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# NURSERY BUSINESS

ISSUE 03 ✦ EARLYYEARS.TEACHWIRE.NET

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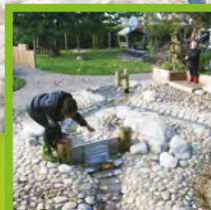
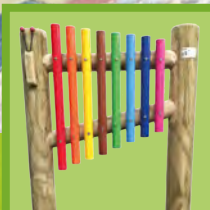
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# Hello...

**N**o one ever said running a nursery setting would be easy – nothing involving looking after small children will ever fall into that category – but it is impossible to write on the topic without acknowledging the particularly challenging circumstances that currently confront the early years sector. Without dwelling on the root causes, since these are covered in detail further into this issue, something of a perfect storm of funding and staffing crises has blown up, and it shows little sign of blowing itself out. For some providers it has already proved too much; many others struggle to keep their umbrellas up on a daily basis, and while the pressure exerted by the sector’s representatives on policy makers to effect change can only be described as relentless, it’s not yet clear when the sun will re-emerge.

Yet in the face of adversity, owners are finding ways to make their businesses work, managers are managing to assemble their teams – and more than that, are doing so without compromising the quality of the care and education they offer their children. More than ever that necessitates finding fresh ways to attract and retain staff; effective methods of reaching out to parents; innovative approaches to staff development; and unique selling points to help settings stand out in a competitive marketplace.

This issue of *Nursery Business* is focused largely on these key areas, sharing advice from nursery owners, managers and industry experts that we hope will help you weather the storm, whether you are an early years veteran or are taking your first steps into what, despite the challenges, will always be a worthy and rewarding profession.

**Jacob Stow**  
Editor



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*Managing director of the Old Station Nursery.*



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## Overseas providers and investors attracted to growing UK children's nurseries market

The UK market for formal childcare is enjoying a period of expansion as parents and government realise the importance of early education to overall child development. Worth £5.3 billion in 2015/16, more than 530,000 currently attend nurseries which provide full day care nursery services for children under the age of five.

This growing demand has not escaped the attention of investors and providers and several European, North American and Asian companies are entering the market. One of the largest new entrants to the UK is French company, Les Petits Chaperons Rouges, the number two provider in France and now the seventh largest in the UK.

Demand is also driving invention. Of note, Eco-nurseries are providing flexibility of supply in the UK childcare market. This report explores this and the wider benefits of child wellbeing offered by competing providers.

However, the market is not without its challenges. Changes in Statutory Maternity Pay and funding for places for 3 and 4-year-olds has reduced 'custom per child' from an average of 54 months to 28 months and the sector still suffers from government underfunding - this is in spite of the 15 hours and 30 hours policies. Meanwhile, although staff training is improving the onus to provide a good quality, well-trained workforce is on the employer, putting further upward pressure on fees.

Nonetheless, change in the market is creating new opportunities. The desire to retain women in the national workforce, means there is pressure on government to come up with the correct childcare strategy to support parents, and as millennials come of age, it seems that London is losing its place as the 'go-to' place for work, making the need for high quality of early years childcare a truly UK-wide market.



## What the report includes

Market  
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Key Legislation  
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# Talking points

*The issues that matter to the early years sector*



## **'30 hours' woes**

It has increasing competition, but the '30 hours' scheme remains the key issue facing early years providers – and it's not just nurseries that say it's underfunded. The Treasury Select Committee's recent *Report on Childcare* ([bit.do/report-on-childcare](http://bit.do/report-on-childcare)) asserts that the DfE's 2015 Cost of Childcare Review relied on out-of-date data, having not taken into account increases in the National Living Wage; that the quoted funding rate is "misleading" because not all of the money is passed on to providers; and that funding is in some cases insufficient to cover providers' average costs.

## **KEY ISSUES IN BRIEF**

*CPD, Funding and SEND*



### **EYTS AT RISK**

Urgent action is needed to prevent the loss of Early Years Teachers, according to PACEY and union Voice. Both are calling upon government to rethink the pay and status of EYTs, and specifically to ensure they receive the same recognition as their colleagues with QTS.



### **RATE RELIEF**

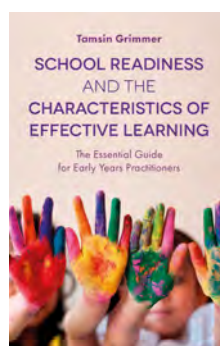
'Struggling childcare providers need help' – that's the verdict of the Federation of Small Businesses, which has just published a new report, *Handle with Care*, calling for 100% business rate relief and a review of government funding. Download the full report at [bit.do/handle-with-care](http://bit.do/handle-with-care)



### **SEND SUPPORT**

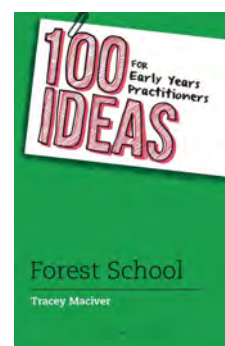
The government recently unveiled a new Level 3 Early Years SENCo qualification specification. While not mandatory, the qualifications based upon it will be designed to help practitioners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to carry out the SENCo role effectively – visit [bit.do/senco-spec](http://bit.do/senco-spec)

## **→→→ DIY CPD**



**JKP, £14.99**

With large numbers of children starting school unprepared, this book provides vital guidance on understanding, assessing and ensuring school readiness. It includes a wide range of practical ideas to assist early years professionals in planning learning experiences that will help to prepare children for the transition to school.



**Bloomsbury, £13.49**

Forest school has never been more popular, with many settings offering sessions as part of their regular programme of activities. This new title in the *100 ideas* series features easy-to-implement ideas for introducing forest school activities and concepts without putting pressure on practitioners' time or the setting's budget.



## Nursery sector grows, but pressures remain

The 14th edition of LaingBuisson's *Childcare UK* market report has been published, and the picture it paints is a mixed one. It notes that overseas providers and investors are increasingly being attracted by the growth of the UK nursery market, which was valued at £5.3 billion in 2015/16 and is currently expanding to accommodate increased demand. Large providers from Europe, North America and Asia are establishing themselves, most notably French company Les Petits Chaperons Rouges, which recently acquired Kiddi Caru. At the same time, it highlights the numerous challenges facing providers – from changes in statutory maternity pay and the 30 hours scheme, to the financial burden of training staff. Read more at [bit.do/childcare-market](http://bit.do/childcare-market)



## Mental health



### Wellbeing at risk

The strain of working in early years is starting to tell

A quarter of early years practitioners are considering leaving the childcare sector due to the stress and mental health pressures they encounter (and 5% have already called it quits) according to a survey conducted by charity the Pre-school Learning Alliance, which received responses from more than 2,000 individuals.

Minds Matter, the Alliance's largest survey to date, also reveals that 57% of respondents have suffered from anxiety because of work, while 26% have experienced depression – 65% say their personal relationships have suffered as a result and 45% say the situation impacts on their performance at work. The principal sources of stress identified were high workloads (particularly paperwork and administration), financial pressures as a result of inadequate government funding, and low pay.

#### Something needs to change

Following the research, the Alliance is calling on the DfE and Ofsted to work with it to carry out a review into early years workloads, and in particular, to address areas of excessive or unnecessary paperwork and administration.

#### FIND OUT MORE

You can download the full Minds Matter survey at [bit.do/Minds-Matter](http://bit.do/Minds-Matter). Turn to page 70 to read Laura West's article on managing work-related stress in your setting.

## Get funded

If you're thinking about opening a new childcare business from home, we have some good news – the Department for Education has confirmed that its Childcare Business Grant scheme has been extended, and is now open to applications. Funding of up to £1,000 is available for childminders, childcare providers on domestic premises and Childminder Agencies looking to make a start in the sector. For more information, visit [childcarebusinessgrants.com](http://childcarebusinessgrants.com)



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### SAFEGUARDING & PROTECTING EVERY CHILD

This conference aimed at nursery owners, managers and practitioners will take place in London on 3 November. Visit [laurahenryconsultancy.com](http://laurahenryconsultancy.com)



# “Record investment? IT ISN’T ENOUGH”

Staff wages are a key concern of early years employers facing up to a funding and recruitment crisis, but the challenges the sector faces don’t end there...

**PURNIMA TANUKU OBE**

**I**t’s official: the staffing crisis currently confronting day nurseries across the UK has reached catastrophic levels, and is now the biggest single challenge employers face.

Qualified nursery staff, particularly those with Level 3 qualifications, are leaving in record numbers. Figures from NDNA’s workforce survey, conducted earlier in 2018, illustrate the picture starkly. Just three years ago we had 20% more Level 3-qualified practitioners than we do now.

But the problem doesn’t end there. Employers are finding it extremely difficult to replace these lost practitioners with qualified staff; they simply don’t exist. Indeed, many are finding it hard to replace them with anyone, whether they have qualifications, experience or neither.

## **Funding shortfalls**

The heart of the issue is that government hasn’t set aside enough money to invest in giving parents the free childcare hours promised before the 2015 election. Whenever the Department for Education (DfE) is quizzed about this, ministers trot out the same phrase: that they are investing record amounts into childcare. This may be true – but crucially, it is not enough to pay for such an ambitious policy and is sending businesses spiralling into closure.

With insufficient funding given to most local authorities, providers try to offer funded childcare to parents who really value this in a way that works for them. But this means that, often, they can only afford to pay minimum wages. This cannot be fair to practitioners, who deserve to get paid fairly



and recognised for their contribution to society, reducing the inequality gap and boosting the economy.

Childcare and early education must be considered as crucial to the country's infrastructure as an efficient transport system or smoothly working IT network. We saw how much working families relied on schools and childcare when many were forced to close during the late winter heavy snowfalls this year. Without this vital lifeline, the UK's general workforce in all industries would be greatly depleted and children would not start school ready to learn.

### Unequal pay

Our Annual Nursery Survey, which we are currently analysing, reveals that paying staff wages is the top concern of early years employers across England, Scotland and Wales. If they are struggling to pay their practitioners even the National Minimum Wage, then how do they hope to hold on to them or even attract newly qualified staff in the first place?

Research by PACEY and union Voice into employee pay and qualifications, released in April 2018, illustrates the disparity between pay in early years settings and schools. It's not surprising that the majority of current Early Years Teacher (EYT) students questioned would prefer to work in school classes instead of nurseries. The pay is more attractive, as are the hours and holidays. And yet they are delivering the same curriculum having received comparable training.

How can the PVI sector, particularly small and micro private businesses, compete with schools if they aren't able to pay graduates and teachers a wage in keeping with their skills and qualifications? How can they hold on to teachers while the government has a focus on schools over day nurseries, despite the fact that it's the nurseries delivering the vast majority of funded places due to their flexibility and prominence in the market? And why is government not recognising

the value of small day nurseries, which deliver over 70% of early years provision in the system?

### Wider issues

Sadly, it's not just money that's the problem. According to our 2017/18 Annual Workforce Survey, staff members who remain in the sector are having to work more hours than ever before, with overtime a regular feature. How long can nurseries rely on goodwill before even the most dedicated employee begins trawling job adverts? No practitioner will be able to keep up this gruelling schedule for long before they struggle or become too exhausted and stressed to work.

This doesn't sound like an attractive environment for new recruits to enter into, so it's no wonder that employers are finding it hard to replace staff with anyone at all, let alone those with qualifications and experience. Two-thirds of managers are unable to recruit suitable candidates, which could potentially reduce the quality of early education most settings currently offer.

### What can be done?

Firstly, government must stop hiding behind its "record levels of investment" line and actually listen to what NDNA and the sector have been saying for years. The evidence is overwhelming and from a number of sources, including the Treasury Select Committee, which advised a higher hourly rate and full business rates relief for nurseries in England, similar to that given in Scotland.

NDNA called for a thorough and rigorous assessment of the cost of delivery of funded hours for nurseries. But this must be done hand in hand with the nurseries themselves. Many of our members have offered to host visits and open their books for senior DfE directors to see for themselves. This would be very useful for the government to finally understand the real cost pressures that providers are working under.

We want the DfE to carry out a robust costings exercise of providers' costs before deciding

how much investment to put into supporting and developing the early years workforce. We sent a strong message to the DfE ministerial team with our response to their user consultation on parents and providers surveys. We attended, along with a group of member nurseries, an event hosted by their research and analysis team in May to make our intentions very clear.

The government's Workforce Strategy launched in March 2017, has yet to show its teeth. We know that some work has been going on behind the scenes, with NDNA's director of quality and training, Stella Ziolkowski, sitting on the Expert Reference Group for Level 2 qualification and career pathways. But at the time of writing, there have been no announcements about reviewing the EYITT routes to make sure the impact of this is being maximised and felt across the sector. We have heard nothing of the programmes the Strategy promised to develop to grow the graduate workforce in areas of disadvantage, or how it can raise the status of EYTs within the teaching profession.

We want to see a properly resourced publicity campaign to retain and attract high-quality candidates into early years, and the sector supported with an early years workforce

investment fund. This should be easy to bid into to help nurseries recruit and retain qualified staff. Finally, with nurseries struggling to give staff non-mandatory training due to squeezed budgets, government must assist local authorities and

***“Practitioners deserve to get paid fairly and recognised for their contribution to society”***

other training providers to make CPD more accessible for practitioners.

We will soon be releasing the results of our Annual Nursery Survey, which should evidence how many nurseries are suffering a funding shortfall and by how much. Together with the workforce survey analysis, NDNA will have a comprehensive picture of how the sector is currently faring and the impact of the 30 hours policy on the sustainability of their businesses.

Armed with this crucial information, we have to trust that decision-makers will finally take note and act urgently to support private, voluntary and independent nurseries, which make up the backbone of our childcare infrastructure.

*Our survey says...*

**70%**

Early years provision delivered by small day nurseries.

**2/3**

Nursery managers currently unable to recruit suitable candidates.



*Purnima Tanuku OBE is chief executive of the National Day Nurseries Association.*

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## LET'S BE CLEAR ABOUT OUR ROLE

In the face of myriad challenges it's time for the nursery sector to come together to show parents what we have to offer...

**A**s a sector, we all want to provide 'best-in-class' early education and care for children. This is harder for some than others, and every setting has high and low points, but that does not alter the fact that to provide the best, you need to sustain your business and support, nurture and retain staff. At the same time we must articulate a clear message to the public about what we do, and deliver 'outstanding' Ofsted inspections. So how do we do all that?

Unfortunately, there are a number of challenges in our path. The sector is operating in a much wider market, subject to a host of PESTLE (political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental) factors.

Politically we are living in a time of austerity and change. Our government is negotiating a Brexit deal and we will have to manage the consequences. There is continued fallout from past political policies (the two years it

has taken to address the A-C entry requirements and the failure to accept functional skills; the lack of political leadership around strengthening our funding and training infrastructure).

Economically, poverty is increasing. Childcare costs remain high, and children in poor areas are at risk of accessing lower-quality services, despite the double disadvantage that could result. Locally, economic challenges (a combination of low salaries, high housing prices and increased transport costs) have impacted on our ability to attract and retain staff. Identifying a method of delivering the underfunded 30 hours that doesn't add more financial burdens to the business model has been a struggle. Parents entitled only to the 15 hours are being squeezed, as fewer settings are offering provision for funded-only children.

Social challenges are wrapped up in political and economic issues, and are being aggravated by demographic changes to large parts of the country.

Families must contend with a lack of the support structures they need to help them with childcare, and this is affecting parental needs and the future shape of nursery occupancy. From a health perspective, we need to think about the child obesity epidemic and how we address the issues of nutrition and physical fitness as part of our provision.

Technology is changing how we engage with parents and we must think about investment in websites, CRM systems and methods of communication that better align with parents' smartphones. Meanwhile, legal changes such as the National Living Wage and the need to comply with GDPR require our attention, lest we end up paying hefty fines.

Finally, environmental responsibility lies heavily on those of us who look after the next generation. From glitter to disposable nappies, we need to think about how we procure and dispose of our waste.

We also need to work out what we are for. Alan Sinclair wrote that, "Investing in early years is as close as it gets to magic without being magic." But if we want to build a nursery infrastructure then we must consider whether to grow and if we do, how. Our big competitors are schools, funded through the DfE and philanthropic grants. The cost to us is greater. Social finance is probably more expensive than the banks! However, when seeking investment we need to measure our return on social impact. We must find ways of working with local authorities faced with large financial cuts in the face of increasing needs.

In the face of these issues, the sector needs to agree a national campaign that describes what nursery education has to offer. Too few parents recognise how we teach and insist on moving their children to schools because they think this is where they 'learn'. Too many believe that going to the school nursery means an automatic place come Reception. Such folly needs to be addressed coherently. Our strategy for dealing with all these challenges has to be built on a collaborative approach, although our tactics may vary. Our campaigns must come from one voice, and be linked to the bigger picture – which is ensuring that all children get a fair chance to access good quality education.

*June O'Sullivan MBE is the CEO of the London Early Years Foundation. Visit [leyf.org.uk](http://leyf.org.uk), June's blog at [juneosullivan.wordpress.com](http://juneosullivan.wordpress.com) or connect on Twitter: @JuneOSullivan*

# “We can’t wait for Ofsted”

The Day Nursery in Peterborough is an ‘outstanding’ family-owned setting that’s committed to quality, and confident it’s getting its provision right...

**U**nassumingly named it may be, but The Day Nursery in Peterborough is far from your average early years setting. From its listed home – the type of character building you might ordinarily expect to be housing a firm of solicitors – and feature-packed outdoor space, to its impressive Ofsted record, high-quality resources and committed and highly qualified team, this is a nursery with much to inspire other providers. “I couldn’t imagine working at another nursery after working here; I love it so much,” manager, Lauren Linskey, says of the setting – so what exactly is The Day Nursery doing so right?

## Going it alone

Owner Lynne Blyth, having initially worked alongside a co-owner, took sole charge of The Day Nursery in 2007, and she hasn’t looked back. ‘Outstanding’ Ofsted reports arrived in 2011 and 2013 (the last time the inspectors visited, at the time of writing), and both speak in glowing terms about the setting’s inspirational leadership, its staff’s excellent practice and children’s exceptional progress.

Given her success, it is perhaps surprising that Lynne was never tempted to try to replicate her formula elsewhere, but The Day Nursery remains a proudly independent setting. “Lynne has always described this as her ‘one egg in one basket’,” Lauren explains. “She says one’s enough to focus on, and really drives people to make the best of what we’ve got here and do 100 per cent of the job.”

Lynne’s business certainly stands out from the crowd: the aforementioned listed building aside, it benefits from a uniquely advantageous location, set in the heart of Peterborough city centre. It attracts parents from all walks of life, from miles around, even without the convenience of a car park. But, as you would expect given the ‘outstanding’ rating, it’s not just the setting’s proximity to places of business that is attracting parents.

## High standards

Behind every successful early years setting are passionate leaders and a motivated team, and The Day Nursery is no exception. The aforementioned ‘inspirational leadership’ starts at the very top: “Lynne is the most passionate person I’ve ever met in regard to childcare, and her positive aura rubs off on everyone else,” Lauren tells us.

While she has taken a step back from the day-to-day running



of the setting, Lynne’s role as vice chair of the local NDNA group and enthusiasm for embracing the latest ideas and resources means practitioners at The Day Nursery have little opportunity to get complacent – but also the support they need to meet their employer’s high expectations.

Overseeing practice on a daily basis is an experienced leadership team, headed by Lauren, focused on both maintaining standards and finding ways to improve their offering further. Alongside her work business manager Jenny Avill, early years coordinator Jade Smith, and quality assurance manager Deborah Hunt – a former Ofsted inspector (indeed, the inspector who assessed The Day Nursery back in 2013). “Deborah carries out a lot



## LEARNING OUTDOORS

The Day Nursery doesn't have the largest outdoor space, but it hasn't been ignored. Currently undergoing an overhaul (that started life as merely a plan to replace the astroturf), it packs in a mud kitchen and picnic bench, climbing and water walls, a place for planting and, on the day of our visit, an uninvited nesting mallard. The highlights, however, have to be the two bespoke 'bendy houses', created by the set designer responsible for the garden in CBeebies' show *Mr Bloom's Nursery*. Equipped with electric lighting, they're the ideal venue for imaginative role play.



*“I feel like we’ve been waiting an age for Ofsted; we just want them to come, to know that we’re still doing things the best we can”*

being a recognition of the setting's great practice, she admits it is also a vital part of the nursery's appeal: “It pulls people in. When I get phone calls from people that want to join the nursery, they say, ‘Your inspection was outstanding, wasn't it?’ and I can proudly say, yes, it was, and that I was here for that. Our reputation is what keeps people coming back and recommending us.”

Of course, being a leader is a much easier proposition when you're managing an experienced and motivated team. Many of those working at The Day Nursery have been there for several years, and an increasing number are qualified beyond Level 3 – staff turnover is low and those who leave to have children often return with their babies. Given the current difficulties with recruitment in the early years sector, it's a happy position to be in, but it doesn't happen by chance. Practitioners at the setting are supported to develop their skills and progress through the ranks, and where positions within the standard hierarchy aren't available, new areas of responsibility can be created to let staff members shine, and let the nursery harness their strengths. The setting has appointed a number of 'champions', in areas as diverse as maths and Makaton, for exactly this purpose.

### Going further

As part of their ongoing efforts to offer children and parents the best, The Day Nursery's team have devoted much time and effort to gaining a range of early years accreditations. Recently, the setting became the first in Peterborough to be awarded NDNA's Millie's Mark, which requires all staff members to be first aid-qualified and life-saving knowledge kept at the forefront of their minds (achieved, Lauren tells us, by regularly addressing queries and providing best practice updates in staff meetings), and

of observations of staff, then provides feedback on their practice – what they're doing well, what could be done better – which has been really valuable,” Lauren explains. “Having somebody with experience of working for Ofsted is a real advantage for us. She's also able to advise us on upcoming changes, so we can implement anything we need to in order to get an ‘outstanding’ again.”

According to Lauren (who was in charge during the 2013 inspection while still deputy manager, just a few months after joining the setting), retaining Ofsted's top grade when the inspectors do come to call again is the priority: “It's really important we stay ‘outstanding’. It means everything to us, and Lynne doesn't want anything less than that ever!” Aside from it







### SENSORY STIMULATION

What was an unused space in need of a purpose at The Day Nursery has been transformed into a fully featured sensory room. “It’s really nice – the children all want to go in there!” Lauren says. “There are bubble tubes and a ball pool, bead-runners on the wall and a CD player so they can listen to music. We’re waiting for a new panel to go in that includes some interactive games.

“The room has also been a useful tool for supporting children with SEN – it can be very calming, when they need to have break from the day-to-day activity in the rooms.”

also received the Soil Association’s Food for Life Early Years award.

Food for Life is a recognition of the setting’s commitment to providing a healthy and varied menu, but that’s not the whole story: regular cooking activities see children invited into the kitchen to make recipes with nursery chef, Denise Bridges, while growing takes place in the outdoor area, broadening their understanding of the world. Making it a success was clearly hard work – business manager, Jenny Avill, spent a lot of time sourcing fresh, sustainably farmed ingredients at affordable prices – but the benefits, both in terms of children’s long-term health and the nursery’s reputation, are easy to appreciate.

### Focused on the details

Care, attention and no little amount of money has gone into The

Day Nursery, to ensure it offers children a fantastic environment in which to learn through play, and offers parents both value for money and peace of mind. Its recently revamped interior features calming neutral tones, hessian-clad notice boards and wooden resources, while the new-look office has been decluttered and equipped with a comfortable sofa, creating a more welcoming space for parents.

Crucially, the atmosphere throughout is friendly and family-orientated, in keeping with the ownership of the business. “Lynne puts in a lot of effort to make sure that parents are really well looked after,” Lauren tells us – highlighting a change in business hours that provided greater flexibility for those working beyond 5.30pm, and surveys to canvass opinion on what improvements might be made to the setting. “One thing that was raised in a recent parent survey was whether we might add a second handrail on the stairs, because some people carried their child on the other side,” Lauren explains. “So we put another one up. When it was there, everyone told us how much of a difference it made – and that all came from something one mum had said.”

Communication with home has a high priority, and to strengthen links The Day Nursery has turned to technology. Its Family software gives parents up-to-date reports on their children’s eating and sleeping habits; access to practitioners’ observations and children’s next steps; and a convenient way to keep track of invoices. They can also share observations and images of their own, which can then be linked to the EYFS,



**EXTRA VALUE**

Adding value for children and parents are the varied 'extra-curricular' classes that The Day Nursery offers at no additional cost. Covering physical development in the form of dance and sports coaching sessions, and music and languages through Bilinguasing, the classes take place on varying days, ensuring as many children as possible can benefit, and, Lauren tells us, are a definite selling point for the setting: "I recommend trying out the taster sessions, seeing how much the children enjoy them, and then, if you can work out a way of getting them into the nursery, even if it's only once a month, it's definitely a benefit."



providing a more holistic picture of children's development. "It's so user-friendly – everything's in one place, parents can access it on their phone, and we've had so much more communication with home since it was introduced," Lauren says.

Alongside this is a secure NurseryCam webcam system that not only allows management to keep an eye on the rooms but also enables parents to log in and view their children in real time whenever they are in attendance. "It offers peace of mind for parents," Lauren says, "especially those new parents who are upset that they've got to go back to work and leave their baby – it stops that feeling they can have of 'Oh god, I'm ringing again!' though we always encourage them to call if they want to, as making sure they're happy is really important to us."

Continuing the technological theme, access to The Day Nursery comes via a biometric entry system (more peace of mind for parents), while the toddler and preschool rooms benefit from the latest touchscreen table computers from 10 Squared, and EducationCity software, focused on boosting skills in the core subjects of English, maths and science. It's not a case of 'money is no object', Lauren stresses, but considerable investment has gone, and continues to go, into equipping the setting to an impressively high standard.

It's not all about technology, of course. Other efforts to forge links with home, for example, have included the introduction of a 'lending book and game library', featuring a wide range of titles and home learning packs. Targeted at children approaching the transition to Reception, the latter feature whiteboard pens, sponges and wipeable boards alongside simple reading books and activities, and forms inviting parent feedback on their children's efforts. A scheme that helps parents solve the problem of inconvenient library opening times while developing school-readiness skills, it's just another example of a setting that's focused on the details.

Visit [thedaynurserypeterborough.co.uk](http://thedaynurserypeterborough.co.uk)

**Meet the team**



**LAUREN LINSKEY,  
MANAGER**

"I've had quite a whirlwind career, working at every level and with every age group, from babies through to preschool. After gaining my Level 2 and 3 NVQs, I became a supervisor at 18, worked as a nursery nurse in Wales, then returned and became a deputy manager at another setting. My then manager and I came to work here together, and I became manager myself in May 2017."



**JENNY AVILL,  
BUSINESS MANAGER**

"With the Food for Life accreditation, we didn't just want to tick the box for ticking the box's sake – we wanted to make sure we were doing the best we could for our business, as well as the environment and the local economy. I contacted a number of local farms and local butchers and went to see market traders. We could have done it quicker, but we wanted to do it properly."



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# Elevator PITCH

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*“The space is light and airy and the children are thoroughly enjoying it. The staff feel like they are on holiday!”*

TOAD HALL NURSERY GROUP

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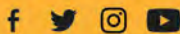


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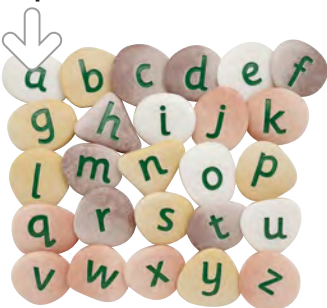
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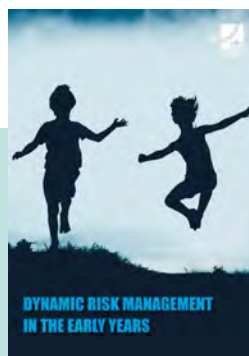
This may look like a wooden cart, but with a dash of imagination it can easily turn into a pram, lawnmower or wheelbarrow. It's great for inside or outdoors and comes fully assembled. £74.95, [edusentials.co.uk](http://edusentials.co.uk)



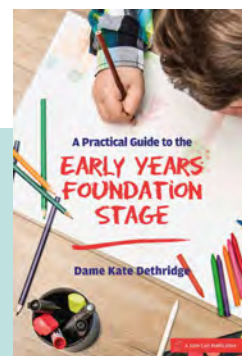
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*Dynamic Risk Management* is a comprehensive guide covering insurance requirements, keeping children safe on outings and visits, safeguarding and child protection, fire safety procedures and more.

This comprehensive guide offers a practical and accessible look at what constitutes excellence in early years practice, and how staff in all settings can work to make it a reality.

# “Looking for great CPD? THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX”

Developing, retaining and motivating staff can be difficult, so when it comes to professional development it's worth broadening your horizons...

**JACKIE HARDIE**

**H**aving run a training company that has helped early years settings around the world, and as the current owner of an 'outstanding'-rated nursery, I place a great deal of emphasis on continuing professional development (CPD). I have always believed that the essential ingredient to an outstanding setting is an outstanding team, so encouraging and supporting staff is very high on my agenda. The question is, how far should we all be going to make sure our practitioners are motivated and ready to give the children in their care the very best?

Rewarding hard work and dedication pays dividends, and it is really important that every single member of your team feels valued. It's also important that they know there is room for career progression and professional development. In practice, investing in support and development will reduce your long-term costs and save you the headache of repeated recruitment.

Recognising the uniqueness of every team member and adjusting the training you provide to meet their individual needs helps to ensure that everyone achieves their full potential. This requires some thought. Traditional training courses and workshops have their place, but looking beyond these options for exciting and inspiring opportunities to support the professional development of your workforce

is just as important, if not more so – as I hope the examples below will illustrate...

## **Opportunities overseas**

Being passionate about getting the best out of my team I am always on the lookout for new ideas. While on a skiing holiday in France with a specialist company I couldn't help but

services they offer as part of their skiing holiday package. Several conversations later I was asked if my nursery would share best practice with the childcare staff in four different ski resorts in the French Alps. I saw this as a great opportunity, not only to help this holiday company but also to add a new dimension to the professional development

deliver training and provide cover for staff sickness and injury.

The opportunity to work with the holiday company has been fantastic. For my staff, working in different settings abroad has given them experiences they would never have found on any training course. We are fortunate as a company that we always operate with a higher staff ratio than required, which ensures continuity for the children in our care whilst allowing staff amazing professional development opportunities. Our staff members are trained to the very highest level so whilst out in the resorts they help support and train less-experienced practitioners, ensuring the children holidaying receive the best possible care.

*“We regularly travel to the Alps to provide expert assistance, deliver training and provide cover for staff sickness and injury”*

engage in conversation with those running the place, to find out more about the childcare

of my team. As a result, my staff and I regularly travel to the Alps to provide expert assistance,



## **Farm school**

Another fresh professional development opportunity came about after some animals visited the nursery. A group of the children had been reading animal-related stories and the discussion that followed uncovered the fact that while some children had pets, others had not had much contact with animals at all.

Responding to this I invited a local, NNEB-qualified farmer's wife, who runs an equestrian centre with her riding instructor daughter, to visit the nursery with a couple of their Shetland ponies. Seeing the excitement this generated and the fun had by the staff and





HOLLY REKESIOUS & JACKIE HARDIE

***“I am a great believer in the need for staff to develop their childcare skills outside of the nursery setting”***

children alike was wonderful. We all learnt more about looking after and interacting with animals, and of course there were other benefits like sensory learning and language development.

The visit was so well received by the staff and children that we made the visits a regular occurrence – but it didn’t stop there. I am a great believer in the need for staff to develop their childcare skills outside of the nursery setting. We already embrace forest school and beach school and I could see some amazing professional development opportunities for us if we

developed ‘farm school’. Happily, our new equestrian centre friends were only too pleased to oblige and so with support and encouragement from the animal experts, our adventure into farm school began.

The nursery staff members were hands-on from inception and were invited to contribute ideas for the development of the farm school provision, exploring how child-led activities could be accommodated by the farm as well as working out the logistics and leading the children’s visits. The team worked in partnership with the farm and equestrian centre owners



***“My job in a nursery has taken me places I never imagined and I now know that professional development can sometimes turn up the most unexpected opportunities.”***

Early years practitioner Holly Rekesius was only 20 years of age when she was first offered CPD sharing best practice with childcare staff at a ski resort in the French Alps. Making new friends, taking children to ski-school, ice skating with toddlers and enjoying snow play were all new experiences that she delighted in recalling among her colleagues upon her return to work in the UK.

She describes her experience as character building. She was pushed out of her comfort zone helping to coach unqualified staff and working with children in a very different setting to the one she was used to. As a result Holly has a new-found confidence.

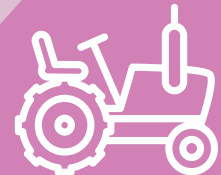
to explore everything from personal health and care in an animal setting and behaviour expectations around animals, through to hands-on learning and engaging with nature.

The staff were also provided with the opportunity of talking to other interested parties, including the local media about their experiences.

**Closing thoughts**

I want to stress that by sharing these two specific opportunities enjoyed by my team I am by no means suggesting that everyone should offer their staff overseas opportunities, or insisting they develop an interest in animals. Rather, I merely want to demonstrate how thinking outside the box can result in fresh ideas that will help keep staff motivated, engaged in their role, excited about work and committed to their setting’s cause.

***Jackie Hardie is the owner of The Nursery, an Ofsted ‘outstanding’ early years setting in Bristol. Visit [thenursery.uk.com](http://thenursery.uk.com)***



***“We have forest school and beach school and now we have farm school too.”***

Finding different ways to complement traditional staff training courses and workshops requires creative thinking – but offering inspirational CPD opportunities can result in a highly engaged, inspired and motivated team, with each team member supported to achieve their full potential.

The development of farm school has been an inspirational process for nursery staff, who together have helped shape this concept of providing children in their care with regular hands-on learning experiences in a farm setting.

# How to make your MARKETING COUNT

When you are investing valuable time in trying to attract new customers, it pays to plan...

JACQUI BURKE

**M**any early years businesses do not have a marketing plan. Some do a bit of marketing, perhaps on rather an ad-hoc basis; others tend to rely purely on word of mouth. But at a time of increasing competition, with new players such as schools and academies coming into the market, having a good plan becomes increasingly important.

## Where to start

A well-thought-through marketing plan will ensure that you spend your time and money on the right sort of marketing activities. That means it needs to consider the following four questions about your business:

### 1 What is your aim?

Your marketing plan should be based on your business objectives. Are you seeking to expand your business, launch new services, transform your business, or just attract a few more customers? Doing this thinking first will ensure that you don't waste money, time and effort on inappropriate activity.

### 2 Who are you targeting?

It is sensible to identify those people who are most likely to be interested in using your service and target your marketing towards them. This means investing more in what we call market research and less in the actual marketing

activities themselves. This might mean identifying areas where there are parents with young children living and going to speak to them, and perhaps asking parents you know to pass on a leaflet to other parents they know who are in a similar situation to them.

**TIP:** Tailoring content to appeal to different target audiences will also make your marketing more effective. This activity is often referred to as market segmentation. Customers can be segmented in various ways. You may wish to use the following criteria:

- *funding source:* free entitlement funding only, parent fees
- *working pattern:* full-time employees, part-time but eligible for 30 hours free entitlement, working fewer hours, not working, commuters
- *location:* walking distance, live in surrounding villages, work nearby, passing through close to your setting.

Think about how you might be able to offer your services more

flexibly in order to appeal to different market segments.

### 3 What data do you need?

It is important to decide what data you need before you begin to conduct any market research. The questions about customers you might want to answer include:

- What kind of childcare do they want, e.g. full day, 30 hours, preschool, after-school club, etc.?
- How far are they prepared to travel?
- How much are they prepared to pay?
- What do they think about

what's currently available (spoilt for choice or can't find what they need)?

- What do they think/know about your setting?
- Do they currently use any other providers of childcare and are they likely to continue to do so in the future?

I often ask early years businesses if they conduct market research and they say that they do, but when asked for more detail they

acknowledge that they only research the needs of their existing customers. This might be helpful if what you are looking for is more of the same types of customers, but if you are considering making a change to your business, such as considering if you should open longer to provide services to working parents, then the parents you need to research are those that you don't currently have a relationship with. So how can you make contact with those parents and find out what they need/want?

Surveys can be a very valuable market research tool. To get the most out of them, remember the following points:

- Be clear about what you want to find out and why (so don't ask questions just for the sake of it).
- Keep it short.
- Use simple language and test it first.
- Make it easy for people to complete.
- Incentivise it.
- Demonstrate that you have acted on past results.

Survey Monkey is an excellent tool for producing free online surveys.

*Social media* is a useful medium for conducting market research because it's free and easy to use, and because people tend to openly share a lot of information



about themselves online. You can:

- Observe what parents say about your competitors by viewing comments made on Facebook or other social media sites.
- Follow competitors, customers and prospective customers on Twitter to see what they are talking about/what's important to them (this can be done discreetly by creating Private Lists).
- Invite people to participate in an online poll or survey about your services by sending it out via social media.
- Offer your Twitter followers or Facebook fans a taster session, discount or special offer on a new service in exchange for helping you to find new customers.

#### 4 How do you compare?

Market research may involve researching your competitors so that you know how you compare. This can help you to design your services and position your business so as to be more attractive to parents. You might want to find out:

- How many providers are there in your area?
- Is there an oversupply of places or a shortage?
- How many of them offer what your target customers want?
- Are there new settings opening?
- What do your competitors offer?
- How much do they charge?
- What do parents think of them?

Some tried and tested methods of conducting competitor research include:

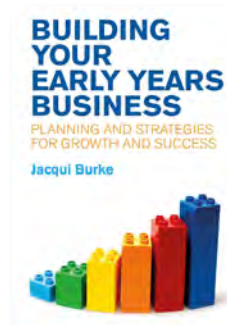
*Website reviews* – it shocks me how much information some settings put onto their websites. However, be aware that the information might be out of date.

*Ask other people* – staff who have worked for your competitors, and prospective customers who come for a look around, who have

probably also been to visit your competitors.

*Ask them directly* – there is no harm in approaching your competitors directly in the spirit of sharing some benchmarking information that you will all benefit from.

*Mystery shopping* – mystery shopping is a very commonly used way of conducting competitor research across a very wide range of sectors. This could be as simple as looking online and trying to find information as if you were a parent, or calling them and asking the sort of questions that a prospective customer might ask. But could also involve visiting for a show around or even taking advantage of a taster session.



*This article is an edited extract from Jacqui's book Building Your Early Years Business (£16.99, Jessica Kingsley Publishers), a practical guide that provides everything you need to feel more confident in making your childcare business thrive and grow. Visit [jkp.com](http://jkp.com)*

### SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE MARKETING

If you wish your business to be regarded as socially responsible, your marketing must consider and respect the needs of potential customers and of society as a whole, as well as the needs of your business. Make sure that any marketing you do:

- is honest
- doesn't mislead people in any way
- doesn't seek to exploit vulnerable people (including children)
- seeks to avoid having a negative impact on the environment, the community, etc.
- adheres to the standards of ethics that you embrace, e.g. Fairtrade, organic, buy local, low carbon
- meets regulatory standards and those promoted by bodies such as the Advertising Standards Authority.





# Early Years Excellence

## CELEBRATING THE SECTOR'S BEST RESOURCES



*Early Years Excellence, Teach Early Years magazine's awards scheme is back for 2018, featuring **13 categories** that cover key areas of learning and development, varied age groups, SEND, CPD and picture books. Our winners will be chosen by an **expert panel** of early years leaders, educators and authors who give their verdicts in Teach Early Years 8.3 – Published September 2018.*

### The judges...



**KIRSTINE BEELEY**  
Independent early years  
trainer and author



**KATHY BRODIE**  
Early Years Professional,  
trainer and author



**SUE COWLEY**  
Experienced educator,  
writer and presenter



**SAM DIXON**  
Teacher, composer and  
musical educator



**KIDDI CARU**  
Provider of outstanding early  
years education and childcare



**JUNE O'SULLIVAN MBE**  
CEO of the London Early  
Years Foundation



**LIZZY STEWART**  
Award-winning author/  
illustrator



**SARAH STEEL**  
Managing director of the  
Old Station Nursery group



**ANDI TURNER**  
'Outstanding' childminder  
and trainee

### Inspiring Online – have your say!

New for 2018, we asked our readers to get involved too by nominating their favourite early years **blog** or **facebook**. Who shares the best ideas? Whose setting offers the most inspiration? Find out within Teach Early Years 8.3.



To see our winners from 2017, visit  
[teachwire.net/eyexcellence](http://teachwire.net/eyexcellence)



# Inspiring learning OUTDOORS

Hull Collegiate School's new open-air space is the perfect place to deliver an early education with character...



On Friday 4 May, Hull Collegiate School's eagerly awaited Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) centre officially opened its doors to pupils, parents and teachers.

The new centre has been carefully designed to give the school's youngest pupils an inspiring, welcoming and spacious place to learn and play. Along with all the facilities you would expect, such as bright and airy classrooms and state-of-the-art technology, the new centre boasts a fantastic outdoor space that seeks to inspire imaginative play amongst pupils. It includes a sand and water discovery area, a storytelling corner, a mud kitchen and even a hobbit house!

There are also cycle tracks, climbing towers and building and construction zones. Pupils can try their hand at gardening in the centre's self-contained growing area and play in the wild camp corner, the double wigwam dens and potting station. They can even let their imaginations run away with them as they explore the magical secret garden, leading on to a woodland experience that includes a safe waterside pond viewing area and amphitheatre.

## A grand opening

To mark the opening of the spectacular new facilities, the setting hosted a party for current and prospective pupils and



their families. To reflect the new centre's potential for imaginative storytelling, children dressed up as their favourite characters from Julia Donaldson books and participated in a host of exciting themed activities whilst indulging in ice cream. Each activity contributed to the magic of the redevelopment, making for an electric atmosphere.

The centre was officially opened by United Learning chief executive, Jon Coles, who cut the ribbon. Opening the centre, he commented, "Every aspect of this centre has been designed with children in mind – from the bright and spacious classrooms to the spectacular outdoor space, children will be inspired to be creative, use their imagination and try new things. It has been a pleasure to open the centre

and to see children's faces light up as they explore their new environment."

## Positive impact

For the school, the centre has made an instant difference. "Although the new outdoor space was only completed a few weeks ago, we are already seeing the positive impact it is having on children's wellbeing and learning," said Antje Kell, head of Hull Collegiate Prep School. "The space both inspires creativity and curiosity, and enables children to assess risk. It is the perfect environment in which to deliver an education with character – an education which inspires and challenges children and ensures their time at school is happy and fun.

"I am proud of the experienced team we have in the EYFS and of their commitment to excellence. The achievements of our Reception pupils are now higher than any in the school's history and this new environment will ensure that we can continue to lay the very best foundations for learning amongst our youngest pupils."

For Gary Cornhill, design consultant at Timotay Playscapes, it was a rewarding project: "Timotay Playscapes are delighted to have worked in conjunction with Hull Collegiate to create a new open-air learning environment," he said. "The great outdoors stimulates and creates the foundation for learning in all core areas. We are incredibly proud to have partnered with Hull Collegiate, who provide an incredible learning environment that challenges, enthuses and encourages their pupils."

## More information

For more information, call 01933 66 51 51, email [enquiries@timotayplayscapes.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@timotayplayscapes.co.uk) or visit [timotayplayscapes.co.uk](http://timotayplayscapes.co.uk)



# Could your **WEBSITE** work harder?

In a competitive marketplace it's important to do what you can to ensure your online presence stands out from the crowd...

**JULIE WAITE**

**Y**our nursery's website is often the first point of contact between you and a potential new customer. A great website can excite and reassure the parent that you are worth visiting; a dull and uninspiring website can put parents off and lose the opportunity for you.

Ask yourself, does your website:

- Reflect the vibrancy, branding and ethos of your nursery?
- Convey key information in an easy-to-read format?
- Give evidence of the fantastic work you do?
- Guide parents towards getting in touch with you for a visit or to book their child's place?
- Come up on the first page of Google when you search using key terms (e.g. 'nursery Nottingham' or 'childcare Swindon').

If the answer to any of these questions is 'no' then it's time to reflect on how you can make your website work harder for you. This doesn't have to mean spending thousands of pounds on a new website or an SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) agency; there are lots of simple changes you can implement that will make a real difference – both for enticing new customers and for improving your ranking on Google.

## Website structure

When reviewing your website's structure there are some essential ingredients that all parents will expect to see:

**HOMEPAGE** – this should feature a warm welcome, a summary of what you do, where you are, what you believe in and why parents should choose you.

## 10 TIPS FOR SEO SUCCESS

- Include your keywords or key phrases several times in your website content
- Ensure you have written enough – a minimum of 300 words per page
- Use keywords in headings and subheadings
- Include internal links to other pages on your website
- Don't repeat content across pages – Google doesn't like this!
- Look for opportunities to get links into your site (e.g. from directories, social media, etc.)
- Update your website regularly (blogs, FAQs and 'meet the team' pages are great ways to do this)
- Ensure any photos you add have 'alt tags' or 'alt text' – a description of what is in the photograph, which is used by Google when searching for images
- Consider starting a blog or FAQ pages – great ways of using keywords and phrases in a natural way
- Proofread your website and blogs – Google rewards good-quality content.

**SERVICES/INFO FOR PARENTS** – this might have a different name, but it is a section that explains in more detail what you offer. It will have key facts such as the different rooms you have, detail of your outdoor areas, opening times, whether you offer 30 free hours or free two-year-old

places, and might also include a sample menu or downloadable parent pack.

**ABOUT** – it is likely that you will have a lot of information under the 'About' heading, so consider splitting it into a few sub-pages. You'll want to include your ethos [*read more about this from page 52 – Ed.*], how long you've been open, information about you and your team, your Ofsted/inspection report, any awards you may have and the curriculum you follow (remember, some parents won't know what the EYFS is).

**CONTACT** – with phone number, email address, contact form, postal address and map.

**FOOTER** – containing your privacy policy, quick contact information and social media links.

Once you've got the basic structure of your website together, you can think about some extra sections that will both add value to parents and help with SEO:

**BLOG** – blogs are great for SEO as they give you the opportunity to provide good-quality content with lots of keywords (you can use them for your news, events, educational articles for parents, advice on starting nursery or school, etc.)

**FAQs** – Frequently Asked Questions are also good for SEO – think about what search terms people might be typing into Google and cover them on your webpage (e.g. 'Helping my child settle at nursery', 'Funding for childcare', 'Choosing a nursery')

**VIDEOS** – short videos can bring your nursery to life more vividly than a photograph; hearing children laughing and seeing them engaged in play is fantastic evidence of your fun, friendly environment.



**GALLERY** – pictures speak much more to us than words. Your website should be filled with big, colourful photographs of your setting, children and staff – and you might want to have an additional gallery page just with photographs and captions.

For each page that you create, consider what you want the parent to do next and include an appropriate call to action – e.g. from your ‘Services’ page you may want them to request a parent pack, so include a link to do this, and make it obvious.

Ensure that you provide evidence of what you are saying through the photography you use and by sprinkling parent testimonials throughout the website. You might also want to have a page just for testimonials under your ‘about’ section.

## Writing for SEO

Google is essentially looking for a match between the keywords that someone searches on and a good-quality website. Spend some time considering what parents search on when looking for a nursery and put together a hit list of keywords and phrases you want to include on your website.

You can increase your chance of appearing higher on Google by including your keywords frequently throughout

the website. So, if you want to appear on Google for ‘nursery Bolton’ or ‘quality childcare Poole’ then you must ensure you have those words dotted throughout your website. Beware though, this must feel natural; do it too much and it will put the reader off and Google won’t like it either.

In today’s busy world, people tend to skim through information, rather than reading it properly. You may therefore be tempted to keep your webpages short and sweet. Google, however, likes content that demonstrates “adequate time, effort, expertise”. So, ensure you have enough words on each page – at least 300.

Use your keywords, where appropriate, in page names and in headings and subheadings throughout the text. Subheadings are a great way to break up a page of text (just look at this article!) and to draw the parent through the crucial points you want to convey.

Search engines like websites that are regularly updated, so make a plan to do this and consider blogging, perhaps on a monthly basis. They also like content without spelling mistakes and poor

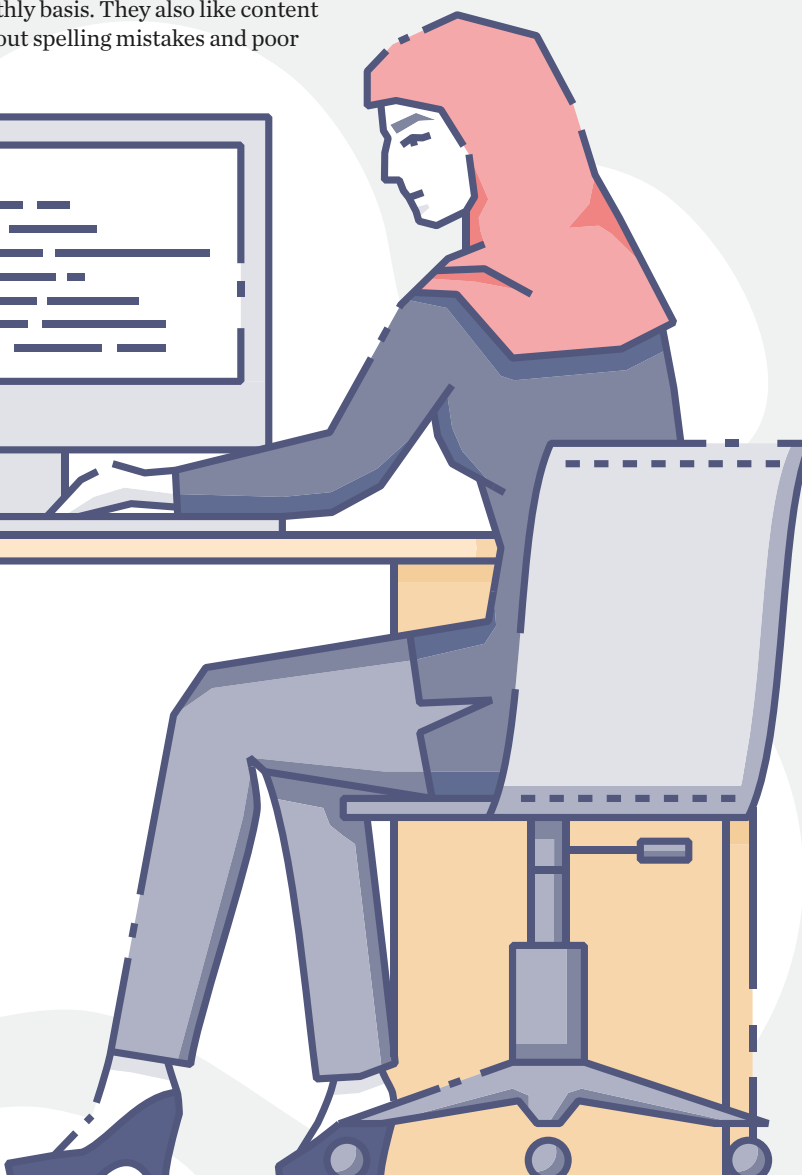
grammar, so don’t forget to proofread your site. Make sure any links you have on the website work and include links internally throughout your website to help with SEO and to guide the parent to appropriate information, prompting them to take action and get in touch.

There’s undoubtedly much to consider when reviewing your nursery’s website, but taking the time to create a site that portrays the best possible picture of your setting can really pay dividends – both in being more visible on Google and then in attracting customers.



*Julie Waite is a writer and marketing consultant working in the early years sector. Visit [jwaitemarketing.com](http://jwaitemarketing.com) or follow her on Twitter: @JWaiteMarketing*

*“Taking the time to create a site that portrays the best possible picture of your setting can really pay dividends”*



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# Resources update

## Introducing CLASSMATES®, the low-cost, big brand alternative from Hope Education

**CLASSMATES®**  
Amazing quality, low prices.



Inspire · Create · Educate

Hope Education understands just how fast busy nursery settings can get through essential resources, and know well that Art, Stationery, Cleaning and Facilities are the areas that are in need of replenishing most often. That's why its team have been working hard to redevelop its CLASSMATES® brand. To give you the very best from its extensive range Hope has developed in excess of 1,000 better quality products whilst keeping its prices affordably low. From the resources themselves, to the packaging they come in, its team have left no stone unturned to help you make savings – from paint and PVA through to pens and hand soap, CLASSMATES® can save you up to 45% against the big brands.

CLASSMATES® is the ideal solution for any learning space, office, staff room or cleaning cupboard. Try it – you'll be amazed at how much of a difference it can make...

### SPOTLIGHT ON...

Little ones love to be creative and with Hope's lowest ever price on PVA glue, you'll have plenty for all your crafting fun!

The CLASSMATES® PVA range is suitable for little hands in every way, as it is CE certified and formulated to wash easily out of clothing and hair, as well as being free from gluten, latex, wheat and phthalate. You can be confident that with the variety of different sizes available, there is an option to suit the needs of your setting.

But that's not all – Hope understands that nursery budgets are tight, now more than ever. So, it has invested £4 million into lowering its online prices to give you better value. This includes CLASSMATES® products, meaning you can save up to 25% on PVA (the 5l bottle is just £4.45!). Simply look out for the 'price drop' logo on the Hope website.

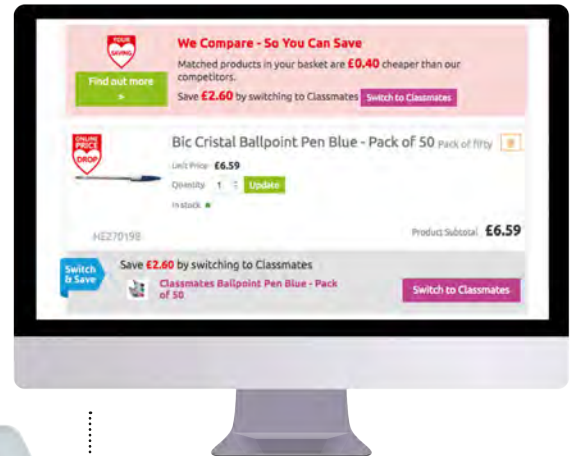


### VIEW FROM THE FLOOR...

Kelly, manager at Treetops Brookbank Nursery, is in no doubt about why she loves Hope's CLASSMATES® range.

"Nothing sparks creativity in our children quite like art play," she says. "They love the sight of paint, paper and glue being laid out on the tables and you can see their faces light up as they think about the masterpieces (and mess!) they are about to create. We need art resources that meet our standards whilst helping stretch our budgets further. That's why we love CLASSMATES®. The quality is fantastic, the ready-mix paint is nice and thick, which means it dries with a bold colour, and the PVA is the best we've ever used. But what's even more impressive is the price! We previously used all the famous brands, but they just can't compete.

"And it's not just the children who use CLASSMATES®; we're often restocking the office with the great stationery and cleaning ranges!"



### SWITCH & SAVE

Sometimes, finding a low-cost alternative to the big brands can be a time-consuming and frustrating process. That's why Hope Education has made sure that switching to CLASSMATES® couldn't be simpler for the managers and practitioners of busy early years settings. You don't need to do a thing – every time you add a big branded item to your basket online and there's a CLASSMATES® alternative available, you'll be shown the saving you can make automatically. You can then choose to switch at the click of a button – it really is that easy, and it gives you the opportunity to re-invest your savings back into your nursery.

Remember, too, that with Hope it's not just the big brands you can save against. Their online price comparison tool also compares hundreds of resources against various suppliers, saving you more time and money.

### More information

What are you waiting for? Visit [hope-education.co.uk/classmates](http://hope-education.co.uk/classmates) to start making savings today!

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**Schools**





# Why I Love...



**Kate**, educational leader at Blueys Treehouse ELC, explains how Kinderloop is taking the stress out of recording planning and observations

## “We want to put meaningful interactions first

Okay, so you have your chunk of time off the floor to record your observations and plan next steps. What do you do? For most educators this time is precious and jam-packed with expectations! The focus of every early years practitioner has to be on the meaningful and purposeful interactions with children, but while we all know that this is the case, a lot of time is often spent writing out learning outcomes observed and having to cross reference ideas and observations, all while wrestling with big piles of paper.

## “We love its simplicity and adaptability

Thankfully, the introduction of digital documentation software is making the process much simpler. At my setting, observations can be posted to the centre's private Kinderloop, either quickly while on the floor with children or in down times during the day. Later I can analyse and assess the learning of the children observed, identifying and tagging developmental areas. We have also seen a vast increase in family engagement, with their feedback going towards our planning for the week! We love its simplicity and adaptability, and how it has improved us as educators!

## “Streamlining observations and planning

Kinderloop is a fun, private early years tool that is empowering over 10,126 practitioners to simplify their documentation, save time and money and securely link to families in real time. It enables educators to streamline the observation and planning process, limiting the duplication of data and leaving them with more time available to spend with the children.

**To find out more, email [hello@kinderloop.com](mailto:hello@kinderloop.com) or visit [kinderloop.com](http://kinderloop.com) to start your free trial.**

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# Why it pays to go PAPERLESS

Software-based systems require you to make an initial investment of time and money, but they can do wonders for parental engagement...

**SARAH STEEL**

**F**or many years we lovingly created scrapbooks for every child at nursery, cutting and sticking in photographs and handwritten notes. Parents loved having them as a record of their child's time at nursery, but about five years ago we started looking around at the then 'new' alternative e-learning journals.

We were mainly interested in their time-saving potential, as we were becoming increasingly concerned at how long staff were spending on learning journeys, not to mention the difficulties around quality control with such individual creations (some were amazing, but some were full of misspellings and the quality was generally very mixed).

The real 'Eureka' moment was when we reflected on the role of the practitioner within the EYFS: was it to support children with learning and development and track their progress, or was it to spend hours cutting out photos and matching them with development statements, so that parents would have a nice keepsake?

## **Taking the plunge**

At this point, we dipped our toe in the electronic water and trialled Tapestry at our Filkins Nursery. Louise, our manager, was keen to see how the system would work, and was really behind the implementation. We asked her deputy manager, Lynda, to oversee the project, and she has gone on to support other settings across our group

as they too have adopted e-learning journeys.

There was initially some resistance to the technology – there were comments from parents, but the reservations were mostly from staff, who thought it was a shame that children would leave without a scrapbook of their time at nursery. We also had some staff who were not 'digital natives' and were a bit hesitant about the tablets and laptops we would have to use. How would they share tablets? Could they get their heads around the software? Would staff constantly have their head in a device?

Louise and Lynda devised a really good system to introduce the whole team to the software and set up a trial child on the system; staff then spent several weeks recording observations about this fictional child, until everyone was happy with how to make observations and find their way around the system. They then loaded all our children onto the new system, and spent a whole half term making observations on the children, before parents were invited to join. This meant that when parents first logged on, their account was live, there were several observations about their child, and they could see how it was going to work.

The team spent a lot of time reflecting on how the new system was working and made adjustments as they went. They agreed the number of observations per week they would aim for, and to start

with, the manager and deputy approved all observations before they were released to parents. This is really important for quality assurance and it may take some time before you decide you are happy with some or all of your team posting live to parents. As with many pieces of software, e-learning journal systems are only as good as the information you put into them. You do need to agree on a set of guidelines before you embrace any new software and be ready to review it and make changes.

## **The benefits**

So, what have the benefits been to us? Well, despite our initial assumption that it would save staff time, the biggest benefit has been an increase in parental engagement. Those parents who fly in and out at handover time, due to busy lifestyles, are far more likely to find 10 minutes at home in the evening to log on and have a look at what their child has been doing. The child who always answers questions about their day with, "I can't remember" or "I don't know," will have a record that their parents can see which might showcase something that they have done during the day, or a trip the nursery has made during the week. We found that even the 'hardest-to-reach' parents who are social media-savvy would look at Tapestry and comment.

Some of them were reluctant to engage at first, but we would invite them into the office, help them download the app and get them all set up as their child was settling in, so they were ready to go.





## SIX WAYS TO MAKE THE MOST OF E-LEARNING JOURNALS

- Rubbish in, rubbish out' is true with any learning journal product; your team must agree how they will use the software and what they want to achieve.
- Review the available products first. We currently use Tapestry, eyLog and Family in different locations and all have advantages. Factor in your budget and any management software you use (having the same software for learning journals and management software makes life much simpler!).
- Once you have made a decision you are committed – you won't want to make a change unless you have to, as you will have invested lots of staff time and parental engagement. So do your homework and speak to colleagues before you make your choice.
- Populate your software before you add parents to the system, so they are instantly engaged.
- Encourage hard-to-reach parents by offering to set up apps for them, so you can talk them through how it works and they can see it really is easy.
- Encourage parents to add photos and observations at the weekend, so that children can show you what they have done once at nursery. This adds a new dimension to 'show and tell', with even the most reluctant children keen to talk about a photo from home.

*“Our parents all rate the interactions provided by the software highly, as it really improves communication”*

### The downsides

And the disadvantages? As well as the annual subscription to the software provider, you do need to have several tablets to use the system well. We have at least two per room and are still constantly working out the best value on the market

(which hardware survives nursery abuse without costing too much – our current favourite is from Acer). You also need a laptop for easy editing and cohort tracking. You do need to make sure that everyone has a chance to play around with the software whilst they are

not with the children; there is nothing worse than walking into a room in nursery and seeing someone focused intently on a tablet and ignoring the children.

### The new normal

At the end of children's time at nursery, we use the software to produce a transition report – some local authorities still ask for their own lengthy document, but we have started sending just the summative assessment from Tapestry. We also save the entire learning journey onto a logo'd memory stick as a gift for each parent – so whilst they don't have a lovely scrapbook to keep, they do have a digital version that they can share with relatives, especially those who may be overseas.

Parents whose children start nursery now don't know that there was ever a paper alternative, and they all rate the interactions provided by the software highly, as it really improves communication.



*Sarah Steel is managing director of the Old Station Nursery. Visit [theoldstationnursery.co.uk](http://theoldstationnursery.co.uk)*





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*Nursery Chain Director*

*“A great app, very well thought out and great price.”*

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# Why I Love...



Childcare professional **Karen McDermot** explains how Kinderly has transformed her early years setting

## “There’s so much functionality – what’s not to love?”

The Kinderly software is so clever and works brilliantly to lighten the paper workload for practitioners. The presentation looks very professional on the Parent Portal and I love being able to share unlimited photographs to parents to show their child’s wonderful achievements at no extra cost. Previously, printer ink was costing me a fortune! The Kinderly team are quite honestly the most friendly, helpful and efficient group of people I have ever had the pleasure of working with.

## “It offers better communication with home, in real time

Sharing a child’s learning journal on a regular basis was becoming impossible for me, as it needed to be kept available in my setting for the constant recording of developmental information. This is no longer an issue, as I can share this information with parents instantly as soon as it’s entered onto Kinderly. I now share even more information to support two-way communication and to support home learning – for example, newsletters, monthly planning, wow moments and details of my ongoing training.

## “Both parents and children love using it

Kinderly has created new ways for parents to engage with their child, and for the children to be involved in their own development and learning journey. All parents absolutely love it, especially being able to discuss all

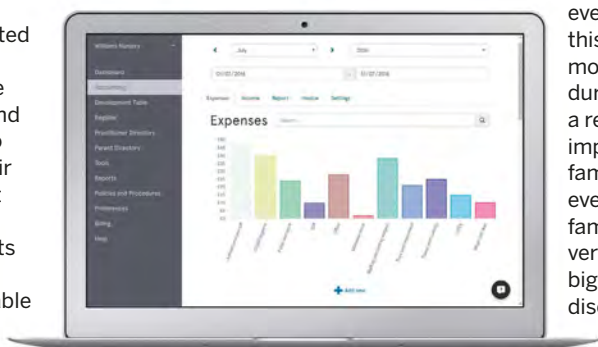


the activities, observations and photographs I can upload with their child at the end of the day. I also let the children ‘save and authorise’ their own observations where possible to send to their parents. This gives them an added sense of self-worth, helps them to learn to follow simple instructions and allows them to practise

using ICT equipment in the process.

## “Kinderly helps me keep on top of everything

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# Ask the EXPERTS

**Ela Law** and **Dr Janet Aylott** explain how the EYN Partnership can enhance your setting's reputation for excellence in nutrition...



**Ela Law** previously worked as Food in Schools Coordinator for Newham within their Healthy Schools Team and now works as an EYN Partnership Registered Nutrition Professional in South East London and surrounding areas.



**Dr Janet Aylott** has 18 years' experience working as a Registered Nutritionist and has significant knowledge in childhood nutrition. Janet now works as an EYN Partnership Registered Nutrition Professional covering London and Kent.

## What does the EYN Partnership offer early years settings?

**Ela:** The EYN Partnership offers early years settings a unique opportunity to work with a dedicated Registered Nutrition Professional, who can support them in their efforts to provide healthy and balanced food, a stimulating eating environment and encourage partnership work between parents and nursery staff. There are several nutrition resources from different organisations available, but only the EYN Partnership offers the personal touch of individual support. The Quality Mark is a fabulous programme to showcase and advertise the great work early years settings do and give them accreditation that is nationally recognised. Signing up to the programme will also provide Ofsted with evidence of the setting working towards the Common Inspection Framework.

## Why does working with a Registered Nutrition Professional (RNP) make the difference?

**E:** The resources from other organisations available to early years settings tend to be downloadable ideas and suggestions. With an RNP, advice can be put into practice with tailored and individual approaches, one-to-one support and the opportunity for settings to ask questions and clarify strategies. Especially at the beginning of their journey, early years settings will benefit from some guidance from a person rather than a web resource.

**Janet:** RNPs have the knowledge and understanding to work towards goals that are right for the setting – not just sticking to



a rule book. Recognising that every setting is different, and every child is unique.

## How does the EYN Partnership Quality Mark work?

**J:** We can give settings instant recognition for the work they already do, as they will receive a 'Committed' certificate upon signing up. The setting will be assessed against a set of food and non-food-based criteria and the way they cater for special diets/preferences and allergies. Once a setting achieves all the criteria, they will become 'Accredited' and receive their certificate. The 'Advanced' and 'Specialist' accreditation awards build on the work put in for the 'Accredited' award. In the wake of the UK childhood obesity crisis, the Quality Mark gives settings the opportunity to highlight work they are doing to ensure healthy futures for children.

## What training is available through the EYN Partnership?

**E:** Our RNPs can run face to face interactive half-day training workshops within settings. The whole team can

attend, and a number of modules can be covered. The Level 2 CACHE award unit offers training for cooks and includes basic nutrition knowledge, planning and preparing healthy and nutritious menus as well as catering for special dietary requirements. The Level 3 CACHE award unit for early years practitioners includes nutrition knowledge and building a skills base to make positive changes around food provision within early years settings.

## How does investing in nutrition pay off for settings?

**J:** All early years providers have a duty of care to provide a good start for young children in terms of healthy food choices and eating habits. By investing in nutrition at an early age, we have a unique opportunity to set children off on a lifetime of positive healthy outcomes. Parents are keen to know that those caring for their children have the best interests of their child at heart, and EYN Partnership have provided a 'gold bar' nutrition standard to work towards. Investing in nutrition through the EYN Partnership gives parents the peace of mind that their child's nutrition is of utmost importance to the setting.

## More information

To find out more, call 0207 697 2565, email [hello@eynpartnership.org](mailto:hello@eynpartnership.org) or visit [eynpartnership.org](http://eynpartnership.org)

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# Are you ready for Ofsted?

Don't let silly mistakes or misconceptions wreck your hard work when the inspector comes to call...

**JULIA MARIA GOULDSBORO**

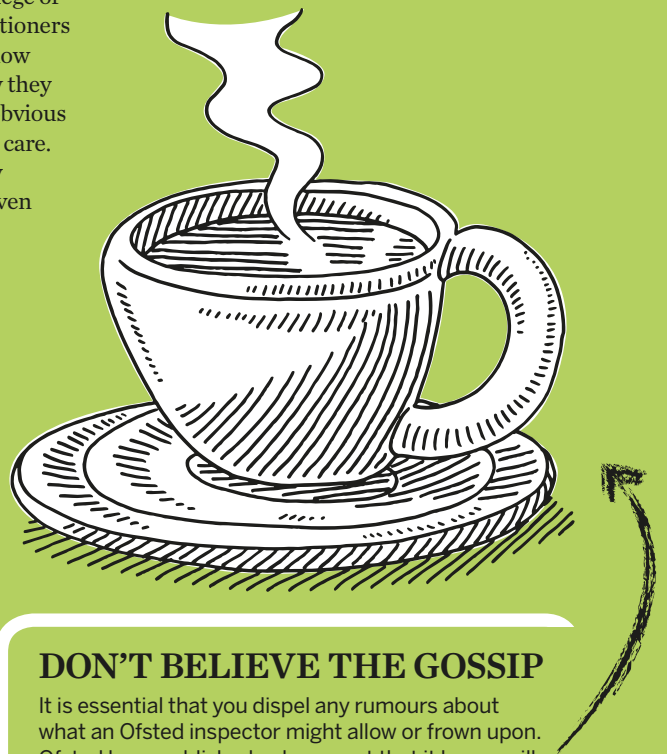
**D**uring my time as an Ofsted inspector for early years I had the privilege of visiting some fantastic settings. The dedicated, hardworking practitioners were a credit to their profession – however, it was often apparent how stressed and anxious they felt when I knocked at the door, and how they were sometimes disappointed with the judgement they received when it was obvious they were trying their hardest to provide the best practice for children in their care.

So, what is the best way to prepare for Ofsted, to avoid the pitfalls that may lead to an unfavourable outcome? Often, the practice is good or very good or even outstanding, but it may be let down by some silly mistakes...

## BE PREPARED

Preparation is the key and, by this, I mean that leaders must start by reviewing the previous inspection. But please, not the day after! Give yourself and your staff time to celebrate success. True leadership is inspiring and motivates the workforce, keeping morale high. Even if the judgement is disappointing, it can change for the next inspection. There is a commonly believed myth that a setting cannot achieve a judgement more than one grade above its previous inspection outcome, and can never get an 'outstanding' grade at its first inspection. This isn't the case (see [bit.ly/2GYXW4K](https://bit.ly/2GYXW4K)) – a setting can improve by more than one grade and receive a judgement of outstanding at its first inspection.

The main point to clarify is that inspectors do not want you to fail. They enter an early years setting wanting to see best practice. Your aim, therefore, should be to present a setting confidently sharing its vision and celebrating its achievements.



## DON'T BELIEVE THE GOSSIP

It is essential that you dispel any rumours about what an Ofsted inspector might allow or frown upon. Ofsted have published a document that it hopes will offer some reassurance – see [bit.ly/2xkPgX4](https://bit.ly/2xkPgX4). As it points out, "Inspections are not designed to catch staff off guard, nor do inspectors prepare a list of trick questions to ask providers." I welcomed a cup of tea during many of my visits (and received many very well-made cups of tea!). However, if a setting has a 'no hot drinks' policy, inspectors will not expect the rules to be broken on their account (Myth 6). The most essential factor is to ensure that the Statutory requirements are adhered to and the changes to the EYFS have been addressed, that all children are learning and developing, and their individual needs are met, and they are cared for and kept safe. If this is your practice daily, there should be no reason for a poor judgement.



***“Leaders must start by reviewing the previous inspection. But please, not the day after!”***





***“It’s vital for providers to follow the same procedure they would if any other visitor came to the setting”***

## KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS

Childcare providers do not need to produce any self-evaluation documentation, but managers and staff should be able to discuss the setting with the inspector. Inspectors will ask staff about the quality of care and activities they provide, and how well the setting is meeting the learning needs of all children. A self-evaluation form or reflection of a setting that includes the parent’s voice as well as the voice of the child shows how effectively parents and children are supported and included in the setting. Although a self-evaluation form is not needed, it is good practice to know the strengths and areas for improvement of the setting.

How does the setting ensure that the voice of the child and the voice of parents are listened to? This needs to be evidenced, as an inspector will only be able to talk to a few parents and children. An inspector will talk to parents and children during their visit and, if parents are picked by practitioners, an inspector will usually ask those who have not been picked, so ensure all parents know who the key person of their child is, how to complain to Ofsted if they are unhappy and how they access their child’s learning. Inspectors want to know the thoughts of as many parents and children as possible.

## STAY UP TO DATE

All settings should be aware of changes to the EYFS ([bit.ly/W2XJpO](https://bit.ly/W2XJpO)), and it’s imperative that practitioners keep up to date and update their training. For example, the rules regarding first aid-trained practitioners state that all newly qualified practitioners at Level 2 and above must gain a full or emergency paediatric first aid qualification within three months to count in the setting ratios. (3.25)

Meanwhile, paragraph 1.5 includes a link to the Chief Medical Officer’s guidance on physical activity for children. Although this is only guidance, it is necessary that settings highlight what they are doing to support children’s physical development.

Policies are often reviewed annually; however, changes to law may take place which will need policies updating with immediate effect. This is especially important for safeguarding issues. Prevent duty guidance and how to safeguard children means that safeguarding policies may need to be reviewed and updated as new issues arise. Leaders must ensure that staff are updated on their knowledge and understanding of safeguarding to keep children safe.

Training should be continuous and ongoing, and establish that all staff should have a clear understanding of prevent and concerns that may arise from it, such as FGM, exploitation and extremism. One of the main aims when supporting children’s personal development and welfare is to help children “understand how to keep themselves safe from relevant risks such as abuse, sexual exploitation and extremism, including when using the internet and social media”. ([bit.ly/2lThx8g](https://bit.ly/2lThx8g)) This means *all* staff. New staff, part-time staff and volunteers need to be just as up to date with safeguarding and what to do if they have a concern as experienced staff and management.



## FOLLOW YOUR PROCEDURES

Often, when Ofsted arrives, anxiety levels are high, but whatever you do, don’t forget the basics. It’s vital for providers to follow the same procedure they would if any other visitor came to the setting. So, politely ask the inspector to show you their ID, sign in (and out) and turn off their mobile phone.

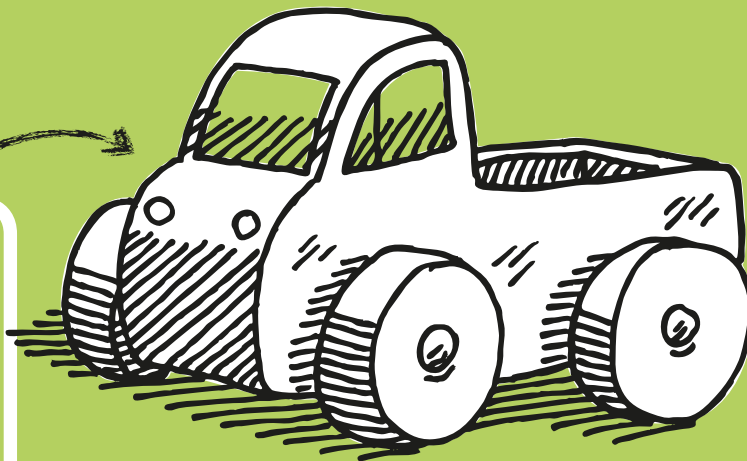
Show them the fire procedures. Sometimes practitioners make the mistake of thinking that the inspector should know all this. Well, the inspector does know all this but wants to see if you, the practitioner, follow your own procedures. Your inspection begins when the inspector knocks at that door.



## FOCUS ON CHILDREN'S INTERESTS

Mud kitchens are a delight to see when you observe children enjoying playing with them, but what an inspector does not want to see is a mud kitchen that is not being used. Often, when settings read other inspections, they mistakenly view the positive comments and examples written by the inspector as the best example of good practice and rush out to recreate the newest trend. The children in their setting may not have shown any interest in mud kitchens and so do not play in the beautifully designed area.

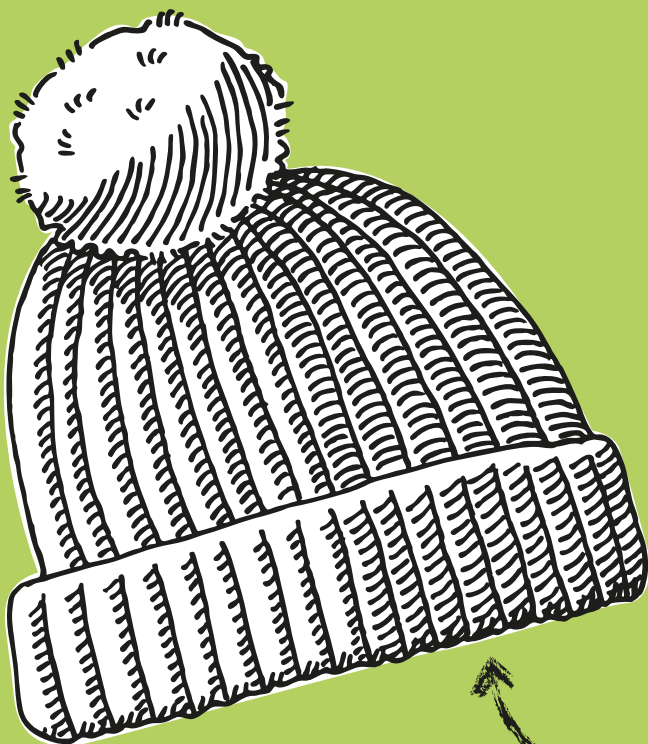
Instead, be confident in exhibiting how well you know your children by creating an enabling environment around their needs and interests. This includes celebrating diversity. A setting needs to know its community, celebrating the festivals and events that matter to them. This is what makes a setting unique. It is good to celebrate wider community events too, but settings sometimes fall into the trap of marking major festivals that have little impact on families and forget to celebrate the cultures and religions that makes up their setting that will have a much greater impact.



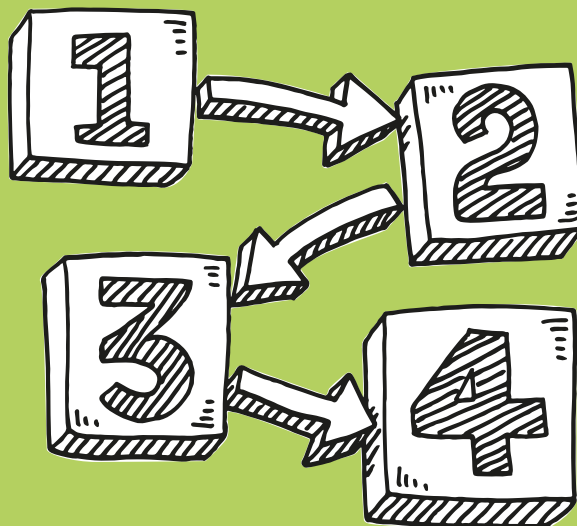
## ADDRESS PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

It might sound obvious, but you must ensure that any previous recommendations or required actions from Ofsted have been fully addressed before your next inspection comes around, and that you are able to provide evidence of the action you have taken for the inspector.

Keep in mind too that it may have been a good few years since your last inspection took place, and if this is the case it is likely that you will have some new members of staff, so make sure that everyone is up to date with all your setting's plans, aims and initiatives, so that nothing gets forgotten on the day.



***“Make sure everyone is up to date with your setting's plans, aims and initiatives”***



## BE HONEST

If your setting has received a complaint it, and how it was dealt with, needs to be recorded and shared with the inspector – remember that they will already know about any complaints.

Don't paint an inaccurate picture of your practice for the inspector's benefit. Take outdoor play – children need to be outdoors and have access to fresh air daily, but if settings only do this on the day of an inspection, children usually give the game away. A setting that ensures all children have appropriate clothing and footwear for outdoors demonstrates that the children in their care access outdoor play every day. (In my experience, often a childminder that has her business in a flat on the second floor will give her children more opportunities for outdoor play and exercise than a setting with wonderful gardens and outside space!)



*“Once you have received your judgement, celebrate the positive comments and reflect on the recommendations or actions”*

### AND FINALLY...

Be confident! Once you have received your judgement, take time to celebrate the positive comments from the inspector and reflect on the recommendations or actions that you need to take. As you do so, keep the following points in mind:

- Do not apportion blame – come together as a staff and discuss what you need to do to address the recommendations or actions.
- Remember, ‘good’ is good – don’t dismiss your judgement, even if it’s not quite what you were hoping for. Of course, everyone would like to be ‘outstanding’, but a positive leader needs to inspire and motivate their staff to help them improve, not deflate them.

The majority of settings that I inspected during my time at Ofsted were ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ and that is something that early years providers all over the country need to be proud of.



### DON'T FORGET THE DETAILS

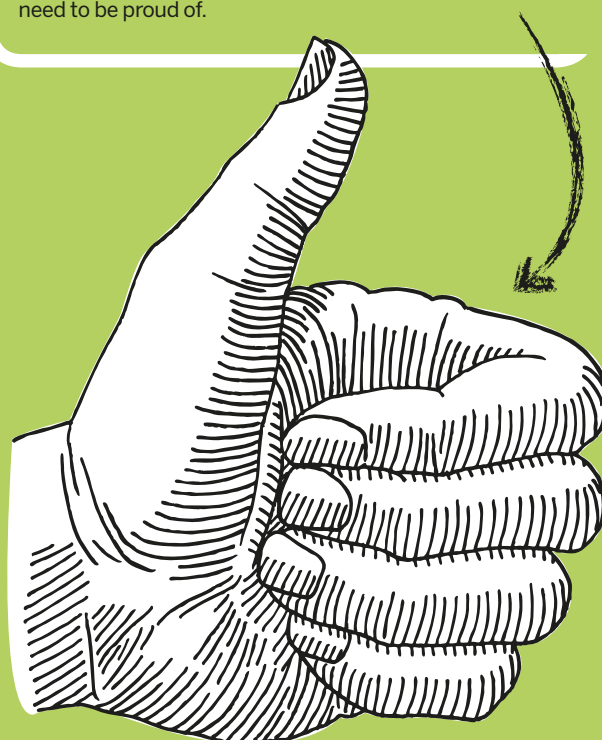
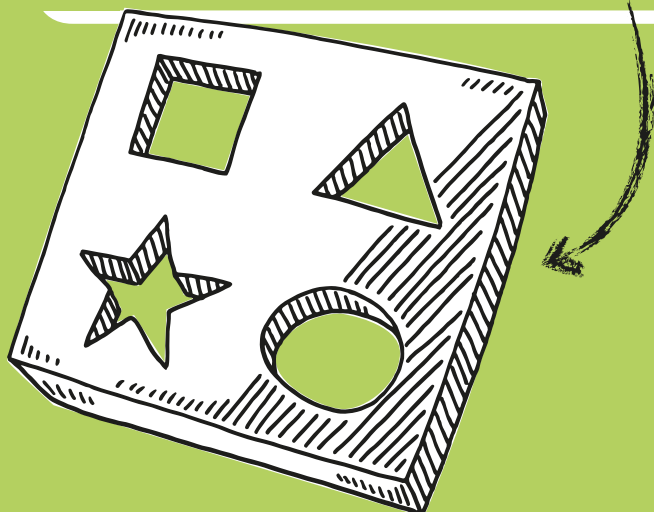
It is easy to overlook the small details, but if you do this you may well trip up at inspection. You should ensure that you record evidence of the following for the inspector:

- Fire drill practices (dates, times, and how many children were present).
- Visitors, evidenced in your signing-in book (make sure you have seen and noted the DBS and identity checks of assessors, agency staff or any visitor that will be in the room where children are playing)
- Evidence of trips, outings or celebrations children have partaken in. Every setting could list many events, but evidence is crucial.
- Ensure the Ofsted complaints number is available to all parents. This means, not only displaying the number, but ensuring all parents know where they can find the number and the procedure for complaints.

Childminders also need a record of their car insurance details (if they use their car for business purposes).

### HAVE A RESPONSIBLE PEDAGOGY

Responsible pedagogy is evident when practitioners have a good understanding about how children develop and because of that they can accurately assess the child when they demonstrate their learning and development. A responsible pedagogy enables each child to demonstrate learning in the fullest sense. Knowing the language of the EYFS changes makes it evident that, as a setting, you have discussed and reflected upon the best way for your setting to observe, assess, record and share achievements and progress with parents.



*Julia Gouldsboro is an author, early years lecturer and education consultant supporting and advising settings and practitioners on achieving best practice.*

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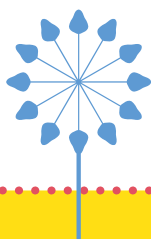
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# Resources update

Access a wealth of EYFS-linked activities at [bloomsburyearlyyears.com](http://bloomsburyearlyyears.com)



Bloomsbury Early Years was launched in April 2018, and, with over 2,000 activities written by trusted authors and linked to the EYFS and Development Matters statements, it provides an invaluable resource for every early years setting.

In a world where there is a lot of hunting and rummaging for teaching ideas via internet searches, practitioners often have little knowledge of the quality of material they find online or how a given activity will develop a child's learning. Bloomsbury Early Years is a much-needed tool and offers a wealth of great activities for early years settings in one place.

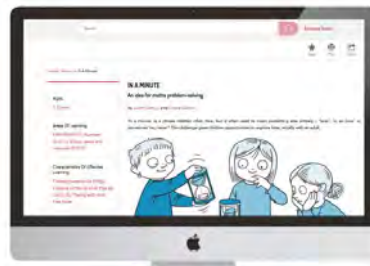
Each of the activities that feature in the resource has been linked to the Early Learning Goals, the Characteristics of Effective Learning and the Development Matters statements, and these are all displayed on each page. The 'Explore' facility and Search and Filters means that practitioners can easily find activities that meet specific learning needs and objectives, to help ease the burden of planning and save time.

## SUPPORT EVERY DAY

Whether your practitioners are seeking an activity that uses cookery to develop children's knowledge of Space, Shape and Measures, or just something to give them inspiration for outdoor learning, Bloomsbury Early Years has something to help. From construction to squidgy stuff, outdoor experiences to tuff trays, the huge variety of ideas on offer will provide help and support every day.

The activities are laid out in an easy-to-follow structure. They clearly indicate what is needed and these are always inexpensive items that the setting may have to hand already. Step-by-step guides to putting the activity into practice follow. If there's something specific to

keep in mind – like vocabulary to use and practise throughout, Health and Safety considerations, or any other helpful hints – these are also clearly displayed on the page. At the end of each activity, the relevant Development Matters statements are shown in a blue box.



## AFFORDABLE FOR ALL

The subscription fee charged for accessing Bloomsbury Early Year is per setting, and is governed by the number of children in the setting's care. There are no add-ons and no extra fees for more members of staff. Everyone can use it, and everyone can have access to everything. Once a setting has subscribed, each practitioner can also make their own area to save and share activities they want to return to. This can help communicate planning to colleagues and any cover staff.

Bloomsbury Education and Featherstone understand the needs of early years practitioners and aim to fully support them in their work. Through Bloomsbury Early Years they are making this material instantly accessible for when your practitioners need it most.



## VIEW FROM THE FLOOR...

*"This may be the website that gives back time to professionals by reducing the time needed to plan and locate resources whilst ensuring high-quality experiences for the children in their care. The ability to save favoured activities, to share them with others and to print them off is invaluable and ensures communication and consistency between multiple adults in a setting."*

*"If you are looking for an affordable (annual subscription fee), well-structured and -planned resource, with all activities linked to the curriculum that eases the burden of planning, look no further than Bloomsbury Early Years."*

**Julie-Ann McCulloch, specialist EAL teacher, EYFS-Y9**

*"Each activity clearly outlines its purpose and specific goals relating to the EYFS and Characteristics of Effective Learning, which is hugely helpful when you are trying to support students with specific skills."*

*"It's easy to navigate, by learning area or topic, or even by season or type (e.g. role play, construction, and even 'squidgy!'). If you are looking for high-quality ideas that can save you time, broaden your repertoire of activities and enrich the learning in your classroom, I would highly recommend it!"*

**Jenna Clare Watson, Reception and nursery, University of Cambridge Primary School**



## More information

To find out more about Bloomsbury Early Years and to subscribe, visit [bloomsburyearlyyears.com](http://bloomsburyearlyyears.com)



# Plan to EXPAND

Growing beyond your first setting requires careful thought but, with the right support, there's no reason you can't make a success of expansion...

COURTENEY DONALDSON

**T**he specialist childcare team at Christie & Co works with a range of clients, from the owners of single settings through to international conglomerates. Each of the largest multinational childcare groups had to start somewhere, but knowing where to start on any new journey can be a daunting experience.

Many of the family-founded regional groups that Christie & Co works with initially set out with the intention of having one nursery. However, as their occupancy levels grew, their business matured and their reputation developed, they found that demand from local parents heightened and each came to a stage whereby they were unable to meet the demands of parents, due to their setting's capacity limitations. Many of those owners, while having no long-term intention of creating a nursery group, felt compelled to find additional premises in their locality.

Some started that journey by identifying nurseries in their local area with a similar culture to their own that might be receptive to selling, or used the services of a specialist agent in order to find a business to acquire – perhaps one where they could 'add value' via occupancy growth and achieve operational efficiencies. Others opted to seek property that they could convert, subject to planning, into nursery use. Those organically developing a new setting had the option to create their own bespoke centre.

Your approach to expansion, be it via organic development or existing business acquisition, will have a direct impact on your success.

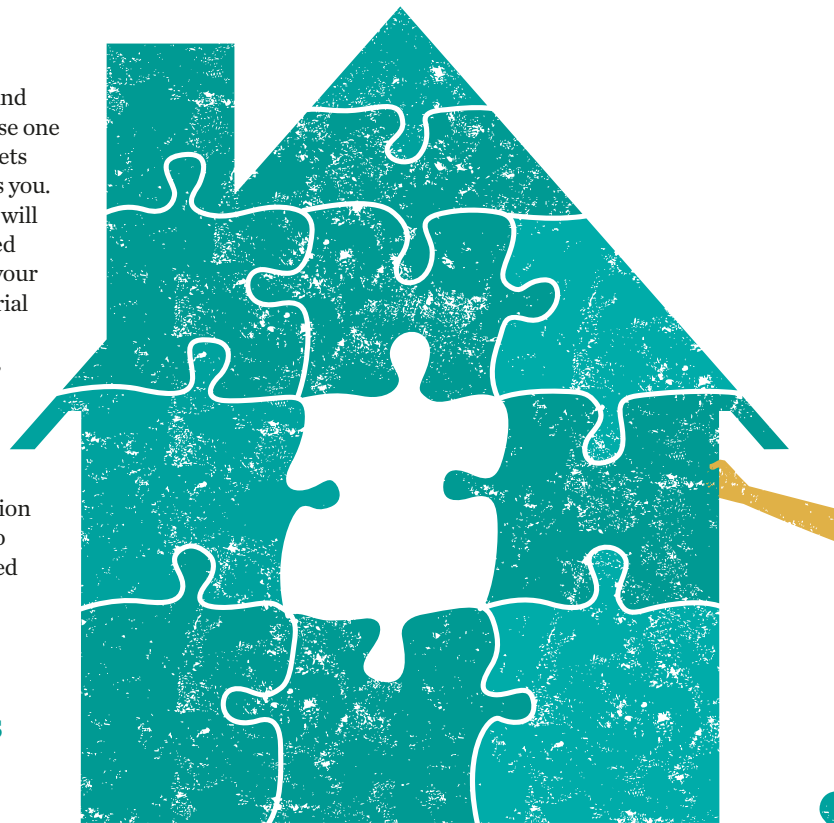
## Know yourself

It is extremely important that you carefully consider your personal strengths as well as areas for development and where you may require support. This will require

you to be honest and self-critical because one of the greatest assets in your business is you. The qualities that will help you to succeed in expanding are your own entrepreneurial skills, including optimism, energy, self-confidence, ambition, integrity, passion about quality and attention to detail – you also need to be balanced and logical.

## Preparing your credentials

Your credentials demonstrate your strengths and experience, and emphasising these during the acquisition process is incredibly valuable – they can present a compelling case to a seller, showing why you personally would be an ideal buyer for their business. Summarising and showcasing your set of skills, qualifications, experience and intended future plans for the business you plan to buy will be of particular use to lenders. Since the global economic downturn, banks' desire to mitigate risk has increased and a comprehensive showcase of your credentials will highlight your experience and sector knowledge, which will provide comfort to your proposed lender. You can also compile a list of what professional recruiters call your transferable skills, which derive from one area of experience and can be applied to another.



## Finding the right business

You will need to identify the attributes of the business you are looking to acquire. This includes defining your acquisition price range, geographical requirements, size of capacity, whether you seek a freehold or leasehold nursery business, and whether the business will operate under management.

Careful consideration must be given to the culture and values of your organisation, and how comparable these are when looking at nurseries that you may be thinking of acquiring – are policies and procedures aligned, how comparable are staff salaries and conditions of employment, holidays, bonus structures and so forth.

Location is always of paramount



importance, but even more so when contemplating expansion. Developing a new nursery or acquiring a setting very close to your own could potentially cannibalise trade, but having a setting too far away means that the deployment of your management time, skills and resources could come under significant pressure. A second setting within a reasonable radius will aid management, the partnership and relationship between both settings and, as such, can also aid staff

## “Location is of prime importance to the success of any nursery business”

deployment between settings in the event of unexpected periods of staff illness.

Many sales will be kept highly confidential in order to mitigate any risks associated with the potential departure of staff and parents. For this reason, it will be essential to look beyond web searches for opportunities and speak directly to agents who specialise in the sale of nursery businesses and are able to advise on your

specific requirements.

The agents' primary objective is to achieve the best possible price for their client and subsequently, ensure a smooth transaction through to completion. Most nursery acquisitions will be subject to financial and property due diligence, particularly if funding is required. The acquisition may take between four and six months from the deal being agreed to completion, which is of course dependent on the nature and structure of the sale.

When acquiring your second setting, if you can demonstrate that your existing business has a proven track record, funding from a bank will be easier to secure and potentially more preferable terms will be achievable, compared to those that may be offered to a first-time buyer.

### Financing your expansion

When determining how to finance your next acquisition, consider how much of your own capital you can put towards the purchase price and what level of debt your business can sustain. For freehold nursery businesses, UK banks may consider a loan on the basis of 60–70% to value (LTV), depending on your experience in the sector and track record as a buyer. Some banks specialise in particular markets and are keen to lend to aspiring purchasers in those markets.

Speaking to a financial broker that specialises in securing loans for nursery business acquisitions early on will be a great advantage and will ensure that your aspirations on the funding front are realistic and realised.

### Location and performance

Once you have identified a nursery business that appeals to you, thoroughly analyse its location, tenure, property and performance. Keep in mind that while physical aspects of a building may be altered, its location cannot be changed. Location is of prime importance to the success of any nursery business, as it dictates customer demographics, competitors, local trading conditions and fee levels. Consider tenure, the condition and configuration of the property and any additional characteristics, such as fixtures and fittings, parking and outdoor areas.

Finally, assess the business' financial state through its accounts, profit and

## SEVEN STEPS TO SECURING THE RIGHT BUSINESS

- 1 Know yourself – define your priorities, wants, needs, hopes and plans.
- 2 Prepare your credentials to demonstrate your sector experience to vendors and lenders.
- 3 Identify the attributes of the nursery business you are looking for.
- 4 Assess your financial situation.
- 5 Speak directly to specialist agents and financial brokers.
- 6 Analyse your chosen business' location, tenure, property and performance.
- 7 If your offer is accepted, work with the owners to ensure a smooth transition post acquisition completion.

loss projections, cash-flow forecasts and management accounts, as these will be reflective of business performance.

Business performance is the single most important factor associated to the value of a business as a going concern. The business' financial information will reveal whether it is well run, overpriced for the amount of trade involved, and if there are areas within the business that could be extended or operated more effectively.

### Making your offer

Your offer should be the monetary sum to purchase the freehold or leasehold interest, the fixtures and fittings, and the goodwill of the business. Your offer will be accepted, rejected, subject to further negotiations or counter-offered by another potential buyer.

Once your offer is accepted, you will need to create a strategy with the owners in terms of a communication plan for staff and parents about the change in ownership, teamed with arrangements as to how the handover of the business will be implemented in practice.



*Courtney Donaldson, MRICS is managing director – Childcare & Education at Christie & Co. Visit [christie.com](http://christie.com)*



# Help!

## We need a new home!

Kitting out new premises can be a stressful experience, but it also offers the opportunity to plan your ideal learning environment...

EMMA DAVIS

**I** imagine this – you’re a thriving charity-run preschool settled in rented premises, have achieved an ‘outstanding’ grade from Ofsted, are full to capacity for all sessions, and then you receive notice to leave. This is the situation we at Busy Bees found ourselves in last May.

While receiving notice to leave was a shock, our dedication to Busy Bees meant we were determined to secure the future of the setting. So, the search began for a new premises from which to operate. Feeling upbeat, we were all focused on finding somewhere quickly, as without a new home Busy Bees would cease to exist. Initially, we had just six months to secure a suitable site – however, with limited options in Ledbury, this proved to be an unrealistic time frame. Fortunately, we were granted an extension of our lease, giving us more time to find somewhere just right.

Over a period of six months, many options were explored – industrial units, empty premises in the town centre, residential properties, a Portacabin on a piece of rented land, and investment from a local developer. All fell through, some after a considerable time of appearing to be ‘the one’. Time ticked on and we were beginning to feel concerned for the future of Busy Bees as well as our own futures. With families to support and bills to pay, the prospect of unemployment was a frightening one.

But at long last we received the news we had been waiting for – the council-owned premises we had first enquired about had become available and discussions could begin regarding a lease. This took a couple of months, but finally, in February this year, we received the keys to our new home.

### The hard work begins

Our initial viewing of the premises was daunting, as it struck us exactly how much



effort would be required to make the building a safe place for children to play and learn. Undeterred, we began work immediately. We’d had time to draw up plans whilst finalising the lease and were excited at the prospect of the huge, cold, echoey hall being transformed into a space we could be proud of.

### Meeting every need

An exciting aspect of the move was planning the space. As we care for children aged 2–11, we needed to ensure the layout met the needs of all attending as well as providing what we consider an enabling environment. It was important to us to set aside an area to be used solely by the older children attending our Breakfast and After-School Club; we wanted them to feel

*“We were all fully aware that the project was a huge undertaking”*

a sense of ownership for their space, so we consulted them and took their views into account. Once we’d decided on how to split the building between our preschool and extended services provision, we then had to plan individual rooms that would be built in the hall, each with its own lighting and heating. This took careful consideration, as we wanted large open areas but also individual rooms to be used as a cloakroom and sensory room. In addition, we also had to consider the essentials – toilets, a kitchen, changing area and space for eating.

The project moved fast – it had to, as we only had two months from the time of getting the keys to the date we had to be out of our rented Portacabin into the



building we renamed The Hive. Work began immediately, using a small team of local builders and tradespeople. Knowing there was no help available to us financially I contacted early years suppliers to see if they could help in any way. Thankfully, the response was incredible. Newby Leisure, in particular, were extremely generous – the equipment they provided us with was totally unexpected and greatly appreciated. Similarly, Early Years Resources and TTS both assisted us with resources.

Local tradespeople were fantastic, offering discounts and some giving their time for free. Local shops ran raffles and cake sales, and pubs put on fun days and skittles events, all to raise money for us.

As the weeks passed, the structure of the rooms took shape. Parents were incredibly helpful, coming in to paint walls, lay flooring, assist with the kitchen installation and move furniture, but there were days when it seemed like the work would never be finished in time.

## Outdoor overhaul

With work on the indoors progressing well, focus shifted outdoors. I had in mind the sort of space I wanted to create, thinking of textured areas that would represent different aspects of play. The landscaper we used was amazing at bringing these ideas to life and the litter-filled, overgrown wasteland of an outdoor area changed dramatically within days. The new fence erected around the perimeter not only looked wonderful but also secured the whole area. With chipped bark, gravel and artificial grass, the whole space became more than I could even have imagined – and when we introduced our new resources, it came to life.

## The final stretch

As Easter approached, the packing up of resources and equipment at the Portacabin stepped up a gear. Fortunately, our local children's centre loaned us the use of their building on the last day of the summer term, allowing us to move out with little disruption to families and in time for the end of our lease. Work continued in earnest over Easter. Reflection on our resources and equipment was necessary to understand where improvements to provision were needed. Out went lots of the plastic and in came a more natural environment. The arrival of resources and equipment was exciting, as we began to think more carefully about the play spaces we were creating. Extra floor space allowed us to plan and develop the provision as we wanted it. However, as a team, we discussed the need to settle in and reflect



on how the children used the space, aware that changes might need to be made.

Before we knew it the last day of the holidays was upon us, and it was spent arranging furniture, setting up rooms and cleaning. There was a real sense of excitement as everyone looked forward to seeing the children enjoying the space the following day.

## Journey's end

Opening day was the most incredible experience. The long hours and worry was completely worth it when we saw the children's faces. Observing them using the space, exploring the resources and just finding wonder in everything was fantastic.

What am I most proud of? The garden has proven to be very popular. Already we are seeing the space change – the willow tree in the centre of the garden has sprung into life. The bird feeders hanging in this tree needs topping up regularly and the

children love watching the numerous birds flying and hopping around (we even made cardboard tube binoculars so we could get a better look!). Our fabulous mud kitchen from Landscapes for Learning is covered in the remnants of mud pies and soups, exactly the way it should be. Reading areas are scattered with books and the 'Little Hive' crooked house is starting to look lived in.

Has it been worth it? Completely! It has been undeniably stressful, but when I look around at what we've created, it makes me feel excited for the future and the wonderful experiences we're able to give the children in The Hive.



*Emma Davis is an Early Years Teacher and manager at Busy Bees Ledbury.*

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# the wow FACTOR

Find out how Living Streets can help you instill healthy habits



## What they'll love

Little Feet, the activity for early years, is charity Living Streets' brand new set of resources for children aged two to five. Its aim – to get little ones active through fun and engaging activities. The set features ideas ranging from things to spot on the way to or from their early years setting, to discussing new findings in class. The idea is that the activities will provide an enjoyable and educational way for children to learn all about the importance of walking while instilling it as a habit that will stay with them throughout their lives. The activities can be enjoyed with parents and carers but are also perfect for use within early years settings.

## What they'll learn

The Little Feet activity will primarily support children and their families' understanding of how to be healthy and the importance of being physically active in achieving this. However, this is not all children will learn – the set is built around popular early years topics such as 'People Who Help us' and 'Minibeasts', meaning that Little Feet will help children learn about the world around them and their local community, while providing a variety of links to the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework. It is also a great way for children to begin to learn road safety skills and how to look after the environment by walking rather than driving to nursery and, later, primary school.

To find out more, call 020 7377 4900, visit [livingstreets.org.uk/early](http://livingstreets.org.uk/early) or follow @livingstreets

**LIVING  
STREETS**

# Little feet

**a walking activity  
for early years**

**9 in 10**  
children aged 2-4 years  
old **DON'T** get enough  
daily exercise

**GET INVOLVED!**

Easy to take part in, Little Feet encourages families & early years settings to fit more walking in, to and from pre-school. The resource supports the Early Years Foundation Stage framework and Ofsted descriptors and rewards families for healthy choices; instilling healthy habits for life.

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# Share your VISION

Taking the time to develop your nursery's ethos will help you hone your practice and connect with customers...

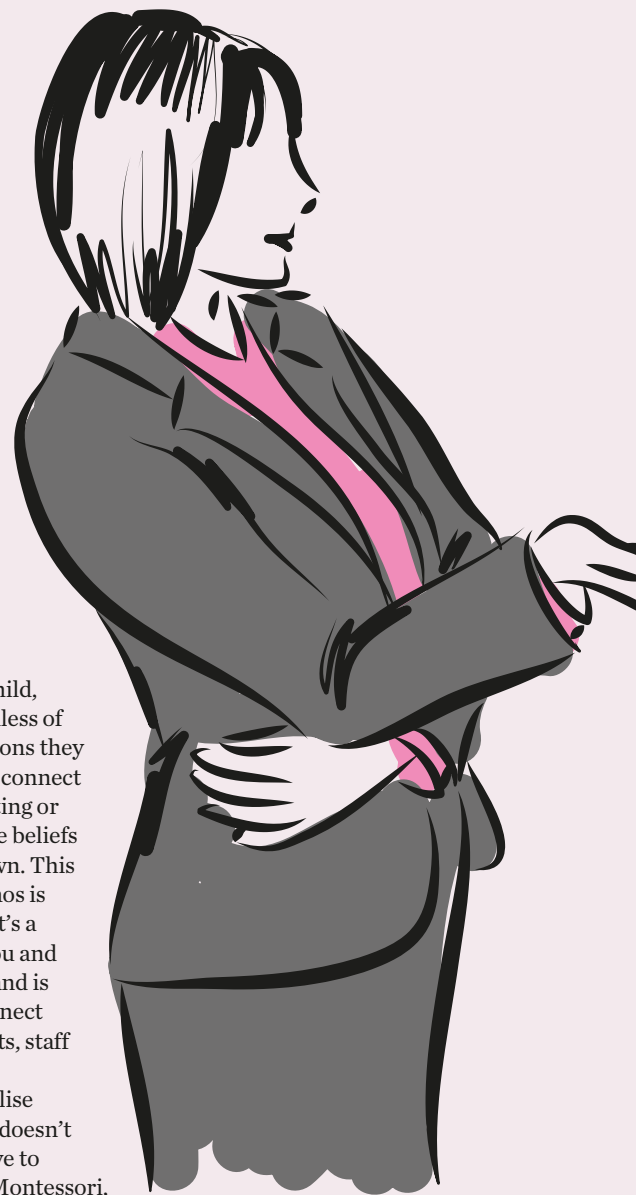
**JAMIE VICTORIA**



@childcareguru\_



thechildcareguru.co.uk



**T**here are over 25,000 group-based providers in England, all of whom follow the Early Years Foundation Stage, yet each one is different. Knowing how to develop your nursery into an outstanding setting with a strong vision and philosophy, or ethos, is what will ensure you create an environment for children to flourish in.

## What is an 'ethos'?

Put simply, an ethos is a set of ideas and attitudes associated with a particular group of people, activity or, indeed, early years setting. When beginning to formulate yours, it's important to think deeply about why you are opening a

nursery, and what beliefs and ideas you have about children, education and care. Each person is different and will be passionate about different learning styles or methods of teaching, and these should be the focus area for creating and embedding your ethos. Typically settings might follow a Montessori or Reggio Emilia ethos, approaches that have been developed over many years and use specific routines and resources. Recently the forest school ethos has become increasingly popular, as practitioners are recognising the importance of being outdoors and creating learning opportunities for exploration and play in a natural environment. But these aren't the only options.

## Make it personal

Why should a parent choose your nursery over another? Why should a practitioner decide to work for you and not somewhere else? Having a clear ethos that reflects your passion for early education is key in attracting like-minded clients and staff. I've always advised parents to visit as many nurseries as possible when deciding where

to send their child, because regardless of recommendations they will ultimately connect best with a setting or manager whose beliefs mirror their own. This is why your ethos is so important: it's a reflection of you and your nursery, and is a means to connect with the parents, staff and children.

So personalise your ethos – it doesn't necessarily have to adhere to the Montessori, Steiner or Reggio approaches. As is the case with me, you may find elements that strongly resonate with you while also having views unique to yourself. Rather than follow the crowd, step back from it and develop your own approach.

## Dare to be different

Recently, I supported a forest school daycare setting and developed the ethos alongside the owners, incorporating several ideas, beliefs and methods to create a unique attitude that reflected the vision of the business. When putting your ethos together I suggest having an open discussion and noting down all the theories, approaches and words that relate to you and your vision for your setting. Mine looked something like this:

*'Forest school'  
'Holistic approach'  
'Multiple Intelligence'  
'Making mistakes'  
'Resilience'  
'Emotional intelligence'  
'Happiness'  
'Creativity'  
'Imagination'  
'Boundaries'*

This list is then the starting point from which to pull your ethos together and make it individual to your setting. These points will be the foundations, the building blocks that underpin all that you do, and you can use them to write an ethos statement that makes your approach clear. Here's an example:

*The Childcare Guru's ethos is a unique, child-centered philosophy*







**“Having a clear ethos that reflects your passion for early education is key in attracting like-minded clients and staff”**

*that aims to develop each child holistically. The Multiple Intelligence approach teaches us that every child is intelligent, which we firmly believe, so combined with the Early Years Foundation Stage we aim to support each child to develop their individual intelligences through play, giving them the confidence to achieve their potential.*

*Our outdoor environment, ensures that children have the opportunity to learn about the world around them and learn in a natural space, allowing them to take managed risks, supported by their teachers, who encourage self-belief and resilience.*

*Boundaries and guidelines support the children in understanding what is expected of them by their teachers,*

*peers and the environment, ensuring they are safe at all times. Emotional intelligences are greatly supported and we believe in each child having a voice and opportunity to discuss their feelings, to encourage them to feel confident speaking out and managing how to deal with emotional situations as they arise. Happiness and wellbeing are at the core of our values, and opportunities for imaginative and creative play are always available – when the gates to a child’s imagination are opened, anything is possible.*

### **Linking ethos to practice**

Once you have an ethos statement, it’s vital that you embed it into your daily practice – it’s not meant to be purely for show on your website or advertising booklets but at the heart of all that you do.

The good news is that adopting an ethos that you have put together is easier for having come from you originally, rather than requiring you to adapt it from elsewhere. However, it’s important that all of the staff have clear understanding of the philosophies behind your statement, so that they feel confident putting it into practice. Inductions, training and reflective practice will help to support this as well as modeling from those who created it. While you as owner or manager will feel confident understanding the ethos statement and explaining it to staff and parents, it may help staff if you simplify it to a set of bullet points. These should then be displayed throughout your setting so that those core values are a visible daily reminder.

Planning of activities should combine both the EYFS and your philosophies. For example:

*As part of our daily routine, the preschool-aged children*

*sit together before lunch for a philosophy session. This comprises storytelling and asking of enquiring questions, which allows the children to turn take, listen and voice their opinions without judgement or fear, thus building their emotional intelligences, confidence, self-esteem, literacy and social communication skills.*

All of the attributes fall in line with the ethos statement above.

### **Communicating your ethos with parents**

As mentioned previously, your ethos is your main initial attraction and selling point, so parents will (hopefully!) already be on board with the way in which you deliver early education. It is important, however, to re-emphasise this – for example, offering parents the opportunity to be involved in nursery life, similarly to their child. In this way, the nursery becomes a community and parents can better understand and follow the setting’s values and philosophies in their home environment, providing a more holistic experience for the child. This can be achieved through things like event days, emails and newsletters, and stay-and-play sessions.

### **Closing thoughts**

As a nursery owner or manager, never be afraid to step out of your comfort zone and create an ethos that is exclusive to your setting. One style of learning will never be agreeable to everyone, yet people do connect with those that are passionate, driven and committed to providing early education that is second to none. For me, balance is the secret ingredient to success – children, parents and teachers alike need balance within everyday life.



**Jamie Victoria, AKA the Childcare Guru, has worked as a nanny, nursery manager and deputy head. Today she advises early years settings and parents, and offers freelance forest school training and much more.**

# Keep parents ON-SIDE

When communication breaks down between setting and home, queries and concerns can go unaddressed, to the detriment of your business...

**I**n a line of work centred on something as precious to parents as their own children, a little friction between provider and client every now and again is inevitable. It's natural that parents want only the best, and likely that sometimes their expectations will prove unrealistic. But it's also true that some nurseries could do better when dealing with their customers, and that standards should be higher – here are five cautionary examples to keep in mind...

## DON'T MENTION MILESTONES!

*"I had been encouraging my daughter to start walking at home and had explained to her key person that I was looking forward to seeing her take her first steps. A few days later, when I arrived at the setting one evening after work, I was greeted by a very excited practitioner who told me that my daughter had just got up and walked for the first time. I was crushed that I wasn't there to see it and couldn't believe that they hadn't acted more sensitively."*

Parents and carers are as unique as the children in your nursery. While some will want to know all about milestones the instant they happen, others – in particular those who are struggling being away from their children – will hate the thought that they are missing out on key events in their child's life. The important thing here is to develop good communication from the outset – for example, it's a good idea to ask parents for their preferences during their induction to avoid misunderstandings down the line. Make sure too that their child's key person is aware of what they've said.



## WHERE'S THE DETAIL?

*"When I spoke to practitioners at pickup I'd often receive very little information – usually just canned responses. I put up with it as the setting had a policy of filling in a daily diary, so I could see how my son had been during the day – how many nappies had been changed, what he'd eaten and what he'd enjoyed playing with. Just two months after starting, though, when I was still struggling to say goodbye to a little boy in floods of tears, I found that less and less effort was being put into recording details of his day. The information was so generic, it made me wonder whether I could believe any of it was accurate."*

Trust is key to the nursery-parent relationship – if it breaks down, you risk losing an existing customer and the word-of-mouth recommendations they might make to family, friends and colleagues. If parents feel they are not receiving enough or, worse, accurate information it may be time to revisit your key person approach – after all they're the primary point of contact with home – and also to consider whether to investigate the new, high-tech methods there are to keep parents in touch with their child's day.

*"Care routines might seem a straightforward part of the early years practitioner's role, but they mustn't be taken for granted"*



## QUALITY OF CARE

*“One of my daughter’s carers – I never found out who – would consistently fail to clean her properly when changing her nappy, leaving her with terrible nappy rash. It took several complaints to staff, and then management before I received an apology – and the explanation that the poor care was the fault of a student practitioner who ‘didn’t know any better’. At least it improved after that.”*

Care routines might seem a straightforward part of the early years practitioner’s role, but they mustn’t be taken for granted, particularly in the case of your youngest team members, who may not have the experience of looking after their own children to call upon. Remember, your provision is only as strong as your weakest team member, and blaming poor practice on the new recruit is no defence at all in the eyes of your customers (or Ofsted!).



## LET THEM EAT CAKE... AGAIN?

*“My nursery seemed to pride itself on the attention it paid to nutrition and healthy eating, but barely a week seemed to go by without me hearing about a parent or carer of another child who had ‘brought in’ birthday cake to share with the children. I was never consulted, and felt placed in a difficult position – I didn’t want my daughter to feel excluded from a treat all her friends were enjoying but wasn’t comfortable with her having extra sugar on a regular basis.”*

Putting to one side for a moment the absolute necessity of knowing exactly what ingredients (and thus allergens) are in every meal, snack and treat you give your children, food can be an incredibly sensitive topic for parents. That means any ambiguity surrounding what’s being served is likely to irk at least one of your customers and potentially many more (and you can guarantee word will get back via your cake-loving chatterboxes if you’re tempted to do things on the sly). Far better in all respects to be upfront, and in full control of your menus.

## PERSONALITY CLASH

*“I wasn’t happy with my nursery’s choice of key person. My little boy was quiet and quite introverted, but the practitioner in question was a classic extrovert – loud, ‘in your face’ and into rough and tumble. It wasn’t a good fit; he never bonded with her, and always seemed reluctant to go to her when we arrived in the morning. When I raised concerns management seemed to think I was being over-protective, and it took several complaints before finally a change was made – and even then my views were barely acknowledged.”*

The realities of running a busy day nursery unavoidably have a bearing on staff deployment, and it’s never going to be possible to please everybody all the time. Sometimes, you may feel that parental complaints aren’t justified, or that you know best – and often you might be right. However, as much as possible – and especially when it involves the vital key person/parent relationship – try to be accommodating. If you can’t make a change, explain why rather than trying to bury the issue, and work with staff where necessary to help prevent the issue becoming an ongoing flashpoint.



Get more tips on ensuring you give your parents what they want on Teachwire.net – visit [bit.do/what-parents-want](https://bit.do/what-parents-want)



# We need to talk about **COMMUNICATION**

Children with unidentified SLCN face an uphill struggle to succeed in education and employment, but the early years sector can make a real difference...

**T**hat learning to communicate is an absolutely vital life skill is a truth that no one in the early years sector would challenge. The importance of ‘communication and language’ is reflected in its position as one of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)’s three prime areas of learning and development, alongside personal, social and emotional development and physical development – and some would argue that it is the pre-eminent of the three.

This is certainly the viewpoint of charity I CAN and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, the authors of *Bercow: Ten Years On* – a review of provision for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) in England, and the follow-up to 2008’s original Bercow report. And it’s because of this view that they are calling for much more to be done to support the 1.4 million plus UK children struggling with communication difficulties.

## Why does it matter?

According to the *Bercow: Ten Years On* review, language disorder is the most common disorder of childhood, affecting almost 10% of all children at some point – though, shockingly, this number sometimes rises to 50% in areas of social disadvantage. This can have a profound impact on children’s education, during the early years and beyond, and damage their prospects in the longer term. For example, the review notes, only 26% of young children with SLCN make the expected academic progress in the EYFS (compared with 69% of all children); just 15% of those with an identified SLCN are where they should be in reading, writing and mathematics by the end of primary school; and only 20.3% of children with SLCN achieve grade 4/C or above in English and maths GCSE.

But it’s not just about academic achievement – 81% of children with emotional and/or behavioural disorders

have been found to have unidentified language difficulties; those with poor vocabulary are twice as likely to be unemployed in adulthood; and some 60% of young offenders have “low language skills”.

As the review puts it, the ability to communicate “directly impacts [children’s] ability to learn, to develop friendships and on their life chances”.

## Early intervention

So what needs to change? *Bercow: Ten Years On* makes it clear that, as with any special educational need, early identification and intervention are essential to minimise the impact of SLCN – and that’s where early years settings have an essential role to play.

Practitioners at all high-quality early years settings work to support the development of communication and language skills on a daily basis. Data from the survey that informed *Bercow: Ten Years On* suggests that school and PVI sector staff have improved in their ability to identify SLCN over the course of the last 10 years, but say the review’s authors, there’s still a long way to go, with more than half of young children in school not having their needs identified.

Where do the problems lie?

The review points to the fact that commonly used language screening tools aren’t sensitive enough to pick up on the early indicators of SLCN, while a “continued lack of awareness, inadequate training for the workforce and increasing demands on practitioners’ time mean the indicators are not consistently used in practice”. The





**“The ability to communicate is fundamental to learning, to relationships and to life chances”**

BERCOW: TEN YEARS ON

**1.4m +**  
**Children with speech, language and communication needs.**

**26%**

YOUNG CHILDREN WITH SLCN WHO MAKE EXPECTED PROGRESS IN THE EYFS.

**12%**

PARENTS WHO SAY THEIR CHILD'S SLCN WERE IDENTIFIED BY A PROFESSIONAL.

skills to identify SLCN at an early age are often missing in initial training and continuing professional development – the report quotes the parent of child with SLCN who told the survey, “Nursery workers kept telling me not to worry and that it was just because he’s a boy”. It’s clear that gaps in knowledge are having a damaging effect, despite the work that has been done to raise the profile of communication issues.

### What can you do?

According to the *Bercow: Ten Years On* review, many of the improvements needed to better support children with SLCN must be made at the policy-making level – for example, its authors call upon the Department for Education to “make speech, language and communication, and identification of SLCN, a core requirement of Level 2 qualifications for the early years assistant”.

Of course, early years settings can also choose place increased emphasis on communication development and identifying issues where they arise. As part of the review, parents and carers of children with SLCN were surveyed to gain their views on what made a difference for their children, and highlighted the benefit

of speech and language therapists “training and working closely with” nursery staff as well as the settings themselves providing “advice and information to parents”.

At a time when money is tight across the early years sector, finding the resources to bring in specialists, upskill staff and reach out to homes is easier said than done. However, as covered by Sue Fisher in *Nursery Business* issue 2 (which you can download for free at [theteachco.com/free-issue](http://theteachco.com/free-issue)) Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) funding is an option for those hoping to address a particular need in their local area. With three- and four-year-olds from low-income families eligible for EYPP, and SLCN particularly prevalent in disadvantaged communities, you may be able to invest in resources or training that will give struggling children a crucial step up.

Amongst the options worth considering is I CAN’s own Early Talk Boost – a targeted intervention designed to help three- and four-year-olds with delayed language development (it aims to boost progress by around six months over the course of its nine weeks). The training provided helps early years practitioners improve their SLCN identification skills, measure children’s progress and deliver the intervention successfully. It is priced at £450 plus the cost of the licensed tutor who will deliver the staff training.

You may want to take your own approach – the article on *The Day Nursery* in Peterborough, earlier in this issue, touches upon its team’s decision to introduce ‘home learning packs’ that offer support in core skills such as language and literacy, while many settings invest considerable sums in resourcing their learning environments indoors and out to develop strong communication skills. Help is also available from the likes of the National Literacy Trust ([literacytrust.org.uk](http://literacytrust.org.uk)), which offers resources for those working with every age group, from babies to those making the transition to Reception.

You will also find a host of ideas and advice in *Teach Early Years* magazine, and on [teachwire.net/early-years](http://teachwire.net/early-years) and [teachearlyyears.com](http://teachearlyyears.com). But whichever route you choose, focusing on your children’s communication skills will not be time or money wasted.

**You can download the full *Bercow: Ten Years On* review at [bercow10yearson.com](http://bercow10yearson.com). For more information on I CAN’s *Early Talk Boost* intervention, visit [icancharity.org.uk](http://icancharity.org.uk)**



# Nutritional KNOW-HOW

*- why it's good for business!*

If your team is lacking the skills they need to help children eat well, it's time to invest in some CPD...

LINDSAY GILBERT



**A**s a paediatric dietitian with a background in early years I'm often disappointed when I discover how many practitioners feel they lack the basic nutrition knowledge needed to help children eat well. Whether it is around appropriate portion sizes or when to wean, how to encourage fussy eaters, guidelines around cup or bottle use, or recent recommendations on sugar or vitamin D, this lack of knowledge can have a serious impact on a child's nutritional intake. Not only this, but a lack of knowledge goes hand in hand with feelings of low confidence, making it much harder for practitioners to tackle nutrition-related issues effectively, incorporate and apply nutritional guidelines to menus or discuss any nutrition concerns with parents.

Statistics show that as many as 96% of the three- and four-year-old population are in some kind of formalised childcare (DfE), and the link between good nutrition in the early years and the prevention of long-term chronic diseases in later life is well established, so it has never been more important that children are supported to eat well by staff who have a good understanding of their basic nutritional needs and eating habits.

## The EYFS and nutrition

Currently, childhood nutrition does not form a core component of the Level 2 Foundation Stage qualification for early years practitioners, meaning that those who do not progress further may have a low appreciation for the role that nutrition can have within the early years environment.

This is despite the fact that the EYFS explicitly states:

*Where children are provided with meals, snacks and drinks, they must be healthy, balanced and nutritious [...] Children must also be helped to understand the importance of physical activity, and to make healthy choices in relation to food. (3.74, 1.5)*

This statement implies a certain level of understanding of the nutritional guidelines for under-fives, practical experience of menu design and the ability to help children learn about healthy eating. However, a recent survey carried out by the Pre-school Learning Alliance showed that almost 80% of early years settings that provide food do not receive any external nutrition advice. From my own experience working with hundreds of settings to



## SEVEN WAYS TO UPSKILL YOUR TEAM

- 1 Identify a key member of staff with an interest in nutrition who can be responsible for disseminating information to the rest of the team.
- 2 Do a quick survey of your staff's recent nutrition training.
- 3 Review the training courses available against your setting's particular needs. E.g. do your practitioners need a quick refresher or more in-depth information?
- 4 Review your food policy, as this is the cornerstone of your setting's whole approach to nutrition.
- 5 Get creative about what counts as CPD.
- 6 Maintain good practice networks (particularly important for smaller settings, e.g. childminders).
- 7 Utilise staff induction and team meetings as opportunities for CPD.

implement the 'Eat Better, Start Better' guidelines, even those practitioners with good nutritional knowledge often struggle to apply these guidelines effectively, highlighting a risk that settings may not be able to meet the requirements of the EYFS as well as they might.

Fortunately, the Level 3 early years qualification does include childhood nutrition as a core component, but as the EYFS requires only a minimum of one member of staff per setting to have a Level 3 childcare qualification, this could potentially leave many settings with very few practitioners having any knowledge of childhood nutrition.

### CPD – your obligations

Like any area within childcare, be it safeguarding or child development, regular CPD in nutrition is crucial to ensure staff are up to date with the latest advice and guidelines. However, unlike safeguarding, it is not considered mandatory.

Training obligations for providers are clear within the EYFS, which states that:

*Providers must support staff to undertake appropriate training and professional development opportunities to ensure they offer quality learning and development experiences for children that continually improves. (3.20)*

And the benefits to children are made explicit:

*A well-qualified, skilled staff strongly increases the potential of any individual setting to deliver the best possible outcomes for children. (1.11)*

However, many local authorities have stopped offering free CPD or have reduced their offer to cover mandatory training only. This particularly affects smaller settings and self-employed childminders with costs for formal training courses being seen as prohibitively expensive. Getting cover during staff absence is also seen as another big barrier. However, there are ways to make your budget for CPD stretch a little further, and considering a 'blended' approach (where the focus is not solely on formal training but includes work-based training and support, mentoring or visiting other settings) may be more practical for many.

For example, online training is much more cost-effective than face-to-face training and resources such as Focus Games' Foodtalk game can be used during team meetings or at twilight sessions to combat both cost and minimise the impact of staff absence.

### Benefits for business

A recent survey highlighted that 93% of early years settings receive enquiries from prospective parents about the food they provide. Whether it is about whether your menus meet the new recommendations on sugar, or how your setting manages children with food allergies, practitioners are often unsure about how to answer. Providing your staff with up-to-date, evidence-based knowledge will allow them to confidently manage the often long list of nutritional queries that parents bring through the door, and parents definitely appreciate well-informed and knowledgeable staff who can manage parental concerns effectively. It is not uncommon to hear managers say that they no longer have any issues around fussy eating at their setting after their staff have received nutrition training.

Providing nutrition training will also help staff understand how to meet the EYFS welfare requirements that meals, snacks and drinks should be "healthy, balanced and nutritious" because staff will have a good understanding of what that actually means in practice, and so be able to apply it. This knowledge about food and nutrition can also be translated into learning activities that meet the EYFS

areas of learning, e.g. physical development and understanding the world.

There may also be cost savings associated with less waste because portions of meals and snacks are more appropriate, or menus are more streamlined. And it isn't just the children who benefit from a more confident and better informed workforce. Staff have also reported that increased knowledge in nutrition has benefited their own families, with the ripple effect from nutrition training often leaving a legacy far greater than the original intended outcomes.

So if your budget is tight, consider your individual staff training needs, review the options available against your budget and hopefully move nutrition training further up the priority list. You won't regret it.



### Training options

**Formal qualifications** – e.g. CACHE Level 2 award in promoting food safety and nutrition in early years and childcare settings.

**Online training** – e.g. NDNA Level 2 Nutrition for Early Years.

**Face-to-face training** – e.g. Action for Children 'Eat Better, Start Better' Voluntary Food and Drink Guidelines for England (online modules on Eat Better, Start Better will be available via the British Dietetic Association at [letsgetcooking.org.uk](http://letsgetcooking.org.uk)) or NELFT Level 3 Early Years Nutrition.

**Staff resources** – e.g. [foodtalk game.co.uk](http://foodtalkgame.co.uk)



*Lindsay Gilbert is an early years dietitian. For any further information, email [lindsay@foodtalk.org.uk](mailto:lindsay@foodtalk.org.uk)*

# Outdoor areas that OFFER MORE

Give your children the freedom to explore a feature-packed fresh-air space and watch them flourish...

CAROLINE JOHNSON

**D**eveloping an inspiring outdoor learning environment should be a goal for every early years setting. A high-quality space to play in the fresh air enables children to learn about the world around them independently by accessing the natural world, alongside the resources you provide, and can have a positive impact on wellbeing and development. But how do you go about creating an effective learning environment outside?

## Why outdoor play matters

Many things we know as adults can't be taught in a traditional sense; instead the knowledge and skills we need are acquired through play – think physical development, emotional development, resilience, dexterity,

creativity, imagination, and much more. As early years practitioners our job is to support children's play with minimal interference, allowing them to be the agents of their own discovery of the world. As part of this we must recognise the significance of child-initiated play, which is when children really demonstrate their own interests and make choices about what they want to do.

An outdoor environment, with all its freedom and breadth, is the ideal venue for child-initiated play. Children are released

from the direction of adults; they are able to make their own decisions and choices about where they want to play and the resources they engage with as they explore in a world where there are no pre-planned outcomes and nothing is definite. The aptly named 'great outdoors' can be completely flexible and open to a child's imagination.

This is because the outdoor environment is not prescriptive. It encourages children to be

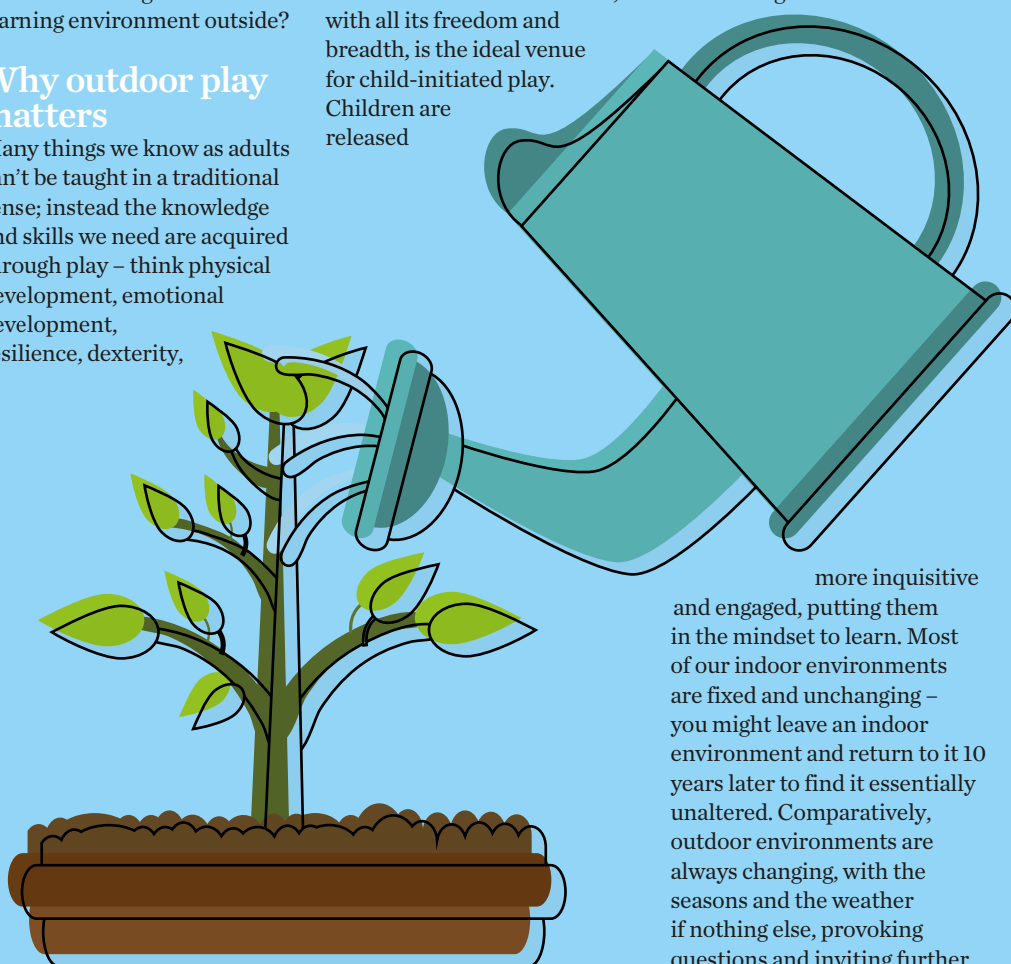
investigation from children.

A range of different play styles, children's schemas and peer group interactions can flourish in a natural environment: children can shout and move around without restriction, while the common visual distractions found indoors – including lighting and wall displays – are absent outdoors. This is particularly beneficial for children who may be on the autistic spectrum or who are sensitive to stimulation which may trigger stress, anxiety or challenges and could influence their behaviour and impact on their learning.

## Plan your space

Establishing an effective outdoor learning environment that allows for challenging and inspiring outdoor play involves creating high-quality, rich play landscapes. Some key principles to bear in mind when looking at your own space is the need for lots of social spaces and areas of interest with an easy flow between them. Children should be able to move between these areas and become engrossed in each without facing barriers. Different ways of getting from place to place easily are fascinating for children, who tend to be interested by difference (try digging a hole in a flat piece of grass or creating a mound, and you'll see what I mean). There should be plenty of opportunity for this in your outdoor space. Children must be able to adjust, combine, reorder, reorganise, problem solve and collaborate. The success

more inquisitive and engaged, putting them in the mindset to learn. Most of our indoor environments are fixed and unchanging – you might leave an indoor environment and return to it 10 years later to find it essentially unaltered. Comparatively, outdoor environments are always changing, with the seasons and the weather if nothing else, provoking questions and inviting further





of your outdoor environment will depend on your chosen resources and the layout of the continuous provision.

The most important aspect of the play environment is its changeability and flexibility. While they look impressive, Children don't need a play ship, an aeroplane or a spaceship to climb inside; they just need a variety of props, for example, moving parts, crates, tyres, wheels, wooden planks, pulleys, rope, sand, water, buckets, stones, rocks and utensils. Of course, the opportunity to throw in the odd random item occasionally is there – perhaps dinosaur fossils hidden in the sand, lumps of gold nuggets dotted around, small and large

children to make marks whilst practising their fine motor skills. Mark-making materials like paper, blackboards, whiteboards, clipboards, pens, chalks, water spray paint, pencils, charcoal, and a choice of large- and small-scale materials enable children to express themselves and consolidate their play. The freedom of actually 'doing' will empower children to practise and give them the confidence to try new things – an attribute they will retain throughout their lives.

### Natural resources

When creating a stimulating outdoor environment it helps to provide varied natural resources. Here are some

areas and resources to consider including:

- **Investigation areas** – include resources and tools such as magnifiers that will allow children to explore natural habitats and uncover small creatures, learning about living things in the environment and their life cycles; fossils, magnets, telescopes are all useful too.

- **Digging areas** – a great way to support children's natural curiosity. Fill containers with leaves, twigs, mud, different coloured sand, water, pebbles or wood, and watch what happens.

- **Growing areas** – extend children's understanding of the world by offering opportunities to plant, water and grow a variety of flowers or vegetables. Take it further by exploring their texture, smell, colour and shape, then peel, cut and eat them.

- **Loose parts** – source small logs, wooden discs, tyres, wheels, cogs, cotton reels, string, rope, buckets, potato mashers, whisks, wooden spoons, crates,

wooden planks, pegs... The list is endless. Children are fascinated by everyday objects and will find many imaginative ways to include them in their games.

### A word about risk

For some early years practitioners and parents, the risks involved in outdoor play can be a concern. Managing *Risk in Play and Leisure* (bit.ly/2quIuFh), produced in 2012, was a result of a collaboration between the Play Safety Forum and the Health and Safety executive to assess the issues. It's a useful guide for managers and practitioners when developing challenging outdoor play in their settings.

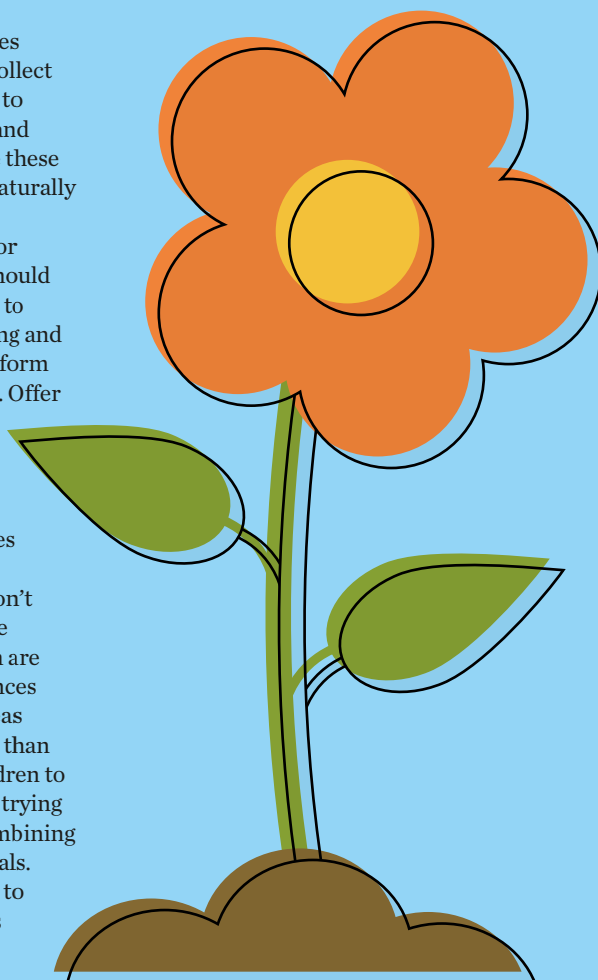
### Closing thoughts

The benefits of an outdoor learning are almost endless – it can do wonders for social and physical development alike, and in turn boosts vital cognitive skills. So there's no reason not to give you space the attention it deserves.

*“The success of your outdoor environment will depend on your chosen resources and the layout of the continuous provision”*

items of different textures and materials, trugs to collect and carry, floaty scarves to create shades, patterns and shapes, etc. If you create these prompts, children will naturally explore them.

A stimulating outdoor learning environment should also give children access to activities like den building and the opportunity to transform and transport creatively. Offer a range of open-ended resources to help support children create their own areas. Readily available messy resources will be mixed together enthusiastically – and don't forget to provide real-life kitchen tools so children are able to recreate experiences from home. Outdoor areas are much easier to clean than inside, allowing the children to get as messy as they like trying out different ways of combining and handling the materials. Providing opportunities to paint on walls and floors using water and paint brushes will encourage



*Caroline Johnson is managing director and founder of Stables Daycare Ltd.*

### SIX POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Create outside areas around the children – think about those who will be using the space; what interests them?
- Look for engaging everyday resources to offer.
- Allow children to transport resources to all areas, and make it as easy as possible.
- Utilise natural resources to prompt children's curiosity and offer them a challenge.
- Be prepared to be flexible and embrace change.
- Be spontaneous – use what's going on in the environment to promote learning.



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# What to do about WORK-RELATED STRESS

Stress can lead to underperformance and may have a long-term impact on your employees' health, so don't let the pressure get too much...

LAURA WEST

Over the course of 2016/2017, 526,000 workers suffered from work-related stress, depression or anxiety at work, resulting in 12.5 million working days being lost. But what is work-related stress, and how can nursery leaders prevent it from becoming an issue in their settings?

## Understanding stress

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) describe stress as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demands placed on them at work”. Stress is a ‘state of mind’ rather than an illness; however, if it becomes excessive or prolonged it can lead to physical and mental health problems.

Pressure is an inherent part of work in any workplace but especially within the childcare sector, with the demands placed on both childcare practitioners and employers increasing. The recent NDNA 2017/18 Workforce Survey reported that amongst the reasons identified for staff leaving employment were “stress, long-term sickness, too much paperwork [...] and demands and responsibilities of the job”.

Pressure doesn't always lead to stress, as many people are able to cope with pressure

they experience – and, in some situations, it can lead to a positive performance (e.g. athletes tend to perform better in competition conditions rather than in training). However, in some cases people cannot cope with the pressure they're under and this can have a negative effect. If these feelings are short-lived, then there are very few consequences for the individual – perhaps a few sleepless nights – but if the feeling of stress continues, this can escalate into psychological illness and physical ill-health.

*“Implementing a stress-management policy is a proactive measure that will demonstrate commitment to protecting the health, safety and welfare of employees”*

## The impact

The effects of stress on a worker's performance can be negative and may include reduced and inconsistent performance through lack of concentration, poor decision making, lateness, regular periods of absenteeism and a loss of commitment and motivation. If the stress is not addressed and allowed to continue the effects can lead to the complete physical and

mental breakdown of the individual.

The HSE's Management Standards for work-related stress classifies the causes under six headings, as follows:

## Demands -

Excessive demands of the job in terms of workload. This might be too much or too little, speed of work and deadlines as well as working hours and work patterns. This was another factor highlighted in NDNA's 2017/18 Workforce Survey, which noted that “79% of staff told us they worked overtime, with just over a third (33%) telling us that overtime varied on a week-to-week basis”.

## Control -

Lack of control over work. This could include control over what work is to be done, when and how, the priorities involved and even simple things like an employee not being able to use their own initiative or have control over the working environment.

**Support** - Lack of support can include information, instructions and training as well as a lack of support by managers and colleagues.

**Relationships** - Poor workplace relationships or conflict and in particular





bullying and harassment (whether by managers, peers or even subordinates), and lack of policies and procedures to deal with these problems. Research published by the TUC (Trades Union Congress) in 2015 reveals that nearly a third of people have been bullied at work.

**Role** - Lack of clarity about an individual's role, what responsibilities and authority they have and how they fit into the organisational structure.

**Change** - The threat of change and the change process itself, whether it affects one worker or the whole team. This can create huge anxiety and insecurity, usually through a lack of consultation, communication and support during the periods of change. This was a cause of workforce turnover highlighted in NDNA's latest survey: "[F]indings demonstrated that 69% of Level 3 staff left due to government policy changes."

Acting quickly can reduce the impact of pressure and make it easier to reduce or even remove the causes of the individual's stress. If an employer is worried that an individual is showing signs of stress the latter should be encouraged to see their GP.

### Stress and the law

There is no specific health and safety legislation relating solely to stress in the workplace. However, employers have duties under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974, and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to:

- ensure the health, safety and welfare of all employees so far as is reasonably practicable;
- carry out risk assessments relating to the risk to health;
- implement and maintain control measures.

### Your policy

Implementing a stress-management policy is a proactive measure that will demonstrate commitment to protecting the health, safety and welfare of employees by recognising that workplace stress is a health and safety issue.

The policy should create the framework for combating stress in the workplace and

## RECOGNISE THE WARNING SIGNS

Stress can have physical, psychological and behavioural effects, and these may have either a short- or long-term impact...

- **Physical** – Short-term effects include sweating, fast heartbeat, increased blood pressure, skin rashes and reddening, muscle tensions and headaches. Long-term effects include high blood pressure, heart disease, eczema, chronic back pain and irritable bowel syndrome.
- **Psychological** – Short-term effects include lack of concentration, poor memory, low self-esteem, irritability and withdrawal. Long-term effects include anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder.
- **Behavioural** – Short-term effects include changes in eating habits, increased use of alcohol and/or drugs, sleeping problems and aggression. Long-term effects include eating disorders and drug and/or alcohol addiction.

a working environment and culture that has a positive approach to the mental health and wellbeing of its employees. It should support employees at all levels to manage stress themselves and provide managers with necessary training to support employees with mental health problems. It should detail specific roles and responsibilities, and outline methods to be used to identify all workplace stressors and ways in which to minimise stress in the workplace.

### Risk assessment

It is essential that employers include stress in their risk assessment programme. A stress risk assessment may relate to a team, department or an individual and should follow the HSE's Stress Management Standard. Employers have a legal duty to protect employees from stress at work by carrying out a risk assessment and acting on its findings. Remember, if you have more than five employees you are required by law to write the risk assessment down.

### Prevention

Since it is not normally possible to remove all workplace pressures, your primary prevention strategy should focus on identifying and addressing the sources of stress using the HSE standard. There are a

range of techniques and tools that can be used to identify stress-related issues in the workplace, which include stress audits, surveys and focus groups.

Proactive controls to prevent stress in the workplace can include planning workloads effectively, team meetings, appraisals, staff development programmes, allocation of clear roles and responsibilities and effective communication.

Secondary prevention is concerned with increasing the individual's ability to cope with the demands and stress, raising awareness of stress as a health issue and training. Tertiary prevention involves reactive support for an individual who has indicated they have a problem with stress; this might include counselling, cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) and employee assistance programmes (EAP).



*Laura West is the childcare health and safety specialist at MCW Nursery*

*Support Service Ltd, a family-run business specialising in health and safety, auditing and training for the childcare industry. Visit [mcwnss.co.uk](http://mcwnss.co.uk)*

# Unravelling RECRUITMENT

Recruiting and selecting staff are time-consuming processes, but taking shortcuts can put your business at risk...

VICKY STANTON

**R**ecruitment matters – get it wrong and you could be leading a team with low morale, poor productivity and that’s subject to a regular turnover of personnel, which can impact heavily on your bottom line (not least because you’ll have the cost of having to go through the recruitment process yet again!). So how do you make sure you get it right?

The fact is that you will never be 100% certain whether you’ve made the right decision, but you can put good practice into place to raise the probability of recruiting someone who will meet your requirements, while ensuring you’re always complying with the law.

## THE PROCESS

There are three broad stages of recruitment that you’ll need to go through...

### 1 Define the requirements

This is the preparation stage, during which you will need to prepare both a job description and a person specification.

**JOB DESCRIPTION** – a good job description is useful for all jobs. It can help with induction and training. It enables prospective applicants to assess themselves for the job and provides a benchmark for judging achievements. It refers to the post not the person.

The job description should detail:

- the main *purpose* of the job, ideally described in one sentence (if possible);
- the main *tasks* of the job;
- the *scope* of the job – information such as the number of staff or any budgets (detailed in figures) the post holder is responsible for.

**PERSON SPECIFICATION** – the person specification details the profile of the ideal

person the organisation is looking for to fill the job. It refers to the person not the post.

When drawing up the job description consider:

- What skills, knowledge and aptitudes are related to the job?
- What type(s) of experience is necessary?
- What competencies are necessary?
- Are there specific qualifications or training that a successful applicant should have?

‘would suit young person’; and stating requirements that may discriminate against disability, e.g. must have a driving licence (of course there will be jobs where this is a clear requirement).

There are always exceptions to the law. An employer can discriminate in recruitment if they are able to prove that a ‘genuine occupational requirement’ (GOR) or ‘genuine occupational qualification’ (GOQ) in terms of race or sex exists.

*“Mistakes when employing people can be costly both financially and in terms of your company’s reputation”*

**BEWARE!** Even at this stage of the process, a potential applicant can bring a claim if they feel the process is discriminatory. It is against the law to treat someone less favourably than someone else because of a personal characteristic. There are nine protected characteristics in law:

- Age
- Being or becoming a transsexual person
- Being married or in a civil partnership
- Being pregnant or having a child
- Disability
- Race, including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- Religion, belief or lack of religion/belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Discrimination *does not* have to be deliberate or intentional. Things to be aware of include using ‘gender-biased terms’ e.g. storeman, handyman; age-inappropriate statements, e.g.

### 2 Attract potential employees

Now you can begin the search for suitable applicants. The objective is to get a good pool of suitable, high-quality candidates who meet your requirements but at the least cost possible.

There are lots of places to advertise. Here are some suggestions:

- **Internal recruitment** – do you have a pool of staff with the right skills and abilities or could you develop and train the right person? Ensure the process for application is clear and transparent.
- **Online recruitment sites** – e.g. Indeed or Job search (the job centre).
- **Local newspapers and radio** – good for less specialised jobs or for targeting groups in a local area.
- **Social media** – Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter.
- **Word of mouth** – via existing employees, family friends and relatives.





This is not an exhaustive list, but they are some of the more common routes to advertise, some cheaper than others and some at no cost.

**DESIGNING ADVERTS** – advertisements must be tailored to the level of the target audience and be easily understood. They must be non-discriminatory, and should avoid any gender or culturally specific language (see Beware! above, as the same guidelines apply).

**NOTE:** It is lawful to request information such as marital status, date of birth and ethnic origin for the sole purposes of diversity monitoring, but they should

not be part of the main application form.

Consider a separate sheet to collect this information.

It is unlawful to ask a prospective employee about their health or any disability before offering them a job. Questions about previous sickness absence are classed as questions that relate to health or disability and must not be asked.

There are some specific circumstances when questions about health and disability can be asked:

- To establish whether the applicant can take part in an assessment to determine their suitability for the job. This includes if the applicant requires any reasonable adjustments to attend the interview.
- To find out whether a job applicant would be able to undertake a function

that is intrinsic to the job.

### 3 Select the right people

Ideally you want to invite to interview those who most closely match the skills, experience, competencies and qualifications you have identified on the person specification.

**RIGHT TO WORK** – prior to the interview it's advisable to check that the applicant is allowed to work in the UK. Visit [gov.uk/check-job-applicant-right-to-work](http://gov.uk/check-job-applicant-right-to-work) to find out more.

**THE INTERVIEW** – this is an opportunity to sell the company to potential candidates and assess each candidate's suitability for the position. It is a two-way process, so it's important to get the basics right. Remember, you are seeking to recruit the best person for the job not the best interviewee on the day, so the more relaxed you can make the applicant, the more you will be able to learn about their skills and abilities.

Consider the location of the interviews and who will conduct them. Make sure they keep to time and the interviewers are prepared. Ask the same key questions to each applicant so you can compare answers, and expect to answer questions from the applicants.

Do take notes during the interview so you have something to refer back to. Do not write anything inappropriate in the notes as you never know when these notes may come into the applicant's hands or the hands of an employment tribunal!

**ABILITY TESTS** – It may be appropriate to ask candidates to undertake some other form of selection process in addition to (or instead of) an interview. You could include tests to check presentation skills or practical skills, for example.

**SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS** – once you have completed your chosen process and have come to a decision as to the chosen applicant, it's good practice to notify those who took part in the process and were not selected that they have been unsuccessful. It's often worth waiting until you have made contact with the successful applicant and they have verbally accepted the job.

It's good practice to put the offer of employment into writing, but make it subject to the receipt of satisfactory references (and other checks – e.g. DBS checks). If anything comes back that you are not happy about, you have a legitimate and lawful 'get out clause.'



*Vicky Stanton is director of HR 4 Your Nursery – visit [inspiringpeopleolutions.net](http://inspiringpeopleolutions.net)*



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## Inclusive play

These beautiful Dolls with Down's syndrome are an excellent resource for promoting inclusion and diversity in any early years setting, and ideal for pretend play. Options include a boy and girl, both of which are available with either blonde or dark hair and light or dark skin. The anatomically correct dolls are made from soft vinyl and feature moveable arms and legs and removable clothes. Adding Dolls with Down's syndrome to your setting will help create an inclusive environment, allowing children to gain a better understanding and acceptance of those with Down's syndrome, and to celebrate differences and similarities.

Visit [earlyyearsresources.co.uk](http://earlyyearsresources.co.uk)



## Insurance experts

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## Star buy

My Mood Stars are soft, tactile sensory toys developed to support social development and emotion recognition. The creation of former early years practitioner Wendy White, the stars are made from super-soft velboa with clear expressions sewn onto them and attach to the board without the need for scratchy hook-and-loop material. While they can help all children recognise their feelings, My Mood Stars are particularly beneficial for those with autism. You can purchase My Mood Stars and download a free 'Games to Play' booklet at [mymoodstars.co.uk](http://mymoodstars.co.uk)



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# Are you taking advantage OF APPRENTICESHIPS?

On-the-job training can make a significant contribution towards solving the childcare sector's skills crisis...

SUZI GRAY

**W**ith less than a year to go until Brexit as I write, recruiting staff with the right skills, behaviours and aptitude within the childcare sector is already a challenge. This is further supported by research from City & Guilds last year, which found that 87% of employers across multiple sectors are struggling to recruit the skilled workers they need. It is difficult to predict what the future might hold for businesses in the childcare sector, but many are speculating that it will become even more difficult to recruit the people the industry needs.

According to ONS figures, 5% of the nursery workforce is made up of EU migrants. That's a potential loss of 14,000 childcare workers post-Brexit. This will have a huge impact on a sector that already faces challenges from perceptions about its historical gender profile and a lack of clarity about career progression opportunities.

Apprenticeships might not be the standalone solution to solving the sector's skills challenges, but they are a great tool that can provide a platform for succession planning and talent

management. Therefore, it's important that employers try to gain a fuller understanding about how they can be used as part of their sustainability and workforce development plans.

## Boost your business

If used smartly, apprenticeships are one of the best tools employers have to help them meet their strategic and organisational goals. While they have traditionally been seen as a vocational training pathway for school leavers, apprenticeships are in fact suitable for staff at all levels – from nursery assistants to senior managers.

Potential for professional development can be a significant motivator when choosing a new career or job. Offering on-the-job training, such as apprenticeships, can help businesses to respond to this aspiration in a way that should

be collaborative and hands-on.

Like any business or industry sector the childcare sector will continue to evolve and develop. Identifying skills gaps, recruitment needs and development opportunities across the whole business is fundamental for growth. However, employers don't have to do this in isolation; they can work collaboratively with a diverse group of training providers to develop an innovative plan to develop their workforce both now and in the future.

## Benefits for all

The Apprenticeship Levy, which was introduced last April, has been the focus of much discussion and concern both from business leaders and in the media. Requiring all businesses with an annual pay bill of over £3 million to pay 0.5% of it into a central government fund has been a tough ask for some, and many are unsure about issues of fairness and accessibility.

These concerns are amplified by the DfE's most recent apprenticeship figures, which revealed that uptake has fallen from 41,600 in November 2016 to 27,000 in November 2017. That's 14,600 fewer apprentices entering the workforce.

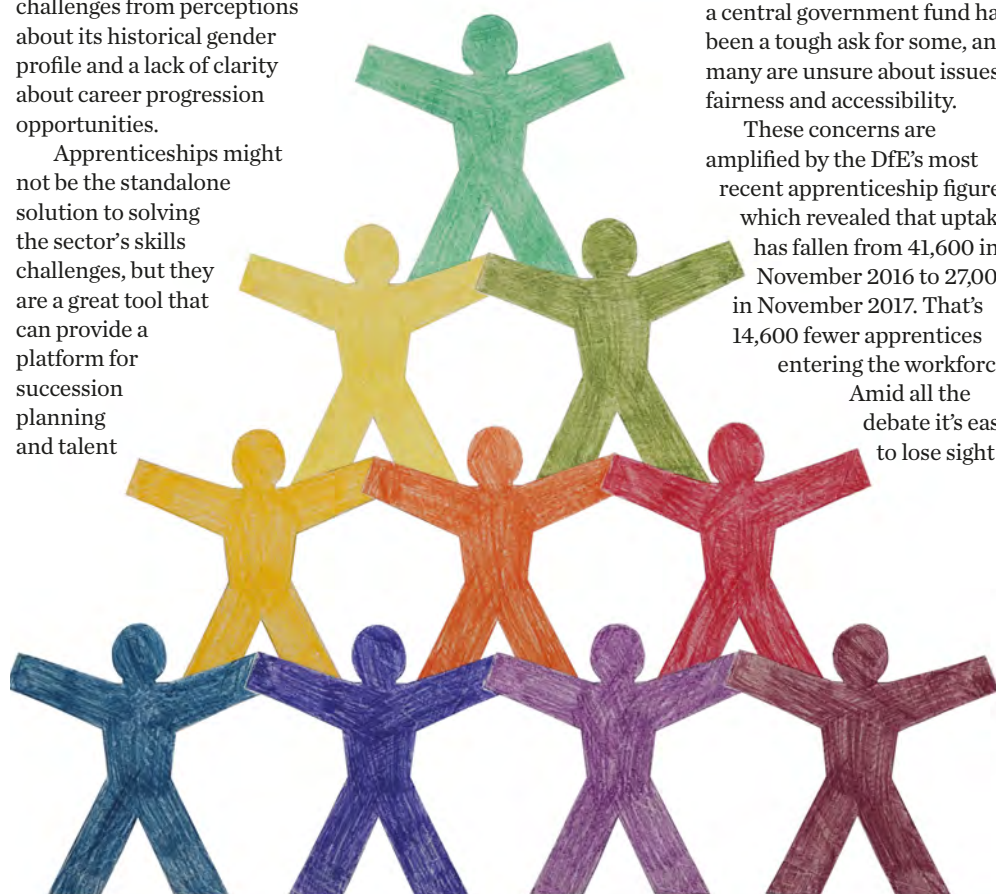
Amid all the debate it's easy to lose sight

of the fact that the levy may present a great opportunity to invest in the training and development of your employees, future proofing your organisation, as well as the wider industry. Businesses of all sizes can benefit – not just those big enough to pay into it. Even the smallest nurseries are able to draw from the levy and will only be required to pay 10% of the cost of training an apprentice, with the government paying the other 90%.

## Use it or lose it!

Employers required to pay into the levy will be able to access funds via digital accounts that must be used within two years. After that point, any money that hasn't been used for the delivery of apprenticeships will automatically go to the Treasury.

With less than a year left until the currently accumulated funds begin to expire (two years on from the launch of the levy), only £108 million has been withdrawn from the levy fund, leaving more than £1 billion sitting unused in the new National Apprenticeship Service account. While it's important that employers look to the future needs of their business, never has the phrase 'use it or lose it' been more apt!



*Suzi Gray is national advisor, health, care and childcare at City and Guilds. For advice on optimising your levy payments, contact Liz Deakin: [liz.deakin@cityandguilds.com](mailto:liz.deakin@cityandguilds.com)*

# How to recruit and retain the best

PACEY, the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, asks three of its advisers what they think...

Research shows that the key to delivering high-quality care and education to young children is highly qualified and trained staff. However, early years settings in England are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain the right people. “The sector is in a particularly fragile position,” says Sue Meekings, former director of the Kiddi Caru nursery chain. “Settings are not in a position to pay staff more, and even the big chains are not creaming off big profits.”

The weakened financial position of many settings is due to a combination of factors, including the 30 hours childcare policy and increases to the minimum wage, pension contributions and business rates. It is a perfect storm of cost increases and funding reduction that has left most settings with little capacity to increase pay or invest in staff development.

On top of this, numerous changes to early years qualifications over recent years have contributed to an overall lack of applicants for childcare roles, particularly in London and the South East. There has consequently been a rise in the use of agency staff, further driving up costs for providers. As Ruth Pimentel, a strategic early years consultant and former chief executive of the Toad Hall Nursery Group, explains, “I’m not sure anyone has managed to crack the current crisis – it will take time to reverse the effects of the government policy on GCSE grades. I hear of many colleges who have had to close their childcare courses due to lack of students, and without the pipeline of new staff coming in the existing staff are in high demand.”

## Recruitment

So what should settings do to recruit high-calibre staff from a dwindling pool of applicants? Emily Clark\*, who oversees a number of settings, recommends advertising as widely as possible, offering flexibility and extending the closing date if needed. She explains, “For some positions we have had to change the hours to make the job more attractive.” She also advises that it is often effective to recruit apprentices, with a view to offering them full-time jobs once they are qualified.

In addition to the usual interview, one of the best ways to spot talented practitioners is to “see them in action with children in the room”, according to Ruth. Emily agrees: “In all interviews we also get the interviewees to

interact with the children. We are looking specifically at their skills in playing with children, talking and listening to them.”

## Retention

Although recruitment is tough at the moment, the more challenging issue for the sector in many ways is retention. The key to holding on to valued staff, our experts concur, is high-quality management. As Sue puts it, a talented manager “can make miracles happen”. Emily agrees that managers are “vital” to the running of a successful setting: “As well as knowing the statutory duties expected of them, they have to build an effective team, whilst keeping a professional distance in order to deal with any staffing issues that arise.” Ruth points out the role of the manager in setting the culture and

expectations of the staff: “If they get this right and staff are happy at work, then they can retain staff more readily and also integrate new staff so they immediately feel part of the team.”

Emily explains that in the settings she works with, all managers must do in-house personal management training. She stresses the need for good support around them from their senior management team such as deputies and room leaders. They also need to know where and when to ask for advice. Sue adds that they must be able to “listen and take concerns seriously”.

What can managers do to make their settings a place practitioners don’t want to leave? What is essential is that they make staff feel personally valued. Ruth asserts, “If staff enjoy their work, feel valued and respected then this is as valued as monetary reward.” Managers can show they value staff in a number of ways, for example, through providing occupational health and wellbeing services, staff forums for concerns to be heard, high-quality training and other support for further qualifications such as time off to study.

The little things matter too, for example, providing a pleasant break room, ensuring people are always individually acknowledged, and keeping them informed so they are “not out in the cold”. Sue stresses the need for staff to be empowered to make decisions and given the “breathing space to do their job properly”. She advocates that settings adopt a similar approach to schools and allocate staff a certain percentage of time each week to focus on their assessment, paperwork and personal development.

## THREE WAYS TO RETAIN YOUR BEST

**Ensure that you are marketing your setting positively in the local area, as this has the double effect of recruiting staff and parents. Make sure the nursery is regularly featured in local events, newspapers and online.**

Ruth Pimentel

**Take steps to make staff feel personally valued and make best use of the talents they already have.**

Sue Meekings

**Invest in your staff, through both training and your time. Ensure you are looking at succession planning, for example, by training in-house with apprentices. Look at your staff team and consider what you could do to improve staff cohesiveness.**

Emily Clark



## Attract graduates

All the evidence shows that graduate-led early years settings are key to high quality, in particular closing the gap between the most and least disadvantaged children. But research from PACEY and Voice found that the majority of current and prospective Early Years Teachers would prefer to work in a school-based early years setting rather than in the private, independent and voluntary (PVI) sector.

Ruth acknowledges that “unfortunately, the attraction of school-based settings is their better pay and conditions. I think PVI settings are a long way off matching that – particularly with the low funding rates that providers are having to operate with.”

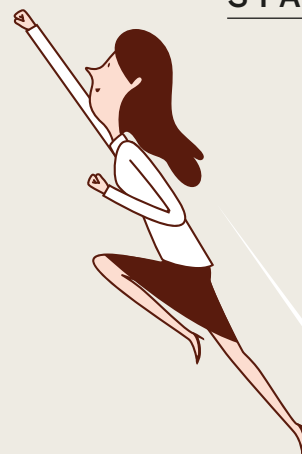
Emily adds, “whilst pay and conditions are a matter for individual nurseries, they can only do so much with such a low funding rate for early education places. Many of our nurseries run on tight margins, which are being squeezed further by increases to the National

Living Wage and low rates for funding. If we were forced to pay higher wages for staff, then we would have to seriously consider the sustainability of some of our nurseries.”

She acknowledges that pay is important to all of us but, for early years graduates, it’s more complex. “My feeling is that people think they are more likely to be valued and supported in a school environment, as there is a more definite framework for training, progression, etc. than in many PVI settings. If you are a graduate in Early Years there isn’t a definitive progression framework – especially as you can be a manager as a Level 3.”

Ultimately, all PACEY’s advisers agreed on one factor that would make a difference in the long term: that is for government to help society value the contribution early years makes and ensure – through higher taxation – that high-quality childcare is better funded.

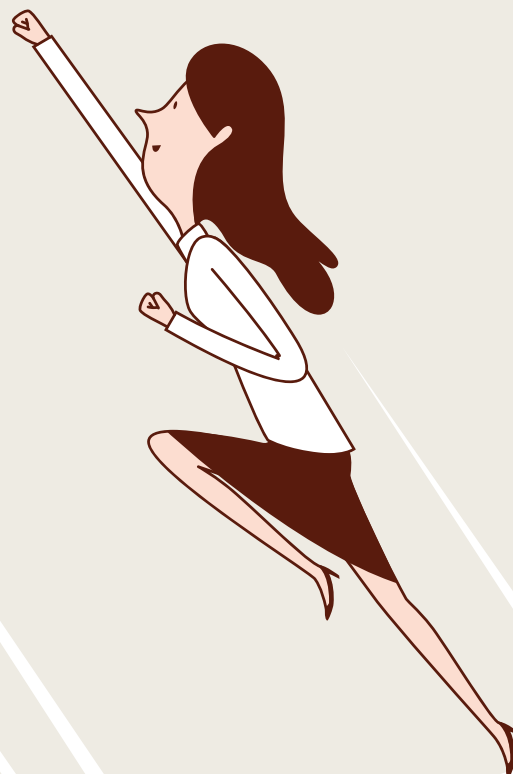
*\*Emily Clark is a pseudonym.*



*PACEY is a charity dedicated to supporting everyone working in childcare and early years to provide high-quality care and early learning for children and families. PACEY membership; its services, including insurance, and support helps nurseries, preschools and childminders to build bright futures for the children in their care. Visit [pacey.org.uk](http://pacey.org.uk)*



***“Don’t underestimate the power of giving regular positive feedback to staff; small rewards, and the odd social event can help too!”***



# Choose your cover WITH CARE

When you come to insure your business, hunting for the cheapest option may prove a false economy...

GARY HARRISON

It's been 18 years since I began my career in insurance – perhaps not the most exciting subject but undoubtedly one of the fundamental components of owning or operating your own business. I'm fascinated by how the consumer industry has developed a 'sort cheapest' buying culture and it concerns me that insurance is viewed as something that people would rather get cheap than right, risking so much more than the average premium saving!

The fact is that there are certain traits to avoid and things you should keep in mind when selecting an insurance provider to trust your livelihood with.

## Look for expertise

Firstly, always start by selecting an insurer who has secure financial stability and an in-depth understanding of your business sector. There are many providers in the market and narrowing who to trust to those that know your industry will undoubtedly have you heading down the right path. After all, who goes to the bakers to get their car's MOT? Likewise, in the same way the bread doesn't taste the same at every baker, there is no such thing as like-for-like with insurance

policies. Often the only likeness is the level of cover on offer – the terms and conditions behind that will almost always be considerably different.

## What do you need?

So, you've picked your potential provider but what do you actually need from them? What insurance do you require most?

Public, Products, Cyber and Employer's Liability, Professional Indemnity; Slip, trip, fall and many more! Each of these liability covers are designed to provide the legal

representation for allegations made against you, your staff and your business if someone alleges that you have failed in meeting your duties of care to others – for example, failing to meet your safeguarding or health and safety responsibilities, resulting in injury and/or damage to other people's property or giving a poor service leading to others losing out financially.

Public Liability will often extend to your responsibility as the business involved in abuse allegations. The act of abuse is criminal and whilst a good Legal Expenses policy will provide defence for the person(s) accused of the act, there is often the added suggestion that you may have failed to meet your obligations – a suggestion you

failed to vet the member(s) of staff correctly, for example.

## Remember

- 'Claims made' policies only assist with claims if the policy is operative at the time a claim is made against you. The alternative solution is 'claims occurred' policies, which will always look to support you provided you had the policy at the time the incident is alleged to have happened. Claims made versus occurred policies still exist in the Public Liability arena and you should take the time to consider what works best for you. With less claims made policies being available, this will greatly reduce your alternative insurer options later down the line and will likely increase the cost of moving insurer.

- Not all policies provide cover for abuse claims made against your business. Some define what types of abuse claims they will cover and will limit the cover further to a claims made basis. Remember, there is no statute bar for when someone can make an abuse claim. If you had a claims made abuse cover and stopped the policy, you would have no future protection.

## Don't ignore digital

The introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the rise in cyber-related attacks

(not only to large businesses but small and medium businesses too) has pitched Cyber Liability as an essential insurance cover. Cybercrime is overtaking physical crime as one of the largest and most profitable types of crime in the world.

## Personal responsibility

As a person of significant control within your business you are also personally liable for the decisions you take that affect the way your business operates and its culture, such as breaches of health and safety or employment law (allegations of discrimination, for example). If you or other business directors and managers are accused of breaching their professional capacity a Directors' and Officers' Liability (D&O) policy will provide the resource to defend against claims made against you, protecting your personal assets, which may be at risk if you are funding your own legal representation.

## Remember

- D&O and Professional Indemnity policies are also provided on a claims made

*“There is no such thing as like-for-like cover!”*



will cover Public Childcare/Law Children Order Proceedings.

### Protect your property

There are a wide range of solutions for your material property: contents, buildings, fixtures and fittings, portable equipment and business revenue.

Take the time to understand what your business needs and to what level it needs insurance for. Material property insurances require you to insure as accurately as possible for the value at risk or the cost of replacement. If you do not set your sums insured correctly, you will be underinsured and not receive the full value of your claim

*For example, if you have £50,000 of contents and only insure for £25,000, you will be 50% underinsured. You have a break-in and there is £10,000 damage caused. Your insurer will only pay 50% (£5,000) of the loss you incurred as you will have been deemed to be underinsured by that amount (despite the claim falling below the level you have purchased).*

basis. They are supported by the option of purchasing an extended period of cover to meet claims after the policy is no longer required. This is called a 'run-off'.

### Covering costs

Legal Expenses cover differs depending on the provider. The types of services you will no doubt want to be certain are included as standard are legal advice, telephone counselling, debt recovery, employment law and PR/media support.

#### Remember

- Very few policies

#### Remember

- When valuing your assets, consider if you have been donated any goods or purchased anything with a sale or bulk purchase discount. If you have, you will need to adjust your valuations to include the full values without the discounts. Also consider growth plans – are you likely to invest in more material property or perhaps increase your business revenue? There are services available to help value your assets if you are concerned.

- All of the covers you arrange can have excesses payable: the first amount of any claim that you will be required to contribute. Make sure you

### SEVEN POINTS TO REMEMBER WHEN PURCHASING INSURANCE

**1** Choose an insurer that understands the sector and your specific needs.

**2** Discuss any concerns you may have to understand the solutions available to you.

**3** Budget and retain reserves for policy excesses (you never know when a claim might occur).

**4** Discuss your future plans, not just the now.

**5** Consider what added value your insurer can provide you and your business.

**6** Always notify your insurer of potential incidents (even if a claim hasn't been made).

**7** Remember, there is no such thing as like-for-like cover!

understand what excesses apply to your policy.

- Insurance isn't often valued until it is needed and you can never plan to claim. Consider what else your insurer can do for you to help with immediate costs to your business, such as training, risk management, employee benefits and pensions.



**Gary Harrison** is business development manager at childcare insurance

specialist Morton Michel. Visit [mortonmichel.com](http://mortonmichel.com)



# YOU WANT TO WORK IN EARLY YEARS?!

It takes a special type of person to make a career out of caring for young children – it helps to be a sucker for punishment, for a start...

[@turner\\_aturner](#) [allearlyyears.wordpress.com](http://allearlyyears.wordpress.com)

**D**espite the fact that the early years sector is navigating the most troubled waters I've ever experienced since the contentious 'More Great Childcare: raising quality and giving parents more choice' reforms; the 2013 adult-to-child ratios catastrophe; and the 2014 childminding agency initiative (and changes in the role of local authorities in the development and funding of early years education and childcare) controversy, there are still those beaux sabreurs determined to weather the storm and open brand new settings – whether home-based or on non-domestic premises. It obviously takes a great deal to scare off this bunch and so it begs the question, how can they be so full of hope when confronted by so many adversities? Well, let's go there...

Consider the unique skill set of the typical early years practitioner. A skill set so prodigious that any other professional from any other sector couldn't be anything but wonderstruck. If you're finding this a bit too abstract I'll break it down into three categories for you.

**1 Required skills:** this is the boring statutory stuff like being suitable for being around a kid and knowing how best to keep them safe and prevent them from becoming sick or injured on your watch and how to respond if they do. That and being able to keep a kid happy and healthy and engaged and all the while keeping the essential legal

and financial documentation bang up to date. This set of skills won't make them stand out in the least for they are crucial and the least that can be expected, but the everyday practitioner is nevertheless undaunted. This really does sort the mighty from the milksop.

**2 Preferred skills:** this is the non-statutory stuff like actually liking kids and the stuff that kids generally say and do, and perhaps having a repertoire of songs that can be sung and signed all the way through in more than one modern foreign language and thoroughly enjoy doing so. Being able

to recognise when a child does and does not need help zipping up his hoodie, or is ready for big boy pants, or when a parent needs a shoulder to cry on or a carer needs signposting to other services. Or, arguably equally importantly, being able to think of a dozen uses for an IKEA spice rack besides an actual spice rack.

**3 Desired skills:** this is the ability to perform utterly brilliant miracles on a day-to-day basis without even realising how utterly brilliant you are. Things like making the 16 chocolates from the box of Milk Tray that Scott Snot brought in for your birthday go around 27 kids (figure that one out) and remembering right off the bat which ones have a dairy intolerance and which ones have a life-threatening nut allergy. And ungrudgingly chatting in Wetherspoons at 7.55 on a Saturday night with a 'merry' anxious parent who's infiltrated your drinking posse with the primary purpose of asking you whether she should be concerned about Manky Franky's first wee of the day smelling like Sugar Puffs.

Then, of course, there's the being perfectly happy to roam charity shops and car boot sales for 'authentic' tea sets and vintage kitchen scales and manual typewriters all weekend long; and being in your element upcycling pallets and cable drums with materials you've scavenged from around your own home, garden and garage and making sand and water tables from your leftover bits of decking and not being able to wait see the look on their chubby little faces on Monday morning when you drag them out of your car. That and being able to see the funny side of earning just £1.94 per hour gross (all things considered) and instead of crying about it, reminding yourself that if your life goal were disembarking from your luxury yacht (is there any other kind?) in Marina di Pisa before speeding through Toscana in a Maserati to quaff Vino Nobile di Montepulciano in some piazza in Firenze then you'd hardly have chosen the early years sector would you?

Sharing your life with children? Now that's an entirely different kind of hedonism. And I totally get it.

*Andi Turner is an outstanding early years practitioner, mentor and blogger.*

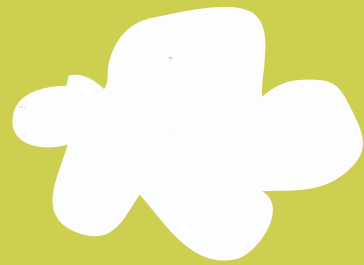




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