

## What can we learn from the Nutbrown report?

Foundations for Quality, the final report from the committee chaired by Professor Cathy Nutbrown looking at early years and childcare training and qualifications, has now been published. Although the committee can only make recommendations, and we will have to wait to see how the government responds, we now have an insight into the priorities that need to be addressed to raise the skills of practitioners and the quality of provision in the sector.

### Summary of the Nutbrown report

[The Nutbrown report](#) is honest and straightforward about what the key issues are for the sector and makes some very clear recommendations about how these should be addressed. In contrast to many reports produced for the government, it is written in a very accessible style and is well worth reading in full to pick up on the thinking behind the recommendations.

The 19 recommendations set out in the report cover:

- improving initial qualifications and incorporating a stronger focus on child development
- phasing-in a requirement for Level 3 to be the minimum standard for practitioners to have achieved to be counted in staff:child ratios
- requiring all students embarking on Level 3 courses to have achieved a minimum of level 2 (GCSE) in English and mathematics
- making it a requirement that all placements for students in training take place in settings that have been graded 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted
- improving the delivery of qualifications by ensuring tutors have the right qualifications and skills, and are able to stay up-to-date through direct experience of working in the sector
- putting a responsibility on the early years sector to take a lead on mentoring new staff, supporting them as they enter work and making sure students learn from good practice
- encouraging graduate leadership in the sector through Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) and a move towards a new specialist qualified teacher status (QTS) qualification covering the birth-to-seven age range.

### Initial qualifications and recruitment

The recommendations regarding improving initial qualifications will be welcomed by all; they show that the committee has taken note of what setting leaders and managers have had to say on this issue. As part of a move to raise the professional profile of the early years sector, the recommendation to impose minimum educational standards for entry to training is very welcome. To help young children build firm foundations in their understanding of language and mathematics, it is essential that practitioners have the skills and knowledge to 'bring a story to life imaginatively and help children to explore through play concepts such as number, size and weight ... in a way that engages and enthuses young children to enjoy learning and discover more' (*Foundations for Quality paragraph 3.7*).

However, these higher entry requirements mean a great deal of work will have to be done in schools and colleges to change long-standing attitudes to childcare as a career choice. In the meantime we can anticipate problems with the recruitment of young people leaving school.

The report is refreshingly forthright in identifying the tensions that can exist between training providers delivering underpinning knowledge, and early years settings providing the practical element of a student's training. The report challenges FE colleges and training providers to review and invest in professional development for their teaching staff, but it also places a responsibility on early years settings to create an effective support and mentoring structure for students and newly qualified practitioners. Now is the time to develop more effective partnership arrangements with the training providers linked to your setting, working with them to put in place structured student support plans. Although there will inevitably be cost implications, it is important to set these against the benefits of improved training, staff retention and quality of provision for children.

## **The future of EYPS**

Foundations for Quality is honest in its comments about the perception of Early Years Professional Status in relation to qualified teacher status. Despite all the promises to the contrary when EYPS was first launched, Professor Nutbrown concludes, 'However hard we try, I do not believe a status that is not the same as QTS will ever be seen as equal to QTS' (paragraph 5.12).

This is not a negative comment but an acceptance of the status quo, and it is accompanied by positive recommendations about how to address this issue. These include creating, from September 2013, a new specialist early years route to qualified teacher status that would specialise in the age range from birth to seven. Practitioners already holding EYPS would be able to access routes to obtaining this qualification as a priority, but as yet we have no detail of what this might entail.

In the meantime, the pathways to accessing EYPS remain open for any practitioner interested in accessing this route. The [new standards for EYPS](#), updated to bring them in line with the revised EYFS Framework, have been published but information on the overall EYPS programme seems to be much harder to access now that responsibility has transferred from the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to the Teaching Agency. Prospective EYPS candidates may find the [FAQs on EYPS on the Department for Education website](#) helpful.

## **No pain, no gain**

Raising the entry level for early years qualifications and recommending improvements to the quality of training across the board is bound to create difficulties during the transition period – in recruitment, in supporting professional development and in rewarding the attainment of higher level qualifications. However, if this improves the outcomes for young children and the status of the profession, it will all be worthwhile.