

# Early Years forum summary

**Purpose of the group** - Bringing the Early Years & FE sector together to support the recruitment crisis.

**Objectives-**

- To better understand what early years settings want and how FE can respond.
- Understand the barriers to apprenticeship take up & drop offs
- How to engage with settings to recruit an apprentice
- Find solutions to support settings with the crisis

**Guest Expert** - Clare Bligh, Fox Family Hub



The group started by introducing themselves and sharing their experience within early years and what they would like to gain from the forum and shared some updates on what challenges they are currently facing.

One provider said they currently have 140 early years vacancies nationally for apprenticeship places, and they are only placing approx. 4 per week!

The group discuss the language used when promoting early years apprenticeships to young people and the issue around it being deemed 'care' not 'education' is off putting for some people.

A provider mentioned they are looking at developing a boot-camp for early years to help recruitment, this will be a 12 week introduction to early years – which the group all thought would be a great idea.

The group also discussed the functional skills element of the apprenticeship and how this is off putting for some people. – this was re-confirmed by Claire who has her own apprentices, and one is struggling to pass maths. Claire explained that this apprentice is a fantastic early years practitioner but without passing the maths she will be unable to achieve her apprenticeship, which means she will not count towards ratio's, therefore, becoming a resource the employer can no longer afford.

NCFE shared their platform to help apprentices with their functional skills gaps and struggles the platform which Learner Led Resources for Functional Skills based on their initial assessments: The group discussed the national picture, pulled from headlines & news articles on the crisis, these were detailed on the forum slides and include –

- More than eight in 10 early years providers (84%) are finding it difficult to recruit staff.
- 49% of providers have had to limit the number of places at their setting or stop taking on new children as a result of the crisis.
- Over a third of respondents are actively considering leaving the sector
- One in six believe that staffing shortages are likely to force their setting to close permanently within a year.



- Recruiting and retaining staff is the sectors biggest challenge.
- Attracting quality staff is difficult but keeping them is shockingly challenging.
- Staffing crisis is also causing issues outside of the sector, as access to childcare is limiting many women-led businesses from thriving.
- Early-years childcare workers are quitting jobs blighted by low pay, long hours and poor prospects.
- Nurseries are facing the threat of mass closures as rising energy costs pile pressure on a sector already strained by a recruitment crisis.



Claire then shared a very insightful, passionate and impactful presentation on the crisis through her lens as an employer and manager of early years settings, a contracted early years Ofsted inspector and one of the DfE's expert consultants on covid recovery for the early years sector.

Claire shared that beyond the main issues we are trying to tackle in the sector with recruitment and retention of staff there are further issues that need to be addressed including –

- Women's equality
- Cost of living
- Funding (or lack of)
- Mental health needs of parents
- Speech & language challenges of children
- Lack of outdoor play and social anxieties of parents
- Increased need for top-up funding (currently approx. 35% of children needing additional support, whereas pre-pandemic it was approx. 10%)

Claire discussed the need for more apprenticeships, and her support for apprentices and her positive recognition on the skills apprentices make and contribution to the workplace, however she cannot ignore the big anomalies surrounding the funding these apprenticeships attract. Claire shared an eye-opening fact that the L3 EYE standard has 28 core knowledge & skills to achieve and attracts £6K funding, whereas the L3 Electrician standard, has only 14 core elements but attracts an £18K funding band. Why is there such an anomaly – is this due to the attitude and recognition of the sector being ‘care’ not ‘education’ and therefore can be funded down.

Claire mentioned the need for turning the KSB’s into opportunities to enable those working in the sector to recognise the progression opportunities and value the sector as a desired career. There needs to be more planning for next steps in the level 3 standard, in order to accelerate people into management positions and room leaders, otherwise early years settings will be forced to close.

Early years settings would benefit from their apprentices learning about management techniques, dealing with staff, ratios and finance, understanding well-being & a greater focus on safeguarding and presently training organisations are just focused on the elements of the standard and not the extension needs of the settings or sector.

Claire shared with the group some campaigns that are helping support the early years crisis, and would recommend training organisations build these into their curriculum with apprentices and support the campaigns as an ally for the sector. These include –

- Pregnant then screwed.
- Shaping us
- Early Years Equality Group



Some other research and campaigns of interest include –

- [Breaking Point: The impact of recruitment and retention challenges in the early years sector in England](#)
- [Nursery World Business Summit 2023](#)
- Social Mobility Commission's call for greater support for the early years sector
- [Early years Recruitment groups tackle crisis](#)
- [Support for Childcare & the Early Years](#)
- [Coram Childcare Survey 2022](#)

Claire also mentioned that early years settings are struggling with some aspects of Ofsted, due to lack of experienced staff and reliance on new under qualified staff and this is impacting their inspection outcome. The main aspect being around ensuring how to develop & implement a robust curriculum, that is well structured, leads to impactful developments for children and focus on preparation and readiness for school.

Claire shared that many settings are having to shut down at a rapid rate as parents struggle with the costs of early years settings, with many choosing not to work instead and in many areas this is further exacerbating and reducing the attainment gap between children from disadvantaged families and their better-off peers.

The group discussed possible solutions for how we can support early years across FE and take on board the insightful information from Claire and the research presented in today's forum, these include –

- Introducing management techniques & additional modules to support progressions.
- Support settings with their curriculum planning & Implementation
- Better promo & publication of the career pathways in early years
- Change the language from child 'CARE' to early years EDUCATOR.
- Look at engaging with the trailblazer groups and the early years apprenticeship standard review.
- Share case studies and success stories & for YLP to develop video content to go into schools
- Look at the Ofsted definition of 'teaching' and build this into apprenticeship standards. Communicating & modelling language, showing, explaining, demonstrating, exploration, encouraging, questioning, recalling
- Look at additional ways to support functional skills element

The forum will meet quarterly, but in the mean time please keep in touch and any topics for discussion at the next forum please let me know. Thank you to every one attended and our expert guest speaker Clare Bligh - [clare@leya.org.uk](mailto:clare@leya.org.uk)

Forum participants -

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