investments in staff development as in case study one. Attention must be paid to the entire workforce and collectively, as a sector, there must be recognition that the current 'uneven playing field' with its 'constantly shifting goal posts' is a matter of grave social injustice.

An integral part of the study, as outlined in the previous chapter, offered an invitation to grapple with the image of the child, image of the setting and image of the worker. Taking time to do this generated lively debate, consensus and hope. Working to reconceptualise entrenched ideas about quality, the workforce, and the imposition of policy (as fixed and problematic) generates possibilities to think more expansively about what might be possible. Crucially the one-day event underlined the urgent need to shift understandings and public perceptions of the sector. Working with young children is the most important, worthwhile and valuable occupation yet it is routinely and persistently denigrated. As a

sector, at all levels, there is an urgent need to resist further damaging policy reform and instead recognise the need to insist collectively upon generative developments.

8.3 Recommendations

Based upon the evidence collected from more than 120 participants, through the various strands of this research, the following recommendations have emerged.

8.3.1 Clear qualifications pathways directly linked to a career pathway

Clear pathways would provide motivation for continuous professional development. Therefore, the number of qualifications should be streamlined and greater assurance is needed that qualifications are rigorous, challenging, and fit for purpose. This should be achieved through the regulation of qualifications and providers to ensure what is on offer is recognised, reputable and transferable (i.e. holds parity with the statutory sector). More bursaries and sustained investment to enable the early years workforce to pursue high quality training/qualifications that are specialist and recognised should be made available. The lack of clear information about qualifications, their value and usefulness must be addressed. It is not acceptable for 'Google' to be the primary source of (mis)information; there must be unambiguous and impartial information made available to members of an overworked, underpaid workforce seeking to enhance their professional development.

Specifically, across the ECEC qualifications framework:

- Early Years Teacher Status (Level 6) must have QTS and parity with comparable teaching qualifications for the statutory sector;
- Early Years Educator (Level 3) must provide greater focus on birth-to-three specialism;
- A good quality foundational Level 3 qualification should be pursued as a minimum, and should include intensive placements. The GCSE requirement should be removed, and replaced with equivalency/functional skills; and
- All training and qualifications should include (action) research as an effective means to weave theory to applied learning and so bridge the theory-practice divide.

8.3.2 Research, Experiment, Innovate

The curriculum content on *all* programmes should be updated to include (action) research, since this cultivates critical reflexivity and can therefore improve quality.

- Embed research into training and qualifications and also strengthen its place within localised learning communities to (collectively) enhance practice.
- Education that enables members of the early years workforce at all levels to question and wrestle with the underpinning meanings of all aspects of their work is vital. Furthermore, opportunities to develop a critical awareness, not just of early years pedagogy but also of themselves as members of an employment sector, is crucial if the workforce is to transform how it understands itself and how others understand it.

8.3.4 Learning Communities

- Increase the number of qualified teachers with specialist early years knowledge (but also include graduates from other subject areas as the quality of provision can be enriched by staff with diverse expertise, as well as a knowledge and experience of early childhood).
- Nurseries should offer effective leadership and learning communities to staff. This involves providing support to identify and pursue continuing professional development opportunities that are rigorous and valuable.
- Recognise that learning is on-going i.e. all staff should be in constant pursuit of more knowledge and improved practice through critical reflection which can be supported through relevant qualifications.
- In-house training can be a useful means to engage staff in training. It can also alleviate the stress and confusion of self-identifying ‘full and relevant’ providers and qualifications. It can however limit critical awareness of wider workforce issues and reinforce parochial views of working in the early years.
- Graduate-led ECEC can raise the quality of provision. The depth of knowledge about early years theories and philosophies taught on degree programmes can open up ways to view early childhood pedagogy and children’s learning more expansively.
- Effective graduate-led provision can create an environment where the pursuit of higher level qualifications can be recognised as valuable, necessary and attainable.
- Being part of a community of practice, with ample opportunities to learn with and from peers has clear benefits for the identification, pursuit, and the successful completion of continuing

professional development opportunities. This rests upon the vision and actions of supportive management – whether in a single setting or part of larger organisation – early years teams need to feel valued and supported throughout their careers.

8.3.5 Collectively collaborate to shift public (mis)conceptions about childhood

The early years is not (solely) about school readiness and developing children to become competent, worthy citizens. Rather young children should be understood as researchers, adventurers and explorers from whom we have a great deal to learn. To shift the perceptions of the wider public (including parents and other professionals) will require the concerted effort of all in the sector, from advocacy groups, employer organisations, unions, training providers, academics and every single member of the early years workforce, to push for a re-imagin(in)g of the child, the setting and the worker.

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Appendices

Email inviting training providers to participate in the survey

The Centre for Education Research & Scholarship (CERS) at Middlesex University has been commissioned to undertake a study on behalf of The Association for Professional Development in Early Years (TACTYC). The study will investigate the training routes of Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT), Early Years Professional Status (EYPS and Early Years Education (EYE). It will consider how these different routes into the sector relate to status, financial remuneration and career progression.

As a previous or current training provider, we would like to invite you to participate in an online survey to offer your knowledge, insights and opinions about the training routes of EYITT, EYPS and/or EYE. The survey will roughly take 20 minutes to complete. We'd be so grateful for your contribution to the study. Data collected through the survey will remain anonymous and will be stored securely. The research has been approved by the Education Ethics Committee at Middlesex University. You will find a full participant information sheet for the study attached.

To complete the survey, click here: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/6756TGD>

Early Years Training Provision

1. What training routes do you provide or have you provided in the past?

	Currently	In previous years
Early Years Educator (EYE)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Early Years Professional Status (EYPS)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Who does/did this training route? Who was the typical student?

EYE	<input type="text"/>
EYITT	<input type="text"/>
EYPS	<input type="text"/>

3. What reasons do/did students have for choosing this training route?

EYE	<input type="text"/>
EYITT	<input type="text"/>
EYPS	<input type="text"/>

4. What difficulties are/were there in delivering this training route?

EYE	<input type="text"/>
EYITT	<input type="text"/>
EYPS	<input type="text"/>

5. What barriers are/were there in recruiting to this training route?

EYE	<input type="text"/>
EYITT	<input type="text"/>
EYPS	<input type="text"/>

To carry on the discussion, please join our forum: <http://eytraining.freeforums.net/>

You will need to register as a member of the forum in order to post your comments and questions. This takes 2 minutes. When registering, choose a username that will help to maintain your anonymity.

Done

Early Years Qualifications and Training Study: Stakeholder Interview

The Centre for Education Research and Scholarship (CERS) at Middlesex University has been commissioned to undertake an important study on behalf of The Association for Professional Development in Early Years (TACTYC). This study recognises that over the past two decades the Early Years Qualifications and Training pathways available to the workforce have been subject to numerous, significant revisions with important implications for public perception, financial remuneration and career progression. The study aims to consider current good practice and to consider the future for EY training and qualifications.

Confidentiality, ethics, anonymity (as far as possible).

1. Background

- Brief details about the participant
- Background/overview of organisation:
 - remit, history, nature of involvement with EY training and qualifications

2. Views on recent developments to the training and qualifications framework in EY

- Reflections on *The Nutbrown Review*
 - key strengths/weaknesses,
 - was their organisation involved in consultation exercises
 - what impact has TNReview had on training providers, training provision, quality of the workforce

- Reflections on *More Great Childcare*
 - key strengths/weaknesses
 - was their organisation involved in consultation exercises
 - what impact has MGC had on training providers, training provision, quality the workforce

- Views on move from EYPS to EYTS:
 - parity, non-QTS, no NQT year, national pay scales
- Views on EYE qualifications introduced in 2014: requirement for A-C grade GCSE Maths and English

3. Comparing training and qualifications pathways

- How do the training routes currently available compare:
 - to those available previously (i.e. NNEB as Level-3 Gold Standard)
 - to those available in other contexts (i.e. Social Pedagogy in European countries)
 - to each other (i.e. EYITT, EYTS)

4. Views on content of training programmes available

- How has the content of training programmes altered
- To what extent do programmes focus on school readiness, developmentalism, learning through play, child-centred pedagogies etc
- Are the training pathways sufficiently specialist in early childhood pedagogy

5. Uptake and value of training

- Are EY qualification pathways appealing to practitioners
 - What facilitates their engagement
 - What barriers/deterrents are there to taking up EY training
 - Is EY training viewed as value for money
 - How does it translate in the workplace (i.e. promotion, pay, status)

6. Future for Early Years Training and Qualifications

- How should EY training and qualifications be developed
- What should be retained
- What currently works well

7. Finish and Close

- Anything to add
- Questions for the interviewer
- Willing to attend Seminar in June

Early Years Qualifications and Training Study: Educator Interviews

The Centre for Education Research and Scholarship (CERS) at Middlesex University has been commissioned to undertake an important study on behalf of The Association for Professional Development in Early Years (TACTYC). This study recognises that over the past two decades the Early Years Qualifications and Training pathways available to the workforce have been subject to numerous, significant revisions with important implications for public perception, financial remuneration and career progression. The study aims to consider current good practice and to consider the future for EY training and qualifications.

Confidentiality, ethics, anonymity (as far as possible).

1. Background

- Brief details about the participant
- Length of time worked in ECE
- Current role, responsibilities
- Qualifications held:
 - Reasons for choosing particular pathways
 - Motivations for pursuing particular qualifications
 - Views on range of qualifications available

2. Views on recent developments to the training and qualifications framework in EY

- Reflections on changes to qualifications and training available
 - What do they consider to have been the most significant changes to qualifications in the recent past (i.e. since 2008)
- Views on move from EYPS to EYTS:
 - parity, non-QTS, no NQT year, national pay scales
- Views on EYE qualifications introduced in 2014: requirement for A-C grade GCSE Maths and English
- How do these different routes shape their professional identities/characteristics.
 - Do they prioritise particular practitioner qualities?

3. Comparing training and qualifications pathways

- How do the training routes currently available compare:
 - to those available previously (i.e. NNEB as Level-3 Gold Standard)
 - to those available in other contexts (i.e. Social Pedagogue in European countries)
 - to each other (i.e. EYITT, EYTS)

4. Views on content of training programmes available

- How/has the content of training programmes altered?
 - What has been added/taken away?
 - Who benefits from these changes?
- To what extent do programmes focus on:
 - school readiness
 - child development
 - learning through play
 - Outdoor pedagogies
 - child-centred pedagogies etc
- Are the training pathways sufficiently specialist in early childhood pedagogy?
- How does the training you have undertaken inform your professional work with children and families?
- What professional roles are you able to fulfil once you complete particular programmes (i.e. EYTS) that were not possible beforehand?
- In your opinion, which is the 'best' training route on offer to early years practitioners?
 - Why do you think this?
- How do others (i.e. colleagues, parents, other professionals working with children) view early years qualifications?

5. Uptake and value of training

- Are EY qualification pathways appealing
 - What facilitates your engagement
 - What barriers/deterrents are there to taking up EY training
 - How is training funded?
 - Does EY training represent value for money
 - How does it translate in the workplace (i.e. promotion, pay, status)

6. Future for Early Years Training and Qualifications

- How should EY training and qualifications be developed/improved?
- What should be retained?
- What currently works well?

7. Finish and Close

- Anything to add
- Questions for the interviewer
- Willing to attend Seminar on 3rd June?

Early Years Qualifications and Training Study: Case Study Focus Group

The Centre for Education Research and Scholarship (CERS) at Middlesex University has been commissioned to undertake an important study on behalf of The Association for Professional Development in Early Years (TACTYC). This study recognises that over the past two decades the Early Years Qualifications and Training pathways available to the workforce have been subject to numerous, significant revisions with important implications for public perception, financial remuneration and career progression. The study aims to consider current good practice and to consider the future for EY training and qualifications.

Confidentiality, ethics, anonymity (as far as possible).

8. Outline purpose of Focus Group

- To debate the core issues in relation to changes to EY training and qualifications
- No right/wrong answers
- Be respectful – don't talk over each other

9. Views on recent developments to the training and qualifications framework in EY

- General reflections on changes to qualifications and training available
- How do different/new pathways routes shape professional identities/characteristics
 - Do different pathways prioritise particular practitioner qualities?

10. Comparing training and qualifications pathways

- How do the training routes currently available compare:
 - to those available previously
 - to those available in other contexts
 - to each other

11. Views on content of training programmes available

- How/has the content of training programmes altered?
 - What has been added/taken away?
 - Who benefits from these changes?
- What do programmes tend to focus on:
- Are the training pathways sufficiently specialist in early childhood pedagogy?
- How does the training inform work with children and families?
- Which is the 'best' training route on offer?

- How are early years qualifications by the general public?

12. Uptake and value of training

- What facilitates your engagement
- What barriers/deterrents are there to taking up EY training
- How is training funded?
- Does EY training represent value for money
 - How does it translate in the workplace (i.e. promotion, pay, status)

13. Future for Early Years Training and Qualifications

- How should EY training and qualifications be developed/improved?
- What should be retained?
- What currently works well?

14. Finish and Close

- Anything to add
- Questions for the interviewer
- Willing to attend Seminar on 3rd June?

Participant Identification Number:

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Early Years Qualifications and Training Study

Name of Researcher: Professor Jayne Osgood

Please initial box

- 1.** I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet datedfor the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

- 2.** I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

- 3.** I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen by a designated auditor.

- 4.** I agree that my non-identifiable research data may be stored in National Archives and be used anonymously by others for future research. I am assured that the confidentiality of my data will be upheld through the removal of any personal identifiers.

5. I understand that my interview may be taped and subsequently transcribed.

6. I agree to take part in the above study.

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of person taking consent (if different from researcher)	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Early Years Qualifications and Training Study

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PIS)

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

The Centre for Education Research and Scholarship (CERS) at Middlesex University has been commissioned to undertake an important study on behalf of The Association for Professional Development in Early Years (TACTYC). This study recognises that over the past two decades the Early Years Qualifications and Training pathways available to the workforce have been subject to numerous, significant revisions with important implications for public perception, financial remuneration and career progression. The aim of the study is to consider the aspects of current qualifications and training pathways that work well and to consider what might be improved.

Why have I been chosen to participate?

We want to hear your views and experiences as somebody with knowledge and experience that will usefully inform the study. The study will involve several groups of participants including stakeholders, training providers, and early years trainees. Different groups participating in the study will be involved in a variety of ways. The various methods and participants are outlined here:

Telephone interviews: stakeholder organisations;

On-line survey and on-line discussion forum: training providers;

Case studies (interviews and focus groups): trainees, training providers, early years educators)

One-day seminar to include discussion groups: stakeholders, training providers, trainees.

All data collected throughout the study will be anonymised and remain confidential; you will not be personally identifiable in reports and other publications. It might be that particular participating stakeholder organisations are identifiable, where this is the case, approval from the participant will be sought prior to publication.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will participate in one of the methods (see above) depending upon which participant group you belong to.

- The **on-line survey** is easy to complete (taking approximately 20 minutes) and the **on-line forum** provides a space for training providers to participate in an on-going, on-line discussion.
- For those involved in **interviews** we anticipate these lasting approximately one hour. Some participants will be invited to participate in a **focus group** which will last around 90 minutes.
- Those participating in the **one-day seminar** will listen to experts in the field debating early years training and qualifications and then have the chance to contribute to discussion groups.

The aim of these research methods is to collect views and opinions and where relevant your experiences of different Early Years training and qualifications.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There is no known risk in participating in this project. However, should you wish to withdraw your consent to participate at any time that is your right.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We hope that participating in the study will inform wider policy debates about the future of training and qualifications in the early years. However, this cannot be guaranteed.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you which is used will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised from it. For data collected online, additional data that is collected through the internet server (e.g. your IP address) will be discarded immediately. All data will be stored, analysed and reported in compliance with the Data Protection Legislation.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The research will be published as a report to the funders: TACTYC and as a series of academic papers which will be published in journals. Participants should contact the researcher for the published results. Rest assured that you will not be personally identifiable in any report/publication.

Who has reviewed the study?

Middlesex University, School of Health and Education, Health and Social Care Ethics Subcommittee.

Contact for further information

Professor Jayne Osgood
Centre for Education Research and Scholarship (CERS)
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Early Years Qualifications and Training Study

The Centre for Education Research and Scholarship (CERS) at Middlesex University has been commissioned to undertake an important study on behalf of The Association for Professional Development in Early Years (TACTYC). This study recognises that over the past two decades the Early Years Qualifications and Training pathways available to the workforce have been subject to numerous, significant revisions with important implications for public perception, financial remuneration and career progression. During the 2000s the CWDC, in its attempts to enact the *Children's Workforce Strategy* (2005), introduced the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) which went on to become the subject of both critique and praise. Considerable government commissioned research was undertaken to establish an evidence base about the effectiveness of EYPS to create positive change in early childhood provision.

However by 2013, following *The Nutbrown Review* (2012), Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) replaced EYPS and there ensued a debate about its parity with school teacher qualifications. A number of issues emerged, chief amongst them was that EYTS lacked QTS and all the associated benefits including observation of practice, support during a NQT year and national pay scales. There has been on-going concerns that EYTs and Training Providers are subjected to the same demands as those in the maintained school sector but enjoy fewer benefits. Alongside the challenges and tensions to arise from the introduction of EYTS and EYITT pathways are those associated with the Early Years Educator qualifications, introduced in 2014, for practitioners seeking a Level 3 qualification. A significant issue with the EYE route is the requirement for applicants to hold GCSE English and Maths at grade A-C. For many this acts to deter them and presents recruitment challenges to training providers. These are some of the core issues to be investigated; a focus on other concerns frequently cited in debates about training and qualifications including the schoolification of early years training content and the erosion of early childhood specialist skills/expertise in the interests of school readiness will also be explored. The costs of pursuing EY qualifications and the ultimate exchange value they represent within the labour market will also be addressed. Sustained policy attention and reform to the qualifications and training pathways available to the EY workforce has been the subject of much research and debate and this study will make a vital contribution to gain new insights as the terrain continues to shift.

Aims and Scope

- To set the study within context by reviewing relevant policy and research literature;
- To provide an overview of the nature of courses (delivery, uptake, success);
- To consider the content of the training and its relationship to practice; and
- To identify implications of the training for career/professional development, reflective practice, resourcing and future provision.

The aims outlined will be addressed through a mixed methods study that will attempt to capture breadth (in terms of the literature and policy reviewed, range of providers included, and geographical coverage) as well as depth (detailed accounts about the experiences of delivering, receiving and enacting the training and qualifications under investigation). This will be achieved by making use of technology where possible to achieve efficient data collection.

Methodology

1. A Literature Review to include research studies, grey literature, policy texts and media coverage.
2. Collation and analysis of on-line marketing materials for courses.
3. On-line Survey of Training Providers.
4. On-line consultation space for Training Providers
5. Telephone Interviews with small sample of stakeholders.
6. Three Case Studies with Trainees and their training providers, and in-work colleagues: to include focus groups and interviews.
7. One-day Seminar (with stimulus paper delivered by Prof. Peter Moss, and break out discussion groups made up of training providers, practitioners, advocacy groups, unions etc) to consider the future of early years training and qualifications.

Timescale The study will last approximately one year from December 2015.

Research Team

Dr Jayne Osgood is Professor of Education, Early Years. She joined the Centre for Education Research and Scholarship <http://www.mdx.ac.uk/our-research/centres/cers> at Middlesex University in June 2015. For more detail: <http://www.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/our-people/staff-directory/jayne-osgood> Jayne is responsible for the overall direction of the proposed project, contributing to all elements but with greatest input at the writing and dissemination stages.

Professor Emeritus Peter Moss at Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, UCL has a long and distinguished research profile in early childhood. Peter will act as consultant to the proposed research, his major input will be the delivery of the one-day Seminar which will generate data from the full range of participants about the future of qualifications and training options in the early years. https://www.ioe.ac.uk/staff/TCRU_37.html He will also contribute to publications from the study.

Dr Leena Robertson is Associate Professor within CERS. For more detail: <http://www.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/our-people/staff-directory/robertson-leena> Leena is involved in all stages of the proposed research; she has extensive experience of undertaking similar research.

Dr Mona Sakr is Lecturer in Early Childhood at Middlesex University and an active member of CERS. <http://www.mdx.ac.uk/about-us/our-people/staff-directory/sakr-mona> Like Leena, Mona will contribute to all aspects of the proposed study. Her expertise in digital research methods will be put to effective use throughout the study, particularly the on-line survey, on-line forum and analysis of on-line marketing materials available via the training providers.

Dilys Wilson is the Programme Leader for EYITT at Middlesex University. She spent many years training and developing programmes for practitioners. This involved partnerships with EY providers, training providers and Local Authority EY teams. She has delivered LA training for EYPS Networks and to leaders/managers in PVI sector on their role in leading practice, emotional wellbeing/strong teams and EYFS supervision. Dilys Wilson will offer important steerage to the project as well as access to networks of training providers and practitioners.