



National Day Nurseries Association

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The COVID-19 pandemic and the early years workforce

August - November 2020:
Staffing decisions in an uncertain environment





National Day Nurseries Association



Method

This report describes the results of the second quarterly survey of early education and childcare providers in Great Britain. The survey was conducted with early years settings across England, Scotland and Wales between 4 – 23 November and was open to all private, voluntary and independently run providers. The survey asked providers about the period from August, when our last survey ran, to November 2020 when the survey was conducted.

Due to differences in which settings responded to our earlier survey, the time periods covered by responses to several questions, and the methods used to analyse their responses, comparisons between the results of this survey and our previous survey are not advised.

Questions were asked that were relevant and specific to the context of each country. In presenting the results the England and Wales qualification levels have been used. Respondents in Scotland answered equivalent qualification levels: Level 2 or SVQ2/NC; Level 3 or SVQ3/HNC; Level 4/5 or SVQ4/PDA8; Level 6 or PDA9 / graduate. When discussing children with additional needs in Scotland respondents answered about Additional Support Needs and SEN/Additional Learning Needs in Wales.

Where one response represented more than one setting (e.g. where we received a response on behalf of a chain of settings, we weighted their response accordingly. This ensures that each setting within a chain counts for the same as any other setting. It also means that some responses on behalf of relatively large chains of settings have a significant impact on the results of our analysis. We have only included the responses of chains to questions that we can reasonably expect all such chains to be able to accurately answer on behalf of all settings in their chain. Details of

which respondents are included are given at the beginning of each section. Throughout the remainder of this report, the term 'responses' or 'respondents' are used to refer to the total number of settings represented by the responses to our survey we have received. This takes into account weighting of the responses of those answering on behalf of chains where applicable.

To calculate the proportion of staff who had been furloughed, made redundant etc., we divided the number of staff to whom the relevant action (e.g. being furloughed) applied by the total number of staff employed in August.

Where settings reported having furloughed or made redundant more staff since August than they had employed in August, we did not include their response in averages on the assumption that this response was a typo or misunderstanding of the question. This applied to fewer than 1 per cent of responses.

We are grateful to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) which is supporting this research as part of the Association's response to the ongoing COVID-19 situation



Characteristics of settings

We received 195 responses, representing 586 early years settings. Of these, nearly all respondents answered all questions that were relevant to them.



586
SETTINGS



10,000
EY STAFF

94% of settings are based in England, with 3% based in Wales and 3% based in Scotland.

Most respondents represented single sites, however, most settings (78%) were part of a chain, while 71% were both part of a chain and answering on behalf of all settings in that chain. Of those settings responding on behalf of a chain, there were an average of 16 settings in such chains.

73% of settings have had to fully or partially close their setting between August and November. Of those settings that have had to close, the most common reason for doing so was insufficient demand for places (72%), followed by staff members or children self-isolating (26%).

In total the survey represents the responses of early year providers representing just over 10,000 staff. On average, settings employed around 17 staff, though some were much larger and others much smaller, with the biggest setting employing around 80 staff and some employing just one member of staff. Of all staff represented by respondents, 4% had no qualifications, 7% were apprentices, 23% held a Level 2 qualification (or Scottish equivalent), 51% a Level 3 qualification, 9% a Level 4 or 5 qualification, and 6% a Level 6 qualification.

Introduction

This is the second in a series of short reports summarising the findings of four quarterly surveys of early education and childcare providers in Great Britain. We are seeking to understand the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the staffing decisions of early years providers in the private, voluntary and independent sector.

Early years providers are continuing to face a variety of challenges as a result of the pandemic. Since our last report in September, the furlough scheme has been extended to March 2021, with the extension being announced just days before the scheme was set to be replaced by the less generous Job Support Scheme. In England, government-funded early education and childcare, a key source of funding for providers, has been promised to providers which are open at 'broadly the levels they would have expected to see in the 2020 autumn term had there been no coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic'.¹ At the time of writing, this arrangement is due to end from January 2021, which may have a significant effect on providers' sustainability.

Over the course of these four surveys, to be carried out between August 2020 and May 2021, we hope to shine a light on the impact on the staffing decisions of early years providers of the current pandemic as it evolves.

1. Department for Education (2020) Guidance: Use of free early education entitlements funding during coronavirus (COVID-19) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-funding-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/use-of-free-early-education-entitlements-funding-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

Staff

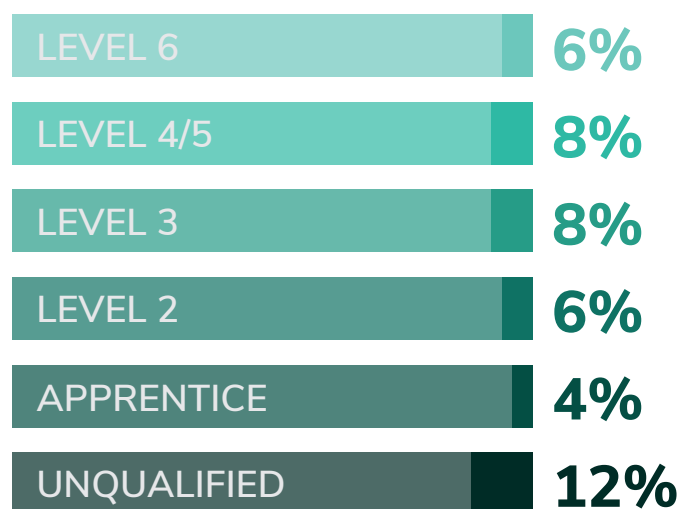
Looking at the size of the workforce, we asked settings a range of questions about how the composition of staff they employed had changed between August, when we ran our previous survey, and November, when they completed this one. Responses from all settings, including all chains, are included here for a minimum of 570 responses to these questions.

Settings reported employing slightly more staff in November than in August – on average, 5% more. Settings who responded to our survey in August reported employing, on average, 7% fewer staff in August than they had in March. Although findings are not directly comparable between surveys, this could suggest the sector as a whole is experiencing some growth after contracting earlier in the year. However, this overall figure obscures some notable variation between those settings that have seen the number of staff they employ between August and November rise and those who have seen it fall. While 29% of settings had seen no change in the total number of staff they employed between August and November, 61% had seen a rise and 10% had seen a fall. Of those that told us they employed more staff in November than August, settings reported employing an average of 27% more staff in the later period. Of those that told us they employed fewer staff in November than August, settings reported employing 28% fewer staff in the later period.

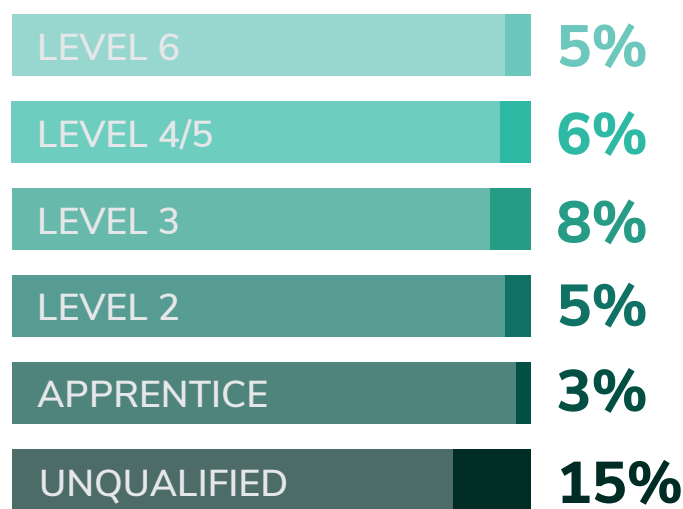
Overall, the biggest changes in the number of staff employed over this period involved apprentices and graduates: settings reported employing 42% and 27% more staff in these groups in November than in August, respectively.

On average, employers had placed 6% of their staff on full-time furlough between August and November. This equates to 565 staff who have been placed on full-time furlough among the settings who responded to our survey. Staff with no qualifications were the group most likely to be placed on full-time furlough. **On average, employers had placed 5% of their staff on part-time furlough between August and November.** This equates to 551 staff who have been placed on part-time furlough among the settings who responded to our survey. Staff with no qualifications were again the group most likely to be placed on part-time furlough.

Staff furloughed full-time (Aug - Nov)



Staff furloughed part-time (Aug - Nov)



When we asked settings in our previous survey in August how many staff they expected to place on furlough over this period, they had expected on average to furlough 18% of staff. As described above, settings responding to this survey in November have placed 6% of staff on full-time furlough and 5% on part-time furlough, suggesting that fewer staff have been furloughed than was expected over this period.

On average, employers had made 1% of their staff redundant in the period between August and November. This equates to 119 staff who have been made redundant among the settings who responded to our survey. This is lower than the 4% of staff that respondents to our previous survey said they expected to make redundant over this period. Staff with lower levels of qualification were slightly more likely to be made redundant than those with higher levels of qualification.

Staff made redundant



Between August and November around 7% of staff had voluntarily terminated their contract. This equates to 726 staff among the settings who responded to our survey, which in turn means that around 4,356 children could have lost their key worker (assuming an average staff to child ratio of 1:6).

Some 24% of apprentices had voluntarily left settings in this period, and 5% of staff with a Level 6 qualification. Many of the settings which reported a relatively high proportion of apprentices have voluntarily departed indicated that some of these were as a result of apprenticeships ending. However, some settings that had seen a high proportion of apprentices leaving did not indicate that apprenticeships ending was a reason for their leaving. While this may be due to an error filling out the survey, it might also point toward apprentices departing before their apprenticeship has come to an end. However, settings also reported employing, on average, more staff in these groups in November than in August. These changes will in part reflect some natural movement of staff in the sector but may also be an indicator of the fact that some settings are expanding while others are shrinking.

Voluntary terminations



Among those settings where staff had voluntarily terminated their contract, the most common reasons that respondents say were given by staff for terminating their contract were personal reasons unrelated to COVID-19 such as relocation or beginning full-time education (31% of settings chose this), finding alternative employment during furlough (24% of settings reported this), and personal or family health concerns related to the virus (20%). **Employers had reduced the contracted hours of 2% of staff on average.** Among the settings who responded, this equates to 230 staff who have had their contracted hours reduced in this period.

Expectations about the future

We asked settings how many staff they expected to place on furlough, to reduce their contracted hours, or to make redundant over the coming three months between November 2020 and the end of January 2021. Responses from all settings, including larger chains, are included here, for a minimum of 575 responses to these questions.

On average, settings **expected to place 3% of their staff on full-time furlough** in the three months between November and the end of January. They expected to place **7% of staff on part-time furlough, and to reduce the hours of 3% of their staff**. Further, they **expected to make 1% of their staff redundant** in the coming three months.

What informs settings' decisions about staffing

We asked settings whether they took the qualifications or experience of their staff into account when making staff redundant or reducing their contracted hours. Responses from single site settings and chains of up to 10 settings are included here, for a minimum of 157 responses to these questions.

When asked about making staff redundant or reducing their contracted hours, settings overwhelmingly told us that they were more likely to do so to staff with lower qualifications and less experience. These findings are in line with the findings of our previous survey.

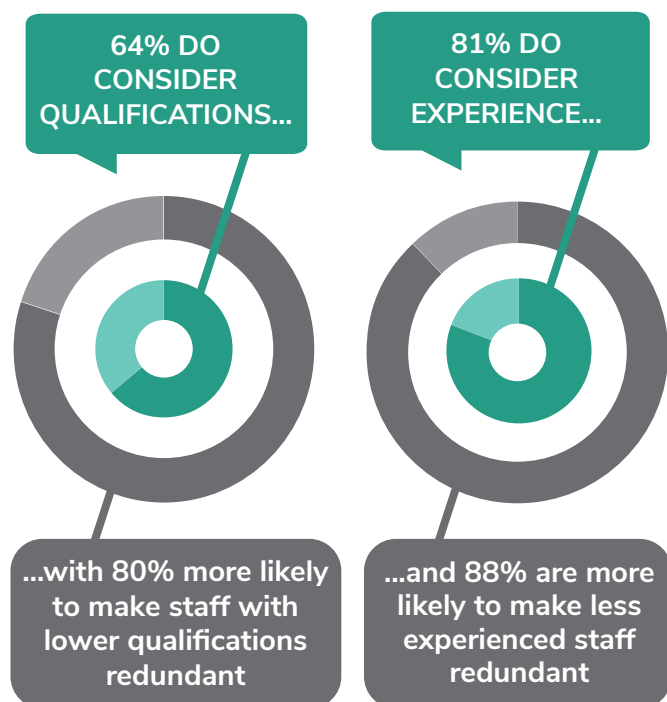
When considering making staff redundant, 81% of respondents take the experience of staff into account while 64% take their level of qualifications into account. A considerably greater proportion of settings said that they are more likely to make staff with less experience redundant (88% than those with more (12%).

Similarly, settings tended to say they would choose staff with lower or no qualifications to make redundant rather than those with more. 41% of settings said they were most likely to choose staff with no qualifications to make redundant, followed by those with low qualification levels (31%), those with higher qualification levels (20%), and apprentices (8%).

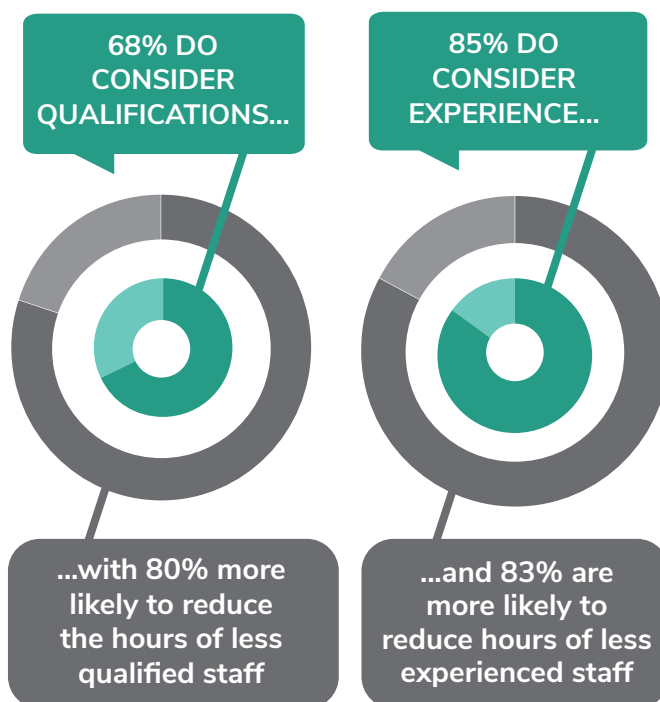
When considering reducing the contracted hours of staff, 85% of respondents said they take the experiences of staff into account while 68% take their level of qualifications into account. A considerably greater proportion of settings said that they are more likely to reduce the contracted hours of staff with less experience (83%) than those with more (17%).

Similarly, settings tended to say they would choose to reduce the contracted hours of staff with lower or no qualifications rather than those with more. Half (48% of settings say they were most likely to reduce the contracted hours of staff who had no qualifications, followed by those with low qualification levels (25%), those with high qualification levels (20%) and apprentices (7%).

Redundancy considerations for employers



Reducing staff hours - considerations



Note - Due to a change in the way staff are grouped here, results should not be directly compared with those of our previous report.

CPD opportunities

We asked settings about the training that they offer to their staff and about the CPD opportunities that are available. Here we have divided respondents into two groups. The first group includes single site settings and small chains including chains of up to 10 settings. This group is made up of 159 responses on behalf of 227 settings. The second group represents chains of more than 10 settings. This group is made up of 4 responses on behalf of 346 settings. The findings in this section for single site settings and small chains are broadly in line with the findings from our survey in August.

Single site settings and small chains

Most settings (95%) report that they are continuing to offer CPD to their staff. Of these, **28% report offering mandatory training only**, with the remaining 72% saying they are offering training over and above what is required.

When asked whether there were enough training opportunities available, 95% of settings said there were enough opportunities for food hygiene training, 93% said there were enough for safeguarding and child protection, and 87% said there were opportunities for infection prevention and control.

Meanwhile, only half (52%) of respondents said that there were enough opportunities for training on trauma and bereavement, 55% said there were enough training on supporting children with autism, and 60% said there were enough on taking a whole-setting approach to supporting children with special educational needs. Finally, 77% of settings said that there were enough opportunities for training on

paediatric first aid, leaving 23% of respondents without access to training which is mandatory. At least one member of staff who is present on the premises at each setting is required to have a current PFA certificate, and all newly qualified entrants to the workforce who have completed a level 2 and/or level 3 qualification on or after 30 June 2016 are required to hold one within three months of starting work in order to count in staff to child ratios. This gap in available training could therefore pose a barrier to settings, especially those seeking to recruit to replace those staff they have lost over this period if demand for childcare recovers following the pandemic.

Two in five (41%) settings reported that they have no current need for CPD.

Chains of more than 10 settings

All chains of more than 10 settings report that they are continuing to offer CPD to their staff. Of these, **just 10% report offering mandatory training only**, with the remaining 90% saying they are offering training over and above what is required.

When asked whether there were enough training opportunities available, respondents representing chains of more than 10 settings were more likely than those responding on behalf of single sites and smaller chains to say that there were enough opportunities for all types of training available. All large chains said that there were enough opportunities available for safeguarding and child protection and food hygiene.

The lowest proportion said there were enough opportunities available for supporting children’s personal, social and emotional development (90%), while 93% said there were enough opportunities available for training on a range of topics including supporting children with SEND, speech and language, supporting children’s personal, social and emotional development and trauma and bereavement training and paediatric first aid.

No chains of more than 10 settings reported that they have no current need for CPD.

The findings in this section suggest that the approach to training and CPD differs between single sites and smaller chains on the one hand and larger chains of settings on the other, with larger chains appearing more likely to offer CPD over and above what is required and to experience fewer issues in securing training opportunities. One reason why larger chains appear to experience fewer issues securing training opportunities might be that some are able to provide training in-house. However, any comparisons should be made with caution since among larger chains there is likely to be a limit to how accurately one response on behalf of a large number of settings can represent the experiences of each setting.

Single site settings and small chains

Enough trauma & bereavement training?

48% no

A whole setting approach to SEND/ASN/ALN training?

40% no

Enough autism training?

45% no

Larger chains

Enough trauma & bereavement training?

7% no

A whole setting approach to SEND/ASN/ALN training?

7% no

Enough autism training?

7% no

Children in attendance

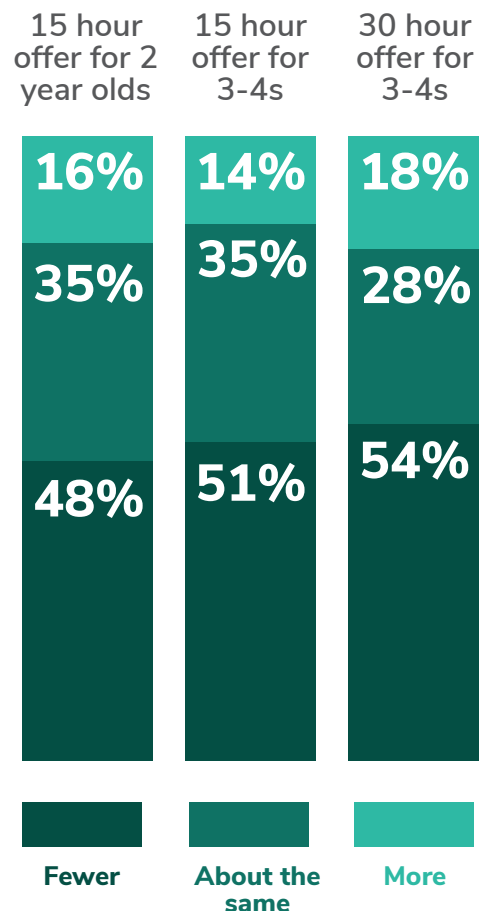
We asked settings how many children attended last week and how many had attended in a typical week the same time last year, as well as how many children were taking up government-funded places compared to last year. Responses from all settings, including larger chains, are included in calculations of average numbers of children attending, for a minimum of 565 responses to these questions.

On average, the number of children attending settings in November 2020 was 6% lower than the number attending in a typical week a year earlier.

We asked settings in England whether the number of children taking up government-funded places at their setting was fewer, about the same as, or more than last year. Responses from single site settings and chains of up to 10 settings only are included in calculations of take-up of government-funded places, for a minimum of 197 responses to these questions.

For all government-funded childcare entitlements, about half of providers said that fewer children were attending this year compared to last year. Meanwhile, a substantial minority of settings said that about the same number of children were attending government-funded places this year as last year. We also asked settings in Wales and Scotland about whether the number of children taking up government-funded places at their setting was fewer, about the same as, or more than last year. Very few settings (<20) in each country responded to these questions, so the findings should be treated with caution. With this in mind, findings appear to suggest that, compared with this time last year, fewer children are taking up the Childcare Offer in Wales while more children are taking up government-funded entitlements in Scotland.

Proportion of settings reporting changes to the number of children taking up government-funded childcare entitlements at their setting



Conclusion (continued overleaf)

Our findings suggest that there continue to be considerable pressures on early years providers and the staff they employ as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold. On average, settings have seen 7% of staff voluntarily leave between August in November, while 1% of all staff, including 2% of those holding a Level 2 qualification, have been made redundant in a period of less than three months.

Settings have, on average, placed 6% of staff on full-time furlough and 5% on part-time furlough – fewer than was expected by the settings who responded to our earlier survey in August. Settings expect to place 3% of staff on full-time furlough in the coming three months, and to place 7% on part-time furlough, suggesting that while these schemes continue to be of importance to the sector, they have become less so. ▶

Changes to the workforce caused by the pandemic appear to be continuing to have a disproportionately negative impact on staff with lower levels of qualifications, especially those with no qualifications. Staff with no qualifications are more likely than other staff to have been placed on furlough or had their hours reduced.

At the same time as some settings saw their workforce shrink, others saw it grow. In fact, the average size of the workforce among the settings who responded to this survey grew by 5% over this period, highlighting the varying experiences of early years providers.

Good training and CPD opportunities are a key part of supporting a high-quality workforce. While the vast majority of settings are continuing to offer CPD to their staff, 28% report offering mandatory training only. Some gaps in the training opportunities available to settings are apparent, with nearly half of settings saying there were not enough opportunities to access training on trauma and bereavement or supporting children with SEND.

Settings report that 6% fewer children are attending currently than were attending at the same time last year, and that fewer children are taking up government-funded places. If this slump in the demand for childcare is temporary and demand returns to pre-pandemic levels later on, the loss of skilled staff that some settings are experiencing could prove costly. Recruiting new staff, especially those with relevant qualifications required to maintain ratios between children and adults, might prove difficult for many settings, given the difficulties faced by the workforce even before the pandemic.

In summary, the early years workforce continues to face instability, with significant proportions being made redundant, having their pay reduced, or voluntarily leaving settings. The evidence is clear that high quality staff are key to supporting children's early development. In order to ensure that such a workforce is there to support children in the long term, governments face significant challenges to continue to financially support early years settings to make sure they can offer the job security, pay and professionalism that staff need and deserve.



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