

In Training

New opportunities to further your career



The 'hair or care' stereotype still exists for many considering a course in the early years; yet many other sectors have raised their expectations in relation to enrolment. It must be a cause for concern that early years courses are often the easiest to enrol on and the courses that the students with the poorest academic records are sometimes steered towards.

PROFESSOR CATHY NUTBROWN

Qualification concerns

Professor Cathy Nutbrown has published an interim report into how to help people working in the early years sector to improve their skills, as part of her ongoing review of the qualifications available to nursery staff and childminders in the UK. Making headlines was the observation that those undergoing training are currently not required to demonstrate their competence in English and maths – interpreted in certain sections of the media as meaning that some children may be in the care of staff who cannot read, write or manage simple calculations. Whilst these claims have been rejected by some, for example, the Pre-school Learning Alliance's Neil Leitch, as being unduly negative, others such as charity 4Children's Anne Longfield have agreed that the report is "a wake-up call" for the sector.

Regardless of the tone or language employed to sum up the situation, there is a consensus that there remains much to do to ensure early years training is fit for purpose. Amongst a range of findings, the report also raises concerns about the "bewildering array of qualifications" employers face when recruiting; a lack of trust in the standards of the delivery of some training; and the deployment of those with Early Years Professional Status – specifically, whether enough are working with the young children they have been trained to help. It is these points and others that the second phase of the review will now consider.

For more discussion of Professor Nutbrown's interim report, turn to page 11, or visit tinyurl.com/bsax74u to read it in full. The final report is due to be published in the summer.

Further opportunities...

Tall Oaks

Tall Oaks has extended its range of courses. New trainers include Kirstine Beeley, Alistair Bryce-Clegg and Jenny Barber, and sessions relating to the revised EYFS are available. The training centre at Glebe Farm is also a Forest School, with Tall Oaks linking up with the FSLI to offer Forest School leader training. Visit www.talloaks.co.uk

Pen Green Research Base

Pen Green Research Base provides training and development opportunities for all early years leaders and practitioners. On offer is a range of short courses as well as higher education qualifications. Call 01536 443 435 or visit pengreen.org

NEW: Safeguarding training from Educare

Educare and the NSPCC have launched two new distance learning programmes designed to complement their existing safeguarding range. The first, 'Child Neglect', is a three-module programme suitable for anybody with a basic understanding of child protection, and covering the causes and signs of neglect, as well as responses to it. The second, 'Child Sexual Abuse', comprises four modules and is aimed at those working in an organisational setting. It includes facts and guidance about the issue, and offers practical steps to promote vigilance amongst staff members. For more information, visit educare.co.uk. For more details about the NSPCC, head to nspcc.org.uk/inform

Course focus

THE UNIQUE TODDLER PROJECT

The details

The Unique Toddler Project was developed by early years consultants at QLS, who recognised a need to provide training to meet the specific needs of toddlers and to enhance childcare professionals' knowledge. The project comprises two audit tools designed to help early years practitioners to shape a varied range of opportunities and resources, helping toddlers to discover connections and think critically as well as enhancing their ability to ask questions.

Engaging with the Unique Toddler Project gives access to the following four booklets:

- The Unique Toddler: Tuning in to the Needs of Toddlers
- Emotional Development – Audit Tool
- Enabling Environments 1 – Practitioners' Audit Tool
- Enabling Environments 2 – Examples of enhanced provision

For more information, visit www.qls.org.uk

Nursery manager Celia Andrews explains how audit tools developed by Staffordshire Quality Learning Services have enabled her to improve her team's practice...

Can you tell us a bit about your setting?

CA: I'm nursery manager at St Thomas's Nursery in Kidsgrove, Staffordshire – we take children aged from two up to five-years and have two separate sites. In our toddler nursery, which takes children aged two and over, we have around about 60 children on role.

We work in quite a deprived area. A number of our families are quite poor, and we're involved with Staffordshire Council's Think 2 Project, which provides early years funding for disadvantaged two-year-olds.

How did you get involved with the Unique Toddler Project?

CA: We've always been quite pro-active in taking training and improving our knowledge. We used to take children from two-and-a-half years, but around four years ago made the decision to take them from two, so we wanted to gain a better understanding of toddler development.

Through our involvement in Think 2, we heard about the introduction of the Unique Toddler Project and were given the opportunity to pilot it for its first year.

What did piloting the project involve?

CA: As manager, in the first instance I undertook training outside of our setting to learn about the project's aims, and how it was to be delivered. It took about half a day, and I was then given materials to take back into the setting, where I delivered the project to my key workers.

This involved carrying out two wide-ranging audits. I had my view of the nursery – how I wanted it to run and how I thought it was being run – but the audits allowed me to get the views of the other practitioners. We did the audits individually – they each take about an hour – to help us to identify, for example, why we weren't reaching a particular level with a child, or to find out if a member of staff didn't understand a certain area of the children's development. It was really useful to get all of those views back, and where there were comments suggesting something that we weren't doing, it helped us to make changes to our practice.

How useful has the project been?

CA: I think it's been really beneficial, for staff, children and parents. Firstly, it's a good thing

for practitioners to reflect on their practice – it's helped us all to work better as a team and we've put a lot of new things into practice as a result. Secondly, it's helped us to form parent partnerships – because our key working system is running more smoothly as a result of the audits, we're better able to help our parents to understand the development of their children. It's given practitioners confidence to explain to parents "This is why we're doing this..." at parents' evenings, for example. We've even introduced workshops for parents with the children, too, for instance, helping them to understand why we're doing messy play, what the benefits are – which is really helpful when some parents don't like the idea of their children getting dirty!

On top of that, it's had benefits for our children's development too – they're more confident and have an understanding of what we've been doing. We've even had schools commenting on how advanced our children are when they start with them, which is great to hear.

And it's ongoing. We're continuing what we've learned from the project. We're always looking to develop our practice – there are always new parents so you have to respond to their needs and the needs of their children.

