

# IN training

**Natasha Leonards** is three months into a Diploma for the Children and Young People's Workforce course from the National Extension College. *TN* spoke to her about her experiences so far...

## What's your background in the early years, and why did you decide upon the Diploma for the Children and Young People's Workforce?

**NL:** At the moment I'm a childminder, but before I had my youngest child I worked in a school as a teaching assistant with Foundation Stage children. I did the Cache childminding unit with NEC last year, but I wanted to broaden my knowledge and skill base so that I could do the best job I could as an early years setting – because childminding is so new to me, I'm very open to learning new practice and comparing what I'm doing to what the current thinking is.

Once my daughter starts school I'll probably look for something outside of the home again, and because the diploma is so rounded I think it will open up a lot of other avenues for me there, too.

## What topics does the diploma cover?

**NL:** There are a range of compulsory core units, as well as optional units which you select to make up the points you need to gain the qualification. I've primarily chosen those that are relevant to the early years, but I've also opted for two or three units about which I know nothing, for example, special needs, helping children with language and speech development, and coordinating SEN – so that if I ever have the opportunity to look after a child with special needs, I'll have some of the knowledge necessary.

## What have you found most useful so far?

**NL:** I'm about four units through, so there's still lots to cover, but so far one of the most interesting units has been on safeguarding, confidentiality and disclosure. I've found that really useful as it wasn't something I knew a great deal about – it encouraged me go back and look at my policies, and to re-think how I would deal with things in light of what the current good practice is.

## How is the diploma delivered and assessed?

**NL:** I'm doing it online through the NEC Laser learning system, but you're assigned a dedicated tutor too. It took a few weeks to get my head around the online way of learning and using the system, but



once you get to grips with it it's easy. Some of the content is video-delivered, some of it's via Powerpoint; it's all different. I'm also reading through the *Children and Young People's Workforce (Early Learning and Childcare) Handbook* by Penny Tassoni, which links in directly with each unit, so you can follow it as you work online.

In terms of assessment, there are tasks to complete which you upload to the Laser system. You then hear back from your tutor, who might point out something you've missed, or something you need to work on, and you can then work on it and re-submit it. There will also be face-to-face assessments, but they happen later on in the course.

## How much time do you spend each week studying, and how long does the course take in total?

**NL:** It's recommended that you spend about four to six hours each week on the course, but it is flexible – you can work at your own pace, which suits me really well because of my family commitments. It's a year-long course, so at the moment my end date is round about the end of May next year.

For more information on courses available from NEC, visit [nec.ac.uk](http://nec.ac.uk)

## FURTHER OPPORTUNITIES...

### A SURE THING

The ninth annual Sure Start conference and exhibition is taking place in London on September 14th. A must-attend event for children's centre leaders and Local Authority officers, covering up-to-the-minute policy and guidance on best practice, it will host 20 expert speakers who will share their knowledge through a series of forward thinking plenary sessions, panel debates and workshops. Visit [neilstewartassociates.com/kd195](http://neilstewartassociates.com/kd195)

### LEARN TO LEAD

Best Practice Network provides Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) qualifications at levels 3, 5 and 7 in Coaching and Mentoring, and Management. Its training takes place across the country and is delivered by a highly qualified team of experienced mentors and assessors. Call 0845 873 2614 or visit [bestpracticenet.co.uk/earlyyears](http://bestpracticenet.co.uk/earlyyears) for more information.