

NURSERY BUSINESS

ISSUE 02 ✦ EARLYYEARS.TEACHWIRE.NET

STRUGGLING TO GROW?

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30 HOURS

JAMES HEMPSALL
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Hello...

Nursery owners enter the sector for a host of reasons. There are commonalities, of course – no sane provider isn't expecting to be able to earn a living for themselves – but whereas a qualified practitioner-turned-owner might be motivated by a desire to offer her vision of early education, a parent-turned-owner may be motivated by dissatisfaction with his local area's existing provision. Then there are the more business-minded, those who spy a gap in the market and move to fill it.

Whatever their background, few nursery owners take on their new role with all the knowledge they need to make it a success. The unavoidable reality is that the business of childcare provision calls for an incredibly diverse range of talents, and business acumen, pedagogical know-how and the soft skills essential when caring for children and communicating with parents seldom coincide outside of the sector.

Opening a nursery, then, is likely to present a steep learning curve – but if that is your plan, take heart from the many success stories there are out there. One can be found from page 18 of this very issue: Anita Huckle, the owner of Orchard Barns, freely admits that she opened her first setting lacking experience in key areas, but 26 years later she can point to a string of successful nurseries, none of which have ever been judged less than 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

Whether you are an existing or prospective nursery owner, or a setting manager looking for guidance on leading your team, we hope that this issue of *Nursery Business* helps make your task that little bit easier.

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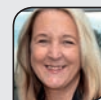
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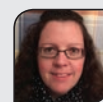
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Is a nursery right for you?

*It's vital to understand the challenges that come with opening an early years business, but don't let the hard work deter you, says **Tricia Wellings**...*

What attracts you to owning your own business? Knowing what your motivation is may just help you to decide whether early years is the sector for you – because this industry is like no other...

With everything being reported in the press at the moment, it's tempting to wonder why anyone would choose to open a nursery today. From the underfunding of the government's free hours to the incredible amount of legislation to contend with, there's no shortage of challenges – and when you factor in the responsibilities of being an employer, current austerity measures and economic uncertainties, it's doubly hard to see the appeal!

For me it was a decision I made some 20 years ago, having worked in a variety of sales and service jobs within industry. I wanted to get out of my 'nine-to-five' role and do something that was more rewarding, didn't require me to meet constant targets set by others, and gave me some control over my own destination. Did I achieve this goal? On reflection I would have to say yes! Was it worthwhile? Definitely! I'm certainly not working nine to five (more like seven till seven), and it was probably more out of the frying pan and into the fire than sailing off into the sunset, but it's been a great journey that over time has reaped many rewards for me, my family, my staff teams and the hundreds – in fact thousands – of children who have been through our doors.

STARTING OUT

So why early years? I had no background in childcare. However, like many others who start up or buy their own nursery, I chose to enter the sector at a time when I was starting a family, and it seemed a natural progression to

combine my business expertise with what would be my new parenting responsibilities. In fact I passed my first early years exam just four days before giving birth to my first child – this set a bit of a precedent as I opened my first nursery, five years later, six months before I achieved my first full early years qualification! But not being qualified hadn't stopped me from pursuing the goal of owning my own setting.

Whilst this route might suit some, it won't suit everyone. You will need to ensure you have an experienced early years expert on board at some point, as with the current registration and legislation requirements, owners or company directors ultimately have legal responsibility for all aspects of service delivery, and therefore need to know and understand what that entails.

A REWARDING ROLE

If you have no previous experience in the sector, you will probably be shocked by the number of different hats you're asked to wear each day. Even colleagues coming in from a primary or secondary teaching background find the amount of work involved in not only running the setting, but also running the business, far greater than they expected.

As I'm a great believer in leading from the front, I would always recommend that you do your research and find out exactly what you're letting yourself in for, as it really isn't all plain sailing and does require a lot of hard work, concentrated effort and dedication from those involved.

But once you get over the steep learning curve, once you become familiar with all the quirks of running this type of business, have a great staff team in place and parents are flowing through the door – then you can start to enjoy that sense of pride in what you've achieved, the sense



Providing care for children has its emotional and social rewards, but that doesn't pay the bills.





of pride that comes from providing a high-quality, rich learning environment for young children and developing your staff.

Provided you have empowered your team, trained them to deliver good and outstanding leadership and management, and have put in place the right systems and processes, you can then choose the role you want to play in the business. I have colleagues who just love being with the children – it provides them with all the rewards and satisfaction they need, alongside a good income. I personally love the business side and making sure we are run in an efficient and sustainable way, thereby ensuring I can continue to provide the best environments and resources, by getting my numbers right. This also now affords me the ability to pursue other avenues such as training and consultancy, whilst maintaining an income stream.

MONEY MATTERS

I can't gloss over the impact that government underfunding is having on the sector. Many nurseries and preschools are closing, though some of this is more to do with a lack of astute business practice than a lack of children or paying parents. Let me be clear: if you're opening a nursery, you must consider the financial realities. Providing care for children has its emotional and social rewards, but that doesn't pay the bills; you need to know it's a business you are running.

Once you have that clear in your mind then I can thoroughly recommend this choice of career. It will be a journey full of challenges, excitement and discovery, with no two days ever being the same. But then nothing worth having is ever going to be easy.

Seek support from others in the industry – we're a friendly bunch once you get to know us – and don't be afraid to call your next nearest nursery and invite them out for a coffee; you may just become the best of friends and find each other a useful source of support.

Failing that, give me a call or find me on Facebook – I'd love to help and support our next generation of nursery owners to become thriving businesses!



Tricia Wellings is the owner of nursery group Bright Kids and MBK Training.



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“Good brands build trust”

June O'Sullivan MBE

Parents need to know what your business, and the early years sector, stands for...

Brands may seem like a modern idea but they actually originated in ancient times when craftsmen imprinted their trademarks on their goods. Since then, of course, the concept has become much more sophisticated, encompassing ownership, identification and sales, and carrying powerful emotional and lifestyle associations.

A particularly famous example of the brand's evolution came in the late 1800s, when Thomas Barratt used a painting called *Bubbles* by John Everett Millais to advertise Pears' soap (bit.ly/2maSjcy) and in doing so showed how advertising a brand could evoke a lifestyle aspiration. In this case the image of Pears' soap became associated with comfort and the Victorian middle-class lifestyle.

Modern businesses continue to explore the brand concept, recognising how important it is to their success. Many spend millions of pounds developing and sustaining a strong brand, ensuring an influential brand identity and attachment in order to distinguish their products and services, and build a long-term loyal customer base in a competitive marketplace.

Developing a brand generally requires three steps (sometimes described as the brand pyramid). It usually involves considering

1 Your values – what is your business about? What makes you different from your competitors?

2 What you want your customers to think of when your brand comes to mind (safe, happy, pioneering, unusual?). How will you build loyalty?



3 Which of your skills your customers particularly need, and how you can deliver them in a way that sets you apart from others. How will you behave? Are you open till late? Do you offer a concierge service? Is that what your customers want?

Once this is clear, the next task is to ensure brand integrity. For example, there's no point building a brand based on a reliable train service if your trains are then constantly late or cancelled. People simply won't believe you.

Your brand must be translated across every level of your business' culture and values. Use your branding to ask, “What do we stand for?”

Now you must make the brand recognisable externally and internally. Externally, your brand will be visible through your logo, colours, fonts, uniforms, messaging, website and signage. Internally, policies, procedures, behaviours, communication and staff training all need to reflect your values.

A BRAND FOR THE SECTOR

I believe it's time to develop the 'early years' brand, so parents understand what it means. Let's consider an early years brand pyramid:

What are our values? What do we stand for? *We stand for the best education for small children, which means balancing teaching and learning with love and care, and providing a physical, emotional and learning environment that helps them develop and thrive and enjoy childhood.*

What do we need parents to feel when the term 'early years' is used? *Trust, assurance, harmony, confidence, calm, friendship and appreciation for the shared teaching experience.*

What do we do that's different from the rest of education? *A nursery generally provides teaching and care 51 weeks of the year between the hours of eight and six. This means parents can work. We provide breakfast, lunch and tea. Our ratios are higher. We can have the children from babyhood to age five, offering consistency and a home from home.*

We need the public to understand what we do so they can make better decisions for children. A strong honest brand could also drive quality, as parents would soon have something to say if the early years brand was not translated in a recognisable and consistent way. Brands help build trust, trust builds commitment and commitment builds loyalty, and that's what's needed between the early years and the public.

June O'Sullivan MBE is the CEO of the London Early Years Foundation. Visit leyf.org.uk, June's blog at juneosullivan.wordpress.com or connect on Twitter @JuneOSullivan

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5 HABITS OF GREAT ENTREPRENEURS

*If you want to make a success of your own business, be passionate, trust your gut and don't be afraid to ask for advice, says **Jackie Hyde**...*

I feel very privileged these days to be considered an entrepreneur, as when I started work, a career was not on my agenda. I was married at 20 years of age and a family arrived not long after, so my personal dreams were very much my focus. What I can say, 33 years later, is that any female can enjoy a wonderful family life and a career.

When I reflect back, I can see now what changed my focus from going to work to earning a living and having a career. It all happened just over 28 years ago when I was first employed by Stanmore Insurance Brokers Ltd, leaving my corporate role within an insurance company behind. Looking after customers and fulfilling their needs just gave me a buzz and I have never looked back. Now I own two-thirds of my business, which specialises in insurance for the nursery sector, and continue to enjoy its wonderful development.

Whatever your industry, the approach a female entrepreneur needs to be successful are the same – so if you are considering starting out

on your own journey, here are my five tips...

1 BE PASSIONATE

To be successful you have to be passionate about what you are doing. It is infectious and you will find it draws in many opportunities. I adore working with other passionate people and this often produces great relationships with customers, suppliers, etc.

2 SHARE YOUR VISION

Make sure you know what you want to achieve and where you are going, and ensure it's clear to everyone around you. This isn't particularly easy for me, I'll confess, as I am quite a creative individual, so I'm always looking for new ideas and can be a bit of a challenge for those who work with me. Remember, you cannot have a successful business without a dedicated team, so they need to be part of the journey and it needs to be fulfilling for them as well as you.

3 ASK FOR ADVICE

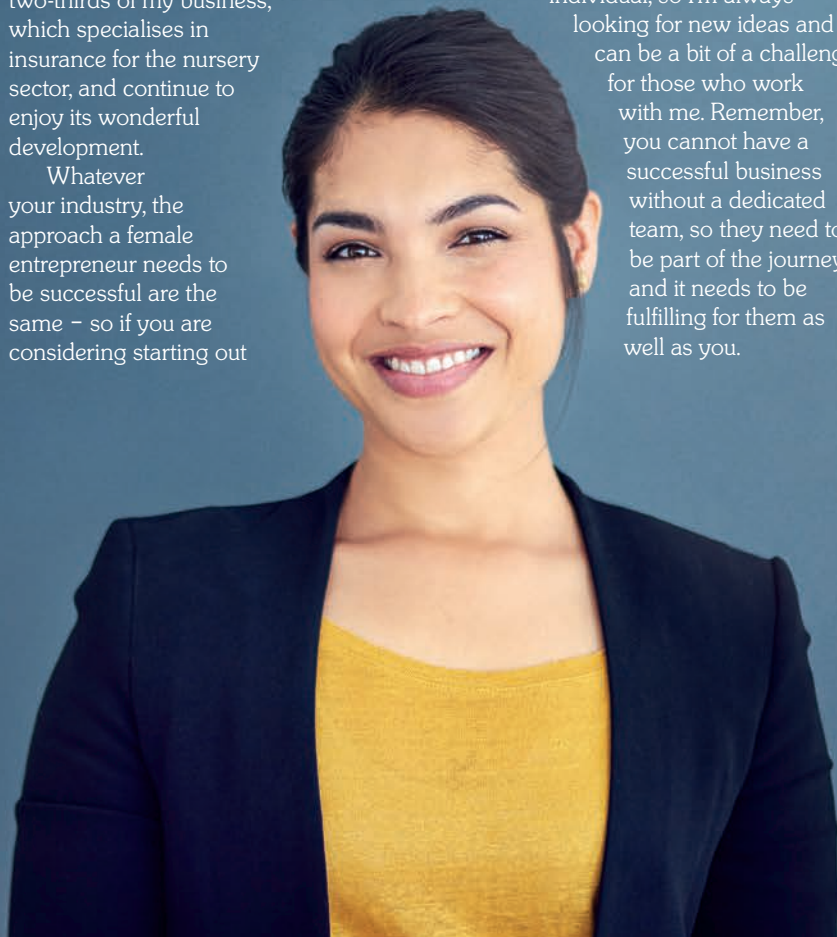
You don't know it all and running a business can be very difficult at times. I have been very fortunate to have built up some great contacts over the years, who have always been available for me to call upon when the need arises. It is therefore vital that you spend time going to networks/events and sharing ideas with all types of business owners to find good-quality peers. In turn, they will come to you for guidance and being there for someone else gives you a great feeling too.

4 STAY AUTHENTIC

Never try to change who you are or hide your beliefs. Being authentic is very important to me, both in business and my personal life. Occasionally, my views haven't always been welcome but I'm straight, so people know where they stand. Someone once said to me, "You tell us when we are not delivering what you want but equally you let us know when things are good too." Be proud of who you are.

5 TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS

I'm very instinctive but occasionally I have been persuaded to go against my gut feeling. It has rarely been a good decision when I've done that, so if you have that intuition, then stick with it!



Jackie Hyde is director at childcare and nursery insurance provider dot2dot – visit dot2dot.org.uk



“30 hours will make a difference”

James Hempsall OBE

There are issues to work through with the extended entitlement, but they can be overcome...

Extending the early years entitlement to up to 30 hours, for three- and four-year-olds from working families, is a policy that has proved extremely popular with parents struggling to juggle work and home. And it has been broadly welcomed by the early years sector too. We understand, better than most, the important role we play in helping families to work and achieve their goals, alongside our core responsibility of supporting children's wellbeing and learning outcomes.

For me, it has always been a double deal: early education and childcare. Children learning, growing and developing, and families managing their economic wellbeing. I don't think it's possible to do one without fully considering the other. But this is still not a widely held view in early years. The whole sector needs to realise that we can achieve both with equal success.

Some two years after the policy was

announced, we've yet to start full delivery of 30 hours. It has been a frustrating period peppered with unanswered questions, and the generation of many myths and misunderstandings. Now, with only a few months to go to the launch in September 2017, there's still much to do and consider.

First, let's look back before we look forwards. The work that many local authorities have been doing on early implementation reveals some useful insights. Eight of them started delivering smaller numbers of places (around 400 each) from September 2016, whilst over 20 more have been looking at themes and issues such as SEND, flexibility or childcare sufficiency. I've noticed several themes that will help: information; business planning; partnerships and collaboration; demand and supply; and thinking differently.

SHARING INFORMATION

One key to successful implementation is moving information around as soon as possible, and getting the terminology clear and consistent. Beware the temptation to hold back until you've got all the facts at your fingertips. Engaging in widespread early dialogues with staff, other providers and schools, the local authority, and current and potential parents is vital. Everyone needs to understand the eligibility criteria, as one of the biggest reasons people don't take up any entitlement is they wrongly assume it's not for them. And all need to know the process of applying and taking their places. Demand will be high for the extended entitlement, and demand will drive supply; it will give

providers a valuable insight into local needs and wants (just like it did with two-year-olds), and will be a powerful and dynamic force that will support all our business decisions moving forward.

I understand how frustrating it has been for providers and councils not knowing for sure the funding rates that will be paid. This message has reached me loud and clear wherever I've been. However, of the 10 steps we have been sharing (*Getting Ready for 30 Hours*, childcareworks.co.uk), the first six did not rely on the funding rate being confirmed. Now, the necessary processes should all be complete, and we should all know the financial offer. This offers the opportunity for real planning on what's possible.

PLANNING & PARTNERSHIPS

Everyone must review their business plan and financial models with 30 hours in mind, then review them again. I meet many providers who are on top of their business planning and financial profiling, but I have to say the vast majority I meet do not have a business plan, have not worked out their delivery costs, nor considered the impact and business potential of 30 hours.

If that is you, be honest and seek help now. It needs to be within the context of running an early years service; generic support doesn't cut it. This is where partnerships and collaboration is advantageous – peer-to-peer support shared between settings, schools and childminders can provide much-needed second opinions and sharing of best practice.



The myths and misunderstandings concerning 30 hours are the biggest barriers to the programme.



This doesn't happen overnight; it requires hard work and tenacity. Don't take the first 'no' for a final answer. Many times a door has been shut in my face, yet I've persisted and forged some amazing alliances. In practical terms, settings may need to collaborate to ensure the full 30 hours is available, free at the point of delivery, for children each week.

MYTHS & MIS-UNDERSTANDINGS

The myths and misunderstandings concerning 30 hours are the biggest barriers to the programme. They need to be put to bed. I still hear how providers feel this isn't going to happen. Well it is. And there are all sorts of ideas being shared around of how practice can be delivered outside of the DfE Statutory Guidance and local contract agreements. This is unhelpful. There is a risk of us reversing the direction of travel we have started with flexible delivery, but I think once the dynamics of demand and supply settle in, we will see parents using their entitlements in ways that make sense for them and providers.

Unlike the first 15 hours, there will be many parents who don't use their whole entitlement. Instead, they could need as little as two or three hours more each week, across more weeks of the year, not just in school term times. This may help providers achieve a balance in the week and throughout the year. When in doubt, refer to the statutory guidance, and ask the local authority with whom you are contracting.

Once these barriers and concerns are worked through over the next few months, we will then focus on how much hard-working families (on average incomes or below) struggle to manage work and life, and to balance their household expenditure and childcare costs. And if the early implementation is anything to go by, 30 hours will make a tremendous difference that we will all be proud of.



James Hemsall OBE has been supporting providers, local authorities and central government to implement early years policy for over 25 years.



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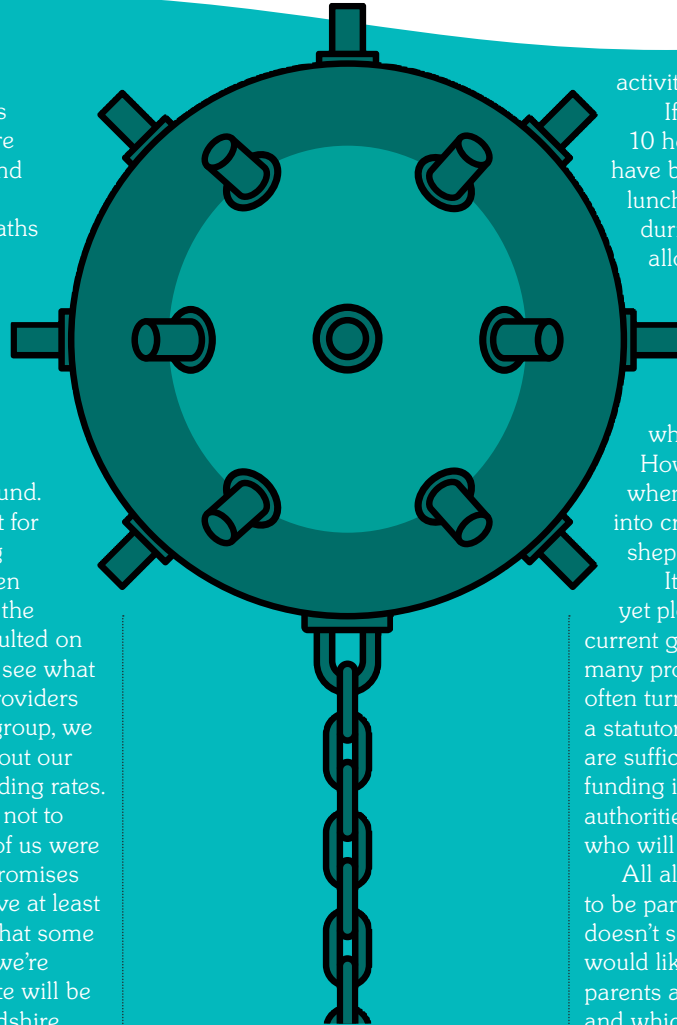
“CHARGING FOR ‘EXTRAS’? IT’S A MINEFIELD”

*Nurseries need parents to subsidise their free hours, but how this will work in practice still isn't clear, says **Sarah Steel**...*

As I write, the announcements from the DfE are coming thick and fast. It's been announced that the GCSE maths and English requirements for Early Years Educators will be replaced with functional skills, a measure widely welcomed by a sector struggling with recruitment. A revised EYFS has been released, with mercifully few changes to get our heads around.

And the model agreement for local authorities for delivering the 30 hours has also just been released; having been part of the working group that was consulted on this, I was really interested to see what was finally published. With providers and local authorities on this group, we couldn't have been clearer about our concerns about the pitiful funding rates. We were initially encouraged not to assume the worst, but many of us were disappointed when, despite promises that all providers would receive at least £4 per hour, it was revealed that some wouldn't. In Gloucestershire, we're being told that the funding rate will be £3.80 per hour, and in Oxfordshire, with some of the highest living costs in the South East, it will be only £4.01.

Providers have been very vocal about the need to charge for meals and additional services, in order to make up the shortfall between what they need to break even and the funding rate. The model agreement is better than I had feared, but still not clear, with the DfE stating that whilst providers can charge for these extras, funded hours “must not be conditional” on purchasing any of them. I understand the ideology – taxpayer-funded hours should be free at the point of delivery – but it has to be backed up with hard cash. Pay us



what we need to stay in business and we'll provide your 'free' hours totally for free.

In reality, providers must find a way to bridge this funding gap. The hourly rate needed will vary depending by provider, but the vast majority will find themselves short – and as many children attend 30 hours or less per week, the opportunity to cross-subsidise with extra paid-for hours is slight. We're looking at a model where the funding is stretched across 51 weeks of the year (so about 22 hours per week) and we'll then need to ensure that the charge for meals, nappies, sun cream, extra-curricular

activities, etc. makes up the shortfall.

If a child attends nursery for 10 hours per day, they'll usually have breakfast, morning snack, lunch, afternoon snack and tea during their day. If providers must allow parents to bring a packed meal, will they bring all this in packed form? Where will we store it? How will we prevent cross-contamination of children who have severe allergies?

How will we manage mealtimes when some children are tucking into crisps and others are eating shepherd's pie?

It's a minefield the DfE hasn't yet plotted a course through. The current guidance is widely flouted by many providers and local authorities often turn a blind eye, as they have a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient places, yet know that funding is inadequate. With most local authorities being cut drastically too, who will be left to police this?

All along the sector has lobbied to be part of the solution, but the DfE doesn't seem to be listening. I, for one, would like a transparent system that parents and providers can understand, and which recognises that government will provide a subsidy towards the childcare for working parents, but that they will be required to make up the shortfall – “1,140 hours subsidised childcare” may not be as catchy as “30 hours free childcare”, but it's more realistic. Mind you, when was reality ever fashionable in politics?



Sarah Steel is managing director of the Old Station Nursery.

How to succeed with EYPP

*Used effectively, Early Years Pupil Premium funding will help you help those most in need, explains **Sue Fisher...***

The Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) was introduced by the government in 2015 with the aim of narrowing the attainment gap between the most disadvantaged children and their peers.

Children for whom early years settings receive EYPP come from low-income families in receipt of an eligible benefit, or have been adopted, are subject to a special guardianship or child arrangement order, or are being looked after by the local authority.

EYPP is paid each term by local authorities to early years settings for eligible three- and four-year-olds. This funding is often delayed, however, and is paid to the setting later in the term during which the funding is provided. Some settings have found this causes difficulties, whilst others have addressed the issue by working on a mid-term to mid-term or half-yearly basis.

Another challenge for managers is to ensure that interventions really target each child's needs, and decisions should be based on secure information regarding eligible children gained through working closely with parents and the child's key person to establish a clear picture of their background and individual situation.

Analysing this evidence provides a sound starting point for agreeing future interventions. In the case of a child found to be working within their age-appropriate developmental level, funding can be used to build and reinforce knowledge and experience.

TARGETING SUPPORT

The government has stated it expects "providers will consult the evidence on

what works in improving quality when making decisions about how to use the EYPP funding" (Gov.uk).

Whilst other children will almost certainly benefit from long-term improvements and additions to provision, it's essential to ensure that the decisions you make will primarily benefit eligible children. A popular approach to this has been for settings to work together to share ideas and develop practice.

Developing a cluster group of local settings enables costs, resources and ideas to be shared, and can present opportunities for training. Such groups can work together to identify local needs and access training from experts in areas such as speech and language, playing and learning outdoors, and personal, social and emotional development, in particular

self-regulation. These are all areas of need that settings report to be regularly occurring. Following training, one-to-one support with the child from their key person will be effective in putting into practice newly acquired knowledge and skills.

Additionally, groups could approach 'feeder schools' for information on children's achievement levels in specific areas as they progress through school. Such forward thinking can help to inform decisions on the current interventions most likely to offer future long-term success.

STRENGTHENING LINKS WITH HOME

Research confirms that the involvement of parents in their child's learning has a particularly positive effect. This is additionally important when the child's attendance is poor. Interventions could include home learning packs, postcards and letters suggesting activities at home to support the child's particular areas of need, as well as the loaning of specific resources.

The team at one setting I work with have created a home/nursery sharing library containing picture books, early phonics resources and books on feelings and developing independence. This has proved a great success and is now being extended to include story bags and puppets.

WIDENING CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES

Some children have limited opportunities for outdoor play and exploration. Extending opportunities outdoors, as well as incorporating trips and visits is likely to impact positively

IN FIGURES

HOW ARE GROUP-BASED PROVIDERS USING THEIR EYPP?

63% have applied for EYPP funding.

56% are satisfied with local authority support.

23% received £1,000+ EYPP in the last 12 months.

75% used EYPP to buy literacy and numeracy resources.

Source: EYPP Providers Survey 2017



on the child, especially when these are linked to individual interests and fascinations. A wealth of additional opportunities can result from this, as well as building enthusiasm for learning.

Whilst forest school offers a specific approach, one setting I know utilises part of its EYPP funding to support weekly visits to a local woodland area, and staff speak highly of the progress made by all children in this alternative environment.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

For value-added benefit, when purchasing resources to support individual needs, consider whether training is available in their use. Practitioners who have attended Numicon training, for example, have found it has inspired them in making effective use of their newly acquired resources.

The setting up

of a professional development library will support staff in accessing relevant information and ideas to support all children in their care, and can be added to on a termly basis when the needs of additional children attracting EYPP funding becomes known.

MONITORING IMPACT

The interventions you employ must be monitored to judge their effectiveness, clearly identifying their impact on children's development.

Whilst some settings measure this success through their current systems for assessing, tracking and evaluating the progress of all children in the setting, others have developed more thorough record-keeping approaches that clearly identify success

in narrowing gaps in attainment. Whichever method you implement, you must ensure

individual starting points are identified and recorded, alongside progress made to accurately assess the effectiveness of the implemented interventions.

In addition, managers will need to keep clear records of how the funding has been spent and reflect on practice before making decisions for future expenditure. Analysis of individual needs may highlight areas for general improvement, and therefore these findings will help to inform management information systems and decisions for future planning for the whole setting.

Whilst the implementation of the EYPP is still in its early stages, developing supportive, imaginative and effective strategies is already proving successful for many children and the settings they attend.



Sue Fisher is an early years training consultant.

READ MORE

Study of Early Education and Development: 'Experiences of the Early Years Pupil Premium' Research report - bit.ly/2n6D2Hl

'How to spend your EYPP' - bit.ly/2mWT28Qk

EEF: 'The Early Years Toolkit' - bit.ly/2mbw3xD



“We’ve always been outstanding”

Anita Huckle’s 26 years of nursery ownership have not been without their challenges, but the quality of her settings has never wavered, as Nursery Business discovered...

If you want to open an early years setting, it helps to have a can-do attitude. “I was 27, and had that ignorance – that arrogance – of youth: ‘I will make it work!’” says Anita Huckle of her first foray into nursery ownership. “I was just that type of person, I wouldn’t let it fail. It could have failed quite easily, but it didn’t.”

Enthusiasm will only take you so far, of course. By her own admission Anita entered the then fledgling nursery sector lacking any early years experience. She was a mum dissatisfied with the childcare available to her, who worked as a senior training manager at Mothercare (ignore the

superficial link to early years, she says – “it has nothing in common!”).

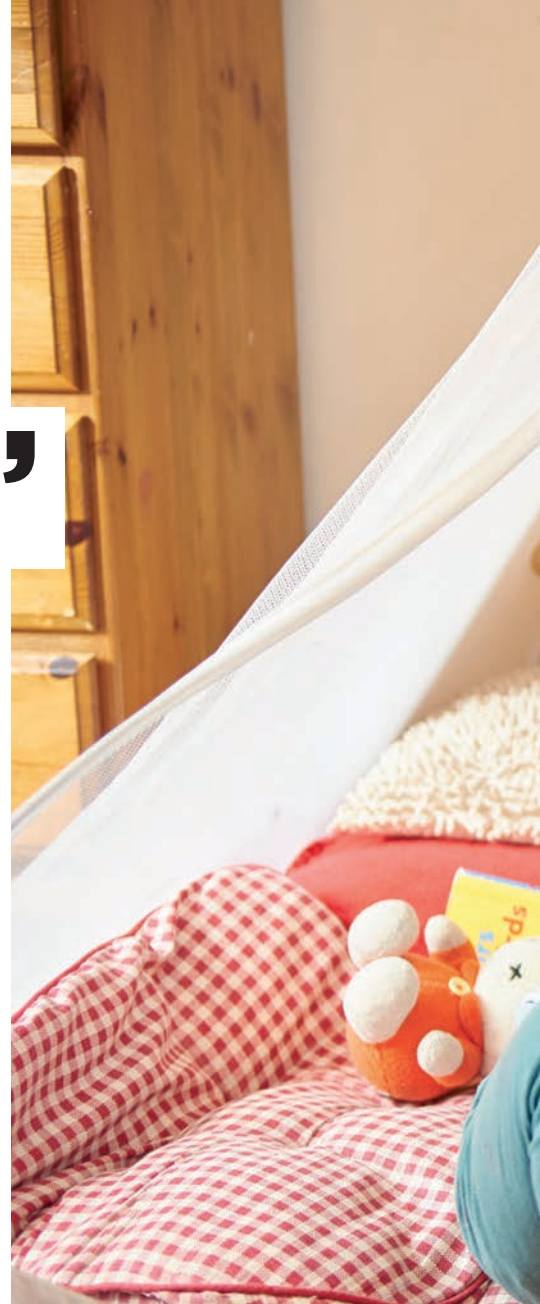
Money was in short supply, and the learning curve steep, but a combination of her business acumen and determination, and a measure of good luck saw her setting thrive. Today, 26 years and several successful nurseries later, she can point to a flawless Ofsted record and an enviable reputation for providing outstanding early years education.

FIRST TIME LUCKY?

In 1991, nurseries weren’t what they are today. “There was just starting to be a demand for that kind of setting, as opposed to preschools or childminders,” Anita remembers. “I was chatting to a friend and within a very short time we’d bought a building and opened a nursery – Woodland Lodge Kindergarten in Great Horkesley, Essex. It was very naive as we didn’t really know much about it, but we were lucky because we managed to employ some very good qualified staff.”

It wasn’t purely luck, though – Anita credits her time at Mothercare, as well as a business degree, with giving her the grounding in staffing matters she needed to compensate for her then lack of expertise: “I think it was one of the reasons why the setting was so successful initially,” she explains. “A lot of people who try to run nurseries are early years practitioners with no business background; it helps if you have both sides to your education.”

Taking her own advice, Anita added



balance to her CV by heading to college and gaining a childcare qualification in the year following the opening of Woodland Lodge’s doors.

Having the nursery up and running in a manner that would bring parents and their children in was imperative, as Woodland Lodge was, in Anita’s words, an enormous challenge financially. Significant conversion work was required, and while the fact that Anita’s husband, a builder, was able to take on the work, the 15% interest rate on the loan secured to fund it was a source of concern.

“We put everything on the line,” Anita says. “We made it work by not taking anything from the business. That was very difficult as I’d given up my job – I wasn’t going to initially, but I soon realised that to make the business a success, I’d have to put one hundred thousand per cent into it.”



I only employ people who have a forward-thinking ethos, who want to improve, who want to be really great.



The gamble and the hard work paid off. The nursery quickly broke even, and was turning a profit 18 months into the venture. “We had something that hadn’t previously existed in the area, and people really wanted it,” Anita explains. “It was also a very good location, so we filled up quickly, and soon had an enormous waiting list.”

Rapid expansion duly followed – from an initial 28 places Woodland Lodge was extended to 40, and then gained a demountable building to accommodate school-hours children. It had reached 55 places by the time Anita decided to sell her share of the business and start afresh.

GOING IT ALONE

It was a desire to have the freedom to shape her provision that led Anita to seek a new start. In some respects, opening Orchard Barns Kindergarten

in Ardleigh was a less stressful process: “I was a lot more confident,” Anita says. “I knew all about how it was going to go, and I knew I could fill it, because I had a product that people wanted. I think we filled up in less than a year here. I already had a reputation, you see – and childcare is completely built on reputation.”

In another respect, preparing the nursery for the public was much tougher. The barns referenced in its name were listed buildings in a poor state of repair. “To get planning permission to open a nursery, the council wanted us to put the barn complex back as it originally would have been,” Anita explains. “When we first came here, one barn was basically two sticks of wood with a tiny bit of that hanging on it. Others had previously been somebody’s house... It was a very expensive job.”

ON EDUCATIONAL ETHOS...

“Our ethos has been developed by us over the last 26 years; it incorporates forest school, Steiner, Montessori, Reggio – we’re looking at that a lot for our new building,” Anita tells us. “Outdoor learning is an enormous focus. At Stratford St Mary we have access to an actual forest! The new nursery will offer free-flow from every room; we’re going to have a canopy extending around the whole building.”

A personal sacrifice was also required. With the council demanding that Anita take on existing planning permission granted to construct a house on the site, she was required to both finance a residential build and move, reluctantly, from her existing home in order to get the green light.

"It was a huge undertaking, and we had to get a bridge mortgage," Anita admits. "We did the nursery first, then built the house, then sold our other house. The whole process took about three years. Parents still came, though. We had children here while all this was going on; people just wanted to use us."

OUTSTANDING PRACTICE

With Orchard Barns up and running, Anita didn't look back. In the following years she opened a second setting in nearby Stratford St Mary, followed by a dedicated babies nursery – "Neither of those two things was intended," she jokes, "they were accidents! I knew the owner of the former, and he wanted to sell, and somebody else had planning permission for the latter, but pulled out. I felt like I had to have it as it was in Ardleigh."

Around 13 years ago she became a partner at Pippins, an established Montessori nursery in White Colne, working with existing owner, Sally Scobie. Somewhere along the line, she says, she was approached to do nursery consultancy work, and this aspect of her role has seen her launch yet more nurseries, including one located at the site once occupied by Woodland Lodge, run by independent school Holmwood House. "I'm very busy!" she says.

What's most noteworthy about



ON SETTING FEES...

"Although we're an outstanding nursery, we try to stay affordable," Anita says when asked whether the quality of Orchard Barns' provision is reflected in its fees. "Childcare is expensive for parents but it is the most important thing they will pay for, and our parents accept the fees they pay for the high quality their children receive. Our fees have increased annually between one and four per cent during the past five years."

Anita's career in the nursery sector, though, isn't the number of settings she has opened or contributed to, it's their quality. Since Ofsted's 'inadequate' to 'outstanding' grading system was introduced, not one of the nurseries she is involved with has been judged below the top mark. "That means a lot," she says. "I want us to be one of the best, if not the best, provider in the country, and the 'outstandings' rubber stamp that."

While she acknowledges the stress



the inspectors' visits create (particularly for whichever one of her managers is left waiting the longest for the knock at the door each cycle), and the amount owners and managers must keep on top of to stay legal, she has no complaints about a system she believes has never been designed to catch providers out.

Anita puts her Ofsted success down to two related factors. The first is the quality of her staff. She is able to call upon a core of highly experienced,

long-serving colleagues and employees – amongst them senior manager, Becki Stoker – but standards are kept high throughout every nursery thanks to a commitment to training that helps foster a passionate and professional ethos. Should they wish it, staff can work their way up from apprentice to graduate, while regular CPD opportunities enable even fresh-faced college leavers to gain and share new knowledge with their colleagues.

This approach leads to the second factor, a willingness to embrace new ideas: "We're constantly looking to improve," Anita explains. "We break down everything we do, looking for new ideas and the best practice wherever we can find it. You won't survive in the nursery business if you're not willing to change."

Appropriately enough, significant change is afoot for Anita and Orchard Barns in the coming months. A significant upgrade in facilities beckons for the group's Ardleigh nursery, which will leave its listed barns to move to a new home at the nearby site of Orchard Barns Babies, once yet more extensive conversion work is completed.

What seems likely to stay the same is Anita's knack for running outstanding nursery provision.

ON PARENT PARTNERSHIPS...

"We recently implemented an iConnect system, and it's proving to be an amazing tool for communicating with parents," senior manager Becki Stoker explains. "It suits where they're at now; everyone's busy, and to be able to touch base online is fantastic. We love that it runs alongside everything else we do; it's not replacing anything, it just makes it better and more accessible."

MEET THE TEAM



ANITA HUCKLE,
owner

"We have a very nice

working environment. Staff are listened to, their opinions are valued. I only employ people who have a forward-thinking ethos, who want to improve, who want to be really great."



BECKI STOKER,
senior manager

"When you

have passionate staff they inspire each other, then you get really good practice and the children get really excited and really engaged – so you get really fulfilling days, which encourages staff to go even further."

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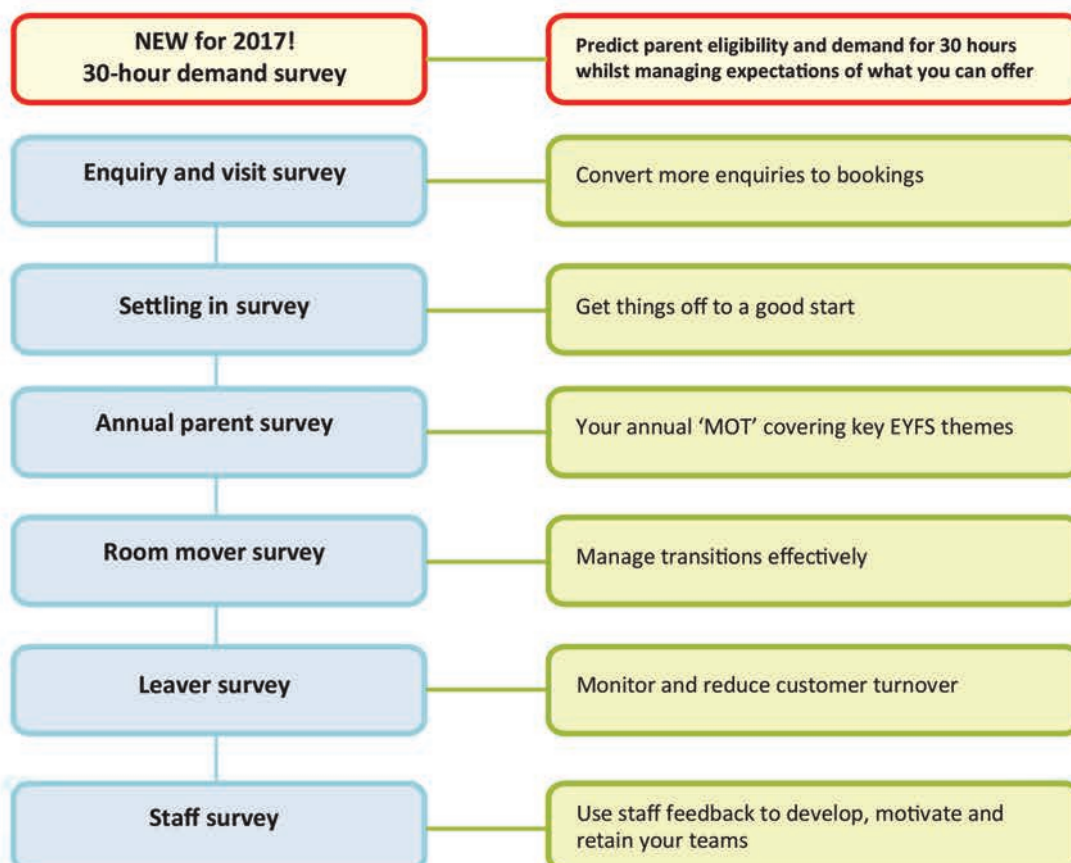
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All your survey needs covered





Leading improvement

*Are you supporting your team to deliver outstanding teaching? It's important that you do, says **Michael Reed**...*

IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE LEARNING

Ofsted make a judgement about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and the effectiveness of leadership and management in the setting. It could be argued that if the quality of either one is weak then it can only have a negative impact on the other. The leader needs to be very clear about what good teaching looks like in everyday practice and how they “successfully plan and

manage the curriculum and learning programmes so that all children get a good start and are well prepared for the next stage in their learning, especially being ready for school” (Early Years Inspection Handbook Ofsted 2015).

Much of the inspector's evidence comes from direct observations of practice during the inspection visit. It therefore makes sense for the leader to regularly observe in a similar way, paying particular attention to the Characteristics of Effective Learning that children are displaying, but also aligning those same characteristics to the teaching that is happening, for example, for ‘creating and thinking critically’

- ❖ prompting children to formulate their own ideas,
- ❖ helping them to make links by questioning and providing narrative,
- ❖ stepping back when appropriate so that children choose their own ways to do things.

It is not always easy for a practitioner to identify these characteristics for themselves when they are immersed in an activity with the children. The leader's observations should result in

constructive feedback that stimulates further discussion with the practitioner and enables a reflective dialogue to take place. This is why the leader's knowledge of best practice and current research is vital, they are ultimately the ‘gatekeepers’ of the setting's core beliefs and values, but most importantly they are the enablers who help everyone meet statutory requirements with an approach grounded in current evidence-based knowledge.

IS EFFECTIVE PRACTICE VISIBLE IN YOUR SETTING?

Using the following statements, think of at least two examples which demonstrate that

- ❖ health and wellbeing is important and given close attention in the setting,
- ❖ listening to children is important and children are encouraged to make choices,
- ❖ parents are closely involved and understand why this is important,
- ❖ learning opportunities are designed to include all children.

The quality of leadership in early years settings is a key factor in determining the quality of the educational provision that children receive. Leaders invest time in motivating people to work as a team and take pride in what they do. They are skilled at estimating the pace of children's learning and recognising that each child is unique.

An important part of the leader's role is to regularly observe the environment and engage with the children, by asking questions, such as

- ❖ Are the staff supportive and kind?
- ❖ Do we encourage curiosity and creativity?
- ❖ Is work created by the children valued?
- ❖ How is learning planned?

Answers to questions such as these will inform the leader about how others view the provision. This will enable the leader to understand how successful the team are in supporting children's learning and development and consistently meeting the needs and expectations of all stakeholders.



Michael Reed is a senior lecturer at the Centre for Children & Families, University of Worcester. This

article is an edited extract from his book Effective Leadership for High Quality Early Years Practice (Pre-school Learning Alliance, 2016), which is priced at £9.55 for Alliance members and £13.95 for non-members. To purchase a copy, visit pre-school.org.uk/shop

Buying your first business

*Acquiring a nursery can be an expensive and time-consuming process, so it pays to be prepared, says **Courteney Donaldson**...*

At any one time in the UK there will be a wide selection of day nurseries for sale, so it's essential that, rather than 'trawling' the web for possible acquisition opportunities, you speak directly to agents that specialise in the sale of nursery businesses and advise them of your specific requirements. The agents' primary objective is to achieve the best possible price for their client, often the vendor, and then subsequently nurture the transaction through to completion.

FINDING FINANCE

The first consideration when seeking to buy a business is how much you can afford. This will primarily be determined by the size of your cash deposit: the days of acquiring a nursery with a 100% business mortgage are long gone.

As a business buyer, you could borrow money from family, friends and banks; or through general mortgage brokers, business mortgage brokers, venture capital firms and business angels. It's important that you seek a lender who understands the nursery sector and has a professional sense

of what you're trying to achieve. How much you can borrow depends on so many personal variables that it's impossible to give general advice. There are, however, four important factors that all lenders consider:

- ❖ How much of your own capital are you putting towards the purchase price of the business?
- ❖ Do you have a good financial history and credit rating?
- ❖ What skills and experience do you bring to the business?
- ❖ What level of debt can the business itself sustain?

For freehold nurseries, whereby you will be acquiring the freehold property and the in-situ business, banks may consider a loan on the basis of 60-70% loan to value (LTV), depending on the experience and track record of the buyer.

Given the size of 'cash' deposits required for freehold acquisitions, many new entrants to the sector have a preference for leasehold business, as the cost of entry is often substantially lower than with freehold acquisitions. However, while leasehold nurseries will often have a lower capital value, the

LTV as assessed by the bank is likely to be closer to 50% or less, depending on the term remaining on the lease and other salient lease terms, such as provisions for a landlord's 'break clause'; some banks may not wish to lend against leases.

Speaking to a financial broker, such as Christie Finance, that specialises in securing loans for nursery business acquisitions at the outset of your acquisition plan is important and will ensure that your aspirations on the funding front are likely to be realised.

KEY QUESTIONS

BEFORE CONTACTING AGENTS, ASK YOURSELF

1. What is my acquisition price range?
2. What are my geographical requirements?
3. Do I want a freehold or leasehold nursery business?
4. Am I looking to acquire a business operated under management, or one I will manage and run myself?
5. What size of registered capacity do I want?

MAKING AN OFFER

When you decide to make an offer, you can make it through the vendor's agent. Your offer should be the monetary sum to purchase the freehold or leasehold interest, the fixtures and fittings and the goodwill of the business, by way of either a share, or asset purchase. You should advise your solicitor of your offer and send it to the vendor's agent





The days of acquiring a nursery with a 100% business mortgage are long gone.



in writing. Your offer may be accepted or rejected, and you may find yourself in further negotiations. There may be a counter-offer from another potential purchaser. At this point you should decide whether you wish to continue negotiating yourself, and find out whether the vendor, via their agent, is happy to negotiate further with you.

Remember that just as the vendor has appointed an agent to assist them with the sale, you can appoint an independent non-conflicted agent or specialist property advisor to act on your behalf. They can assist you in the formulation of your offer and negotiate on your behalf.

COMPLETING THE DEAL

Often, agreeing the deal is the easy part. As a purchaser, this is where your commitment and contribution to progressing your acquisition really

starts. As a buyer you need to step up and embrace the process.

From a deal being agreed, and a Memorandum of sale (MOS) issued, it's not unusual for a transaction to take up to six months to complete, depending on the complexity of the deal, the amount of due diligence required, the size of any bank loan required to facilitate your acquisition and the experience of your solicitor. However, if you are a cash buyer involved in less complicated acquisitions, whereby there is no need for pre-completion Ofsted re-registration, sales can be completed within six weeks. Much depends on the experience of the buyer, the desires of the vendor and the calibre of the agents and advisors appointed to facilitate the transaction.

OTHER COSTS

Alongside the headline acquisition sum, you will need to be mindful of other associated costs. While

not an exhaustive list, 'deal or acquisition costs' may include solicitors' fees, a 'Red Book' valuation if you have financing through a bank, and stamp duty.

THE HANDOVER

The final period leading up to completion will be incredibly busy, but your solicitors and bank should communicate frequently with you, as you move towards an agreed date for the exchange of contracts. For sales structured as asset sales, Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE) consultation processes need to be implemented.

For first-time buyers, the vendors will often agree to be on hand during the first week of the business being operated under new ownership. Thereafter, deal negotiations may have facilitated for the former owners to be available for a specified period of time, which could be between four weeks and three months.

When you are finally in place, enjoy your new business, embrace the challenges, be proactive, forward thinking and make your nursery the premier setting in your local area.



*Courteney Donaldson
MRICS is head
of childcare at
Christie + Co.
Visit **christie.com***

STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD

*In a competitive sector, attention to detail will help you keep your occupancy high, says **Caroline Johnson...***

It's the small touches that make a nursery unique. Regulation ensures that the majority of settings will offer a good standard of care, but those prepared to go above and beyond, to take time to reflect on their business and action change that leads to real progress, will set themselves apart. Here are some key areas to focus on...

KNOW YOUR PARENTS

Outstanding service can only be achieved by understanding the people you are providing for. As the business owner, you need to know who your clientele are, and their expectations, if you want to develop your offering to the next level.

Look at the social dynamics of the area in which your nursery is situated. Social media is an excellent place to start if you want to learn about what parents want from their nursery. Get to know your families – what's important to them, what elements of childcare they are unhappy about and what they like. Carry out market research to gather information about what other settings are offering. Although fees will be important, these will be overlooked if quality is compromised.

Carry out regular questionnaires and act upon the data collected. You'll be surprised at what aspects of your setting parents value, and this data is vital for building upon those things.

MAKE TIME TO LISTEN

Communication with parents doesn't stop at a few tick boxes. An open-door office policy makes your setting feel less business-like, and more personal. Make it easy for parents to discuss issues or concerns, and ensure they



You need to know who your clientele are, and their expectations.

feel comfortable doing so by dealing with any information immediately. Always be available to discuss even the smallest matters with mums, dads or carers as they will likely feel strongly about what they are bringing to your attention. Provide alternatives to parent's requests if you are not able to meet their needs directly and keep them informed of what has been actioned. Your open door will work both ways, and parents will often take the opportunity to praise your setting too.

Put yourself in the shoes of your prospective clients. Always try to accommodate their busy lives by allowing them to look around unannounced, regardless of the timing, remembering the prominent part your nursery will play in a child's life. Show them that you care about all aspects of their child's wellbeing, safety and learning by listening to their needs and answering any questions, without rushing. There is a whole world of competitive parenting out

there and mums and dads undoubtedly want to feel they are making the best choices for their children.

MONITOR YOUR CONTINUOUS PROVISION

Your responsibility as equipment buyer and staff selector must not be ignored. This role requires you to ensure high-quality care, progress and improvement in your setting, and will mean that you are constantly aware of what the children require and enjoy.

Look at the continuous provision you offer in your environment. Is it inviting, interesting and challenging? Does it incite and intrigue? Is it in good repair and clean? When selecting new toys and activities, take care to choose unique, challenging and inspirational products. You don't have to break the bank, but you will be commended for having unusual equipment that sets you apart from other settings. Be creative, think outside the box. Move away from generic, everyday toys, or seek different ways to use them.

Present activities in a way that looks inviting, setting them up in advance before the children arrive and



tidying them away after use. This will also demonstrate your organisation and planning to parents.

Natural products are often cheaper and can trigger imaginative play in various forms and initiate rich conversations as well as being aesthetically pleasing. Utilise out-of-the-ordinary learning opportunities, including frost, snow, rain, wind, broken trees, delivery trucks or a new baby, for example, and be open to new ideas and suggestions from staff, parents and the wider community. Become a vessel for change and do not let your ego become a barrier. Children are learning new things every minute of every day – embrace and enjoy it.

SUPPORT YOUR STAFF

Engage your staff in interesting training and talk to them regularly about the latest research and interesting things that you have read or discovered. Keep them interested in the children and the importance of their role. Encouraging staff to embark on further training, inspiring them to reach for the stars and providing opportunities for growth in their careers will raise their self-worth, and in turn they will reward you with good practice.

Doing this will allow your staff to share in the passion for learning that the nursery projects. Help them to engage with the children and monitor them in their planning of activities, making sure they are 'child-based', and not something the staff are interested in doing for themselves. Offer advice, help and support to achieve a shared goal, and help staff to remain consistent, friendly, caring, kind and presentable, using regular supervisions. The open-door policy applies here too.

DON'T FORGET...

As a nursery owner, you must evolve as your business does, letting go of prescriptive schedules, rotas and unnecessarily strict routines. Be open and adaptable, and attentive to your clients' individual needs, and watch your setting thrive alongside the children within it.

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

IN DEMAND

FIVE WAYS TO DEVELOP A GREAT REPUTATION...

- ✿ Find your unique selling point (USP) and be creative in devising new ways to utilise it.
- ✿ Forget profit and loss; empathise with your parents and play with your children. Find out about the children's needs and what they want from their day.
- ✿ In the nursery industry, quality childcare and education has to be at the forefront of your business.
- ✿ Don't be too rigid with timetables; children in early years cannot tell the time and although they need routine, they do not need a timetable. Allow yourself to be spontaneous.
- ✿ Keep up-to-date with emails and parent correspondence, and respond quickly.

Learning Escapes

Eco-nurseries provide the perfect environment to inspire young minds...

TG Escapes provides eco-buildings for schools and early years settings throughout the education sector. Early years providers will find much to love in the company's Learning Escapes, which can stand alone providing bright, secure spaces perfect for the Foundation Stage. Sun pipes, sedum roofs and energy-efficient designs make these A-rated buildings more economical to run and cosy in the winter months.



can discuss a long-term maintenance plan, or changes of usage that may come along, with you. Its team have also found finance providers who can help with funding for an eco-nursery. Private companies can look at leasing or hire purchase, while state-funded organisations are eligible to use operating leases.

For more information, call free on 0800 917 7726 or email info@tgescapes.co.uk

FREE-FLOW LEARNING

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Full-length windows and bi-folding doors, affording great views of each building's surroundings, not only encourage the children to go outside, but also provide staff with a clear line of sight from inside to out (and vice-versa) – so, a careful eye can be kept upon your mini risk-takers as they

explore the great outdoors, soak up some sunshine and get the roses in their cheeks.

AN ALL-INCLUSIVE SERVICE

All Learning Escapes are bespoke designs by architects Metropolis, but a standalone building, including kitchen, offices, toilets and wet play areas for 24 children, starts from £132k, with a 72-place building priced from £370k.

There are no hidden extras – everything is included in the project proposal. It couldn't be easier with full bespoke design and project management offered as part of a one-stop shop that includes

- ❖ planning permission/building regulations,
- ❖ foundations and clearance,
- ❖ service connections,
- ❖ demolition (if required).

You can also rest assured that Learning Escapes will be around for the long term. Every building comes with a

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HAPPY CUSTOMERS

Learning Escapes offer an environment that's ideal for children in the early years...

"Both children and staff love learning and working in the building due to the amount of natural light and space. Free-flow access to a covered deck is a huge advantage, so that outdoor learning can take place in all weathers."

Sam Patel, director of school development, Bickley Park Prep School

"The children, parents and staff love it. The space is light and airy, and the children are thoroughly enjoying it. The staff feel like they are on holiday!"

Ruth Pimentel, Toad Hall Nursery Group

"We have seen a big improvement in their behaviour and they are much calmer, something that we think may be due to the natural light they have, which was not available in the previous room."

Alison Price, headteacher, St Fagan's Nursery





5 WAYS TO RAISE FUNDS

*When planning to boost your budget, get creative, says **Kirstine Beeley**...*



GET CRAFTY

The key to successful fundraising is to think outside the box. Most parents are thoroughly fed up with cake stalls and dressing-up days! I've found that if you tie the fundraising into the learning going on in your setting, people are much more likely to engage, and children will have lots more fun too.

Try making up some creative craft sets from your local scrapstore. For a few pence you can usually get plenty of crayons and paper, etc. and if you charge a few pounds per pack in the run up to a holiday break, you can emphasise your ethos of encouraging creativity (rather than following a template), while children get something fun to occupy them during the holidays.



PLAY-DOUGH PACKS

Fine motor skills are essential to early learning, so try focusing on these processes whilst earning a few pounds for your setting! Offer packs of play-dough and some associated bits and pieces (matchsticks, pipe cleaners, googly eyes, etc.) for sale, and you'll get the message about that all-important finger and hand strength across to parents while building bridges with home. Seasonal sensory play-dough is always popular, e.g. lemon in spring, cinnamon/chocolate at Christmas, etc. Your local supermarket may donate the flour, etc. needed if you ask nicely. Alternatively, see if your local DIY store will donate nuts, bolts and washers, and make up some funky fingers bags for home.



GROW & SING

Why not try a sponsored sunflower grow? For the price of a packet of seeds and a few pots from a pound shop, you can put together a kit for the children, who can then get sponsors for each cm or 10 of growth. Give a special prize to whoever grows the tallest sunflower – certificates are always popular for sponsored events. Alternatively, consider a sponsored singsong: provide parents with words to songs or rhymes their children enjoy in your setting and encourage them to learn at home with the children. Gather sponsorship for each song the child can sing (in a group). Again, both these activities build on partnerships with parents as well as raising funds.



SOURCING GRANTS

For any larger items you might need there are plenty of grants you can apply for. Try to find local sources of funding such as the Lions Club, Rotary Club or even local Freemasons. Look for companies with head offices near you, as many have local community support schemes, which have tax benefits to them. Make sure you're really specific about what you need the money for, and show you have shopped around. A request for £500 to 'do up the garden' will most likely be overlooked due to a lack of detailed information. Try looking online for lists of community grant funding, too, or ask your local authority sustainability department to let you know what's available.



CALL FOR RESOURCES

Rather than raising money, why not try to save some by getting parents and local companies to donate products? A donation tree with examples of things you need on a daily basis gives mums and dads the chance to make small, affordable contributions to your setting. Ask for items you use regularly, such as rice, pasta, flour, shaving foam, food colouring, etc. Or ask local builders, garden centres and turf suppliers to donate gravel, sand or plants for your outdoor area.



Kirstine Beeley is an author and educational consultant.

Stop coping, start thriving!

Purnima Tanuku OBE explains how to move your nursery from 'staying afloat' to 'full steam ahead'...

The vast majority of childcare and early learning providers in the UK are private nurseries that must be able to balance the books to serve their communities. Furthermore, to stay sustainable and continue improving, settings must not only cover costs but make a surplus, or profit.

Nobody opens a nursery to get rich quick, but profit should not be seen as a dirty word. If a business isn't sustainable, it cannot provide high-quality, reliable childcare and early years education, or support hardworking staff with their career development – and that's no good to anyone.

So what should new or fledgling businesses be thinking about to ensure those books do balance, staff training can be paid for and contingency funds are healthy for unexpected expenses? The following pointers – split into three categories – are intended as simple and straightforward food for

thought rather than a comprehensive guide. Principles are taken from four free or low-cost Department for Education-backed online courses currently being offered by NDNA, and you can find more details about these in the panel below.

“KEEP GOOD FINANCIAL RECORDS”

Effective book-keeping and accounts are vital to the business health of any nursery, and the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate may ask to see records dating back as far as six years. You must also keep receipts, invoices and bank statements.

Owners and managers must think about all their fixed and variable costs – everything the business spends money on. That is likely to include heating, staff wages, insurance, mortgage, rent, loan payments, food and other supplies. These amounts must be set against income. Profit and loss accounts can then show financial

performance over a set period of time, such as a year. In contrast, a balance sheet can show the situation at that moment in time, where finance has come from and how it has been used.

A robust financial management system is vital and it must be updated at least monthly. A simple system would split information into a business forecast, financial management information and financial records – the future, present and past. A monthly business report should show income and expenditure, variance from forecast, information on performance so far and profit and loss.

If a setting has poor cash flow, and there is not enough money to pay bills and salaries, problems can develop quickly. Action such as increasing occupancy, putting up fees, reviewing debtors, controlling costs or devising a full fundraising plan could be necessary.

“PLAN AHEAD AND BRANCH OUT”

With 30 funded hours around the corner, now is the time – if you haven't done so already – to consider all the implications of expanded free childcare and what they could mean for you. Then, if opting in is the right course of action, plan for growth and increased capacity.

If are not already part way through this process, it might be hard to prepare for more children in time for the full roll out in September 2017. But there will be a steady stream of potential new customers looking to take up their entitlement in the months and years to come, not just from September.

If you decide to expand your existing site or develop a new one, there are four fundamental criteria for success – a sound business plan, careful planning, market research

BUSINESS SUPPORT

NDNA provides factsheets, business support and templates to assist with business planning. Member benefit partner KPMG Small Business Accounting offers a fixed-fee accounting system with a free trial available to NDNA members.

The charity also offers four Department for Education backed business courses – A Beginner's Guide to...

- ❖ **Finance,**
- ❖ **Business Planning & Expansion,**
- ❖ **Managing Effectively, and**
- ❖ **Marketing & Sales.**

These courses are free to members or £10 each to non-members. Visit ndna.org.uk/shop or call 01484 407 070.

and a high-quality, committed staff team, effectively managed. Achieving the balance of good management and early years practice is not easy, but providing a great experience for children and employees, while operating sustainably, is an extremely worthwhile goal.

Before branching out it's vital to think about your customers, your competition and how your plans will work in practice, including raising finance and gaining planning permission.

“MAKE THE MOST OF MARKETING”

Good marketing is another cornerstone of sustainability. It's important to tell potential customers about your services, particularly during difficult economic times when competition is fierce.

Not all nurseries understand the full range of marketing tactics available to them. Good promotion should explain what you have to offer, show people why they should choose you, explain how you can fill a need, and be enthusiastic.

Is your branding as good as it could be? Are you being 100% honest in your communications? Are you thinking about the long term, even if your occupancy levels are buoyant right now? All these things count.

One way to analyse your marketing is to think of everyone who could use your business and split them into smaller, segmented groups. What do you think each group needs? Do you need to do some market research to establish this? Now think about how your setting meets those needs. You might prioritise one group over another. What do you want to say to these potential customers and how are

you going to say it? Do you need to create a flyer in a particular language, or could you showcase your setting on social media? Should you take out some advertising?

Make sure any advert has a call to action, such as an open day to attend, so people can see for themselves what you do – and spread your messages further, by word of mouth.

In drawing up a marketing strategy with tactics and an action plan, don't forget to factor in monitoring and evaluation. How will you tell if you have been successful?



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



Make the most of your joint observation

*It's important to take full advantage when your inspector invites you to watch your team in action, says **Julian Grenier**...*

During your Ofsted inspection, the inspector will ask if you would like to undertake joint observations, and you should seize this opportunity. You will know the children much better than the inspector, so you will be able to draw his/her attention to a moment that is particularly significant for an individual child. Where possible, talk about what has happened before: point out the child who has needed many weeks of support to be able to come in calmly, or the child who would only play in one or two areas but is now confidently accessing the whole room.

You will also know if something is not typical: perhaps a practitioner is having a bad day, or a child isn't responding in their usual way. Think quickly – what can you offer your inspector to give a more accurate view of how things are over time. Do you have a recent example of when you observed the practitioner, when she or he was working effectively? Can you provide evidence that a child normally enjoys their time in nursery through their Special Book? Everyone can

have a bad day: what Ofsted are trying to find out is the typical quality and effectiveness of your provision.

If there is a member of the team who is less effective than the others, then be open about this: tell your inspector why you think that, and the steps you are taking to address the situation. If the practitioner's practice is improving, give examples. If it isn't, explain what you are doing about it. Tell your inspector how you are minimising the impact on the children. No team is perfect: what matters is that you can show how you act appropriately, decisively and firmly in the interests of the children.

FEEDING BACK

It is very important that you can demonstrate that your judgement is sound. So, if you talk over the observation with the inspector, or if you offer feedback to a practitioner in front of the inspector, make sure that what you say is sound and is informed by what you saw. It isn't advisable to try to give a positive spin – feed back accurately what you saw and what you

thought. Otherwise, your inspector may come to the conclusion that you don't have the necessary skills to judge how effective your provision is. That will call the accuracy of your self-evaluation into question, which in turn will make your inspection a more difficult experience.

Ideally, your judgements about how effective the provision is will largely coincide with your inspector's. Ofsted plan for inspections to be done with you, and not done to you. Your early years expertise and your knowledge of the staff, children and families should help your inspector to gain a rounded view of your provision. This, in turn, will mean that your inspection will serve as a combination of a validation of your work, and an opportunity for professional dialogue and challenge.

However, the process of inspection is never going to be perfect, so there are likely to be at least some points where you and your inspector take a different view. In these cases, you need to put across your view in a



READER OFFER

This article is an edited extract from *Successful Early Years Ofsted Inspections* (SAGE, 2017) by Julian Grenier. To receive 25% off the purchase price of your copy, visit sagepub.co.uk, add the book to your basket and enter discount code **UKREADER25** at checkout.

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professional, calm and appropriately assertive manner. Go back to the evidence that you have recorded and ask your inspector what they saw. Explain why you have come to your conclusion about the effectiveness of what you saw, if your inspector is taking a more negative view. Draw on previous observations to show typical quality over time, and link those observations to outcomes. Share any previously completed joint observations with professionals from outside your team – for example, advisory staff from the local authority, or early years consultants.

RAISING CONCERNS

During the inspection, generally towards the end, the inspector will talk to you about any 'outstanding' or 'inadequate' practice that has been seen. If there are serious concerns that might lead to an 'inadequate' judgement, you will be alerted to these. You will also have an opportunity to raise any concerns you might have about the conduct of the inspection or the inspector, and find out about how the evidence collected will inform the judgements at the end. These areas of discussion are highly important, so make sure you are calm, collected and in a suitable place. Keep brief notes, and tell your inspector if there is anything you don't agree with, or don't understand.

If necessary, you could make a formal complaint, but it's much better to raise, and resolve, any issues, concerns or points for clarification during your inspection. You will often find that there has simply been a misunderstanding, or that some further discussion makes things clearer.




Julian Grenier is headteacher of the 'outstanding' Sheringham Nursery School and Children's Centre.

TAKING NOTES


THREE THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND WHILST YOU ARE OBSERVING...

- ❖ **What is helping the children to learn?** Note down when you see good care routines, a well-organised and planned environment and good deployment of staff. Always comment on the impact of what you are seeing,
- ❖ **How effectively are staff helping children to make progress in their learning?** Note down indications that staff know the different starting points and needs of the individual children. Listen out for times when children expand on what they are saying because of the encouragement of a practitioner, or become engaged in their play because of the help or guidance they receive.
- ❖ **Especially for babies and young toddlers:** Note down where the key person approach is helping children to develop strong relationships and develop their sense of self and security.



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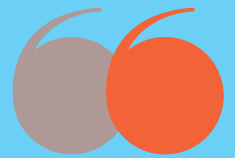
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Plan the perfect learning environment

*How you lay out and resource your classrooms will have a huge impact on how well children learn, says **Matthew Sayer**...*



Your learning environments should be developed to promote children's independence.

It can be daunting to be faced with setting up or changing the environment in your setting. But how you approach it matters – not just in terms of aesthetics but also because the environment is an essential element in ensuring that children are able to learn effectively.

Your learning environments should be developed to promote children's independence and their ability to make decisions. Children should have the opportunity to decide how,

where and with whom they learn. Consistent organisation, resourcing and routines that give children a real sense of control over their day and their learning support the development of autonomous and self-regulating learners. Well-planned, high-quality environments both indoors and out, informed by how young children learn, what they like and what they need, underpin the development of the dispositions that empower children with the sense that they can progress and achieve.

1

STARTING POINTS

High-quality, open-ended resourcing where an environment responds to young children's needs, natural desires and interests, is key to effective learning. Children's interests generally fall into four broad categories: themselves, the natural environment, the local environment and the world of fantasy and make-believe. These categories should form the basis of your indoor environment, creating a physical space in which children can explore, discover and learn.

Carefully planned spaces that promote high engagement and quality learning opportunities consist of a number of clearly defined areas that complement each other with a clear sense of flow around the room. It is widely acknowledged that particular areas of provision when resourced and organised effectively are the best way to enable children to follow their interests and explore the things that matter to them.



Defined spaces

A clearly defined area is a space whose purpose is known and where children can be encouraged to focus, with minimal distraction from other areas of the room. Achieving this is often as simple as ensuring each area has a clear divide or corner. You can then plan for a number of key areas of provision to maximise children's learning potential by building upon the desires that drive them.

At the early stages of planning it's best practice to consider floor coverings – spaces that work best often have vinyl or laminate throughout, upon which softer carpeted surfaces can be dropped in. The maintenance of the carpeted spaces is then much easier, as they can be cleaned, moved or replaced when required, and the space can be used flexibly if needs be.



When positioning furniture units, make good use of the centre of spaces or rooms to create areas, as well as corners – these can be created anywhere and ensure best use of the space available. Three units together, arranged in a Y shape, is most effective and can be used in the middle of rooms or off a wall. Angling furniture also helps create larger spaces and creates usable provision areas towards the middle of rooms.

Three units together, arranged in a Y shape, is most effective and can be used in the middle of rooms or off a wall. Angling furniture also helps create larger spaces and creates usable provision areas towards the middle of rooms.

3

Continuous provision

Continuous provision refers

to resources that are there all the time, and is often informed by what children would naturally do with a particular resource, e.g. sand and water. Children come to rely on the resources, and over time develop mastery behavior as they return to them. They apply skills and knowledge taught at surface level and make sense and internalise these in a meaningful context at a deeper level of learning.

It's helpful to think in terms of wet and dry provision areas, almost splitting a space in two. Wet provision areas might include sand, water, paint, play-dough and a workshop (offering fixing, fastening, 2D collage-type work and 3D modelling opportunities); whilst dry areas might include books and puppets, writing/mark making, mathematics, block play, small construction (e.g. construction kits), small world and role-play, IT, and discovery/investigation and gathering.

If space allows, many settings provide snack as a rolling offer, so somewhere to provide this might also be a consideration.

4 Places to gather

It may be appropriate at certain times of the day to congregate in larger groups, and a number of gathering points can be planned to facilitate this. Consider spaces in which up to 13 children could comfortably sit alongside an adult. If interactive whiteboards or smart TVs are part of the plan, these can be planned as an additional focal point.

Be sure to use these spaces for other areas of provision at other times. Small construction often works well in gathering points, as the space can be quickly cleared and children's work can be carefully displayed on shelving or nearby low tables for their creators to return to later.

5 COMPLEMENTARY STORAGE

Each area of provision requires at least one shelving unit plus storage to contain and display resources, but it's also worth considering which areas particularly complement each other. As mentioned, gathering points and small construction planned together is an excellent use of space. Role play areas in close proximity to writing/mark making also works well, as children can often be seen popping out from roleplay areas with a real reason to write before popping back in. Block play is complemented very well by small world resourcing, as children will often create structures and/or scenarios that can be enriched by small world pieces close to hand. Workshop resources and paint can be used very effectively by children if in close proximity, as media can be mixed and used to finish creations off or add greater detail.



7 Accessible organisation

Well-presented resources that are enticing, intriguing and engaging help practitioners demonstrate to children that their choices are valued, and thoughtful organisation supports them as they play. Young children need to be able to see what's on offer to them, and open shelving, a wide range of trays, shallow boxes and pots facilitate this.

Where appropriate labelling can be used to promote children's independence and development as autonomous learners. Labels

might take the form of photos, words or photos and words; in some instances, often in sand and water areas, shadowing can be used (this is where the footprint of a

resource is attached to the shelving unit to support the consistent organisation and return of resources). Careful labelling helps to ensure resources are always on display in the same place, well maintained and presented. Colour-coding can also help here – red storage containers and resourcing for wet sand, for example.

Materials & resources

There is much that is predictable about young children's interests, so resources that reflect these interests should be made available to them. Resources need to earn their place in our environments; aim for open-ended resources of the highest possible quality.

A good mix of natural and man-made and, where possible, 'real' resources add to the breadth and depth of experiences. For example, when children are playing in water, filling, emptying and pouring are likely to occur so a variety of tubes, buckets, jugs and graded pots would be provided.

Provision can be fine-tuned so that a variety of containers offer a range of possibilities and opportunities: a tall, narrow graded tube; a short, broad graded tub; a bucket with a rim; a container with a spout; and both clear and opaque containers. Providing children with a broad range of resourcing, but not too much of the same, encourages many of the social skills we want to promote – patience, sharing, negotiating, cooperating and problem-solving.

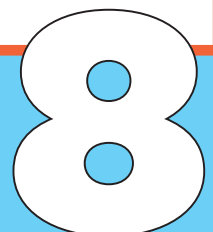
THE ADULT'S ROLE

Once furniture, storage and resources are in place for children to use the classroom environment effectively, adults must actively teach them how to use the resources very carefully. This is vital, requires great skill and must be accomplished incrementally. From the start, set high expectations of the children, and as time goes by continue to teach them additional skills and knowledge to enable them to access the resources with increased mastery and know-how. In this way the resources will continue to challenge the children for months to come.

Through our work at Early Excellence supporting EYFS practitioners in setting up and developing their environments, we have seen the impact that these principles have on ensuring that the physical aspects of settings – their furniture and resources – become a key part of supporting children's learning and development.



Matthew Sayer is a curriculum consultant at Early Excellence. For more information, visit earlyexcellence.com





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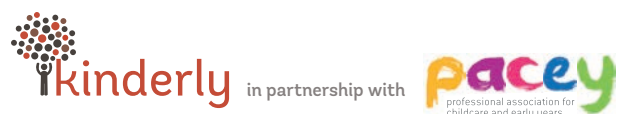
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“E-learning journeys enhance our provision”

*Retiring your traditional paper-based system and embracing digital technology can pay huge dividends, says **Emma Davis**...*

My experience with online, or ‘e-’, learning journeys began in 2014. I had concerns about the efficiency of our paper-based system – the endless stream of post-it notes as well as printing, cutting and annotating photographs had become a chore, taking up time far better spent with the children. I began to question the value of the whole process, particularly as parents were

reluctant to take the learning journeys home for fear of losing them.

I began researching online methods for recording children’s learning, development and achievements but was concerned that such systems would be impersonal. Happily, a trial of such a system put my mind at rest...

GETTING STARTED

There was some administrative work involved initially as we made the

transition – from preparing and sending out information and permission forms to parents, to inputting children and parents on the system, writing user guides and updating policies. Before ‘going live’ with the system, it was important that all staff and parents knew how to use it and what was expected of them.

Many parents began using their child’s e-learning journey immediately, adding photos and commenting on observations. Some took longer to build the confidence to engage with the system, but most did so with reassurance and support. After using the new system for a term, I sent out a questionnaire to parents to understand whether the implementation had been a success. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, with many parents commenting on how lovely it was to talk to their child about what they had been doing, using our photos as prompts.

Although I was happy with the transition, I still wanted more engagement from parents. How could we encourage those who hadn’t got involved without putting too much pressure on them? I decided to run a competition over the autumn, asking parents to head outside with their child over half term, collecting seasonal items in a paper bag we provided. I asked for photos of this activity to be added to the learning journey, and the photo judged to be the best would win

STUMBLING BLOCKS

Although the transition has been smooth, there have been some niggly issues to iron out. When it felt like staff were becoming too keen to upload any little thing a child had done, we introduced iPad-free days to relieve this pressure and ensure we maintained quality interactions.

As time has gone on, staff have become more at ease with the system, realising that not everything has to be recorded, so a balance has been found that suits everyone.

a prize each for parent and child. This worked incredibly well, with the majority of parents participating and telling us how much they enjoyed it.

IMPROVED ENGAGEMENT

Parents have told us how much they value knowing what their child has enjoyed, experienced and achieved with us. Previously, parents would often collect their child, ask them what they'd done that day, only for the child to shrug or say, "I can't remember." Now if children can't remember, parents can say, "I've seen you've been for a walk today" or "I saw you had fun in the sand", which leads on to lovely conversations.

Because the system is available 24/7, it's easily accessible and there is no risk of the parent losing it. Once the child leaves us, the whole learning journey is downloaded and saved on a disc for the parent to keep.

Since the system was implemented, engagement between setting and home has grown considerably. The impact of this on children has been the overriding success by far. They love showing us photos their parents have uploaded, talking about where they were, who they were with and what they were doing. This is fantastic for promoting communication and language development, as children can relive and retell experiences they rarely would have before. We use the information uploaded by parents as prompts in our discussions with the child, which allows them to elaborate on their experiences.

OUTSTANDING PROVISION

As a manager, I'm thrilled at how e-learning journeys have enhanced our provision. This was acknowledged by an Ofsted inspector when we were graded 'outstanding' in 2016. The inspector was impressed with the involvement from parents, the quality of observations and how the system allowed us to efficiently track children's development.

Although it takes time for me to read and moderate each observation before setting them to go live, I enjoy the process; an online system can be

just as personal, if not more so, than a paper system and I can now identify which staff member has written an observation, as they all use a different tone or style.

Parents now see many more photos of their child – we simply would never have been able to print the same number. There is also the option of including videos and uploading information and reminders to keep parents up-to-date on events and news from the setting. Photos are taken of children's drawings, paintings, constructions and creations, and are shared online. Children now often ask for something to be added to their learning journey as they want to show it when they get home.

GOING DIGITAL

HOW TO MAKE A SUCCESS OF E-LEARNING JOURNEYS...

- ❖ **Ensure parents are fully aware of the system and provide permission slips prior to setting children up with an online learning journey.**
- ❖ **Allow children to be involved. Perhaps they could take their own photos of things they like at the setting and help to upload them?**
- ❖ **If parents have commented on an observation or uploaded photos, acknowledge this to ensure they realise that their effort is appreciated. They'll be more likely to contribute again in the future!**
- ❖ **Read all observations before allowing them to go live, so any spelling mistakes or grammatical errors can be corrected before parents view them.**



Emma Davis is an Early Years Teacher and setting manager.



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SHOULD WE BE TWEETING?

*Is your nursery making the most of the opportunities Twitter provides? **Julie Waite** offers tips on getting started...*

To the uninitiated, Twitter can seem like a daunting and confusing world; it has its own language (tweets, followers, hashtags), people have different names (@who?!) and what about the trolls! But, it's actually not that scary – in fact, once you get started it's rather enjoyable and it can bring benefits for both your business and childcare practice.

WHY TWEET?

People tweet for many reasons: some are campaigning for change, some are communicating with friends, and for others it's just a stream of consciousness. However, as a business, you must be clear about why you want to use Twitter; make it part of your business strategy and set objectives.

Nurseries use Twitter to

- ❖ improve communication with parents,
- ❖ share and discover best practice ideas,
- ❖ keep up-to-date with sector news,
- ❖ network with other early years professionals,
- ❖ develop relationships with their local community,
- ❖ build a profile for the brand or an individual, and
- ❖ promote and grow their business.

If these benefits resonate with your nursery, then Twitter could be for you. You might be feeling a little hesitant, though, and concerned about what could go wrong, but Janet Bebb, a social media consultant at Social Progress (@SocialProgress), advises, "Don't worry too much about 'what if' and 'maybe' or negative comments and trolls. If your setting provides a great place for children to learn and play, then you have nothing to worry about. And, as for trolls, you're

a small fish in a big pond – trolls have bigger fish to fry."

GETTING STARTED

If you're ready to take the plunge, you'll need to get your head around some Twitter basics:

1 After you've signed up, choose a username/profile name – this must be fewer than 15 characters. Choose a name that includes both your nursery name and an indication of what you do, e.g. @XYZnursery or @XYZchildcare.

2 Add a profile photo (your logo, a picture of your setting, an image that encapsulates what you are about or your own photo if the focus is on you) and a header photo (a colourful image, perhaps of children having fun and something that fits with your brand).

3 Complete your bio – this is your chance to sell yourself; include what you do, where you are and your website address.

4 Start following people – explore Twitter to find people or businesses you are interested in and start following them. Look at other nurseries, local businesses, membership associations, news outlets or online magazines (e.g. @TeachEarlyYrs). By observing others, you'll get ideas of what to tweet and learn how people interact on Twitter. You'll also get people following you back!

5 Tweet! Writing your first post can be nerve-racking, but, given that the average lifespan of a tweet is a mere 18 minutes and at this stage you won't have many followers, the likelihood is that it will go largely unnoticed.

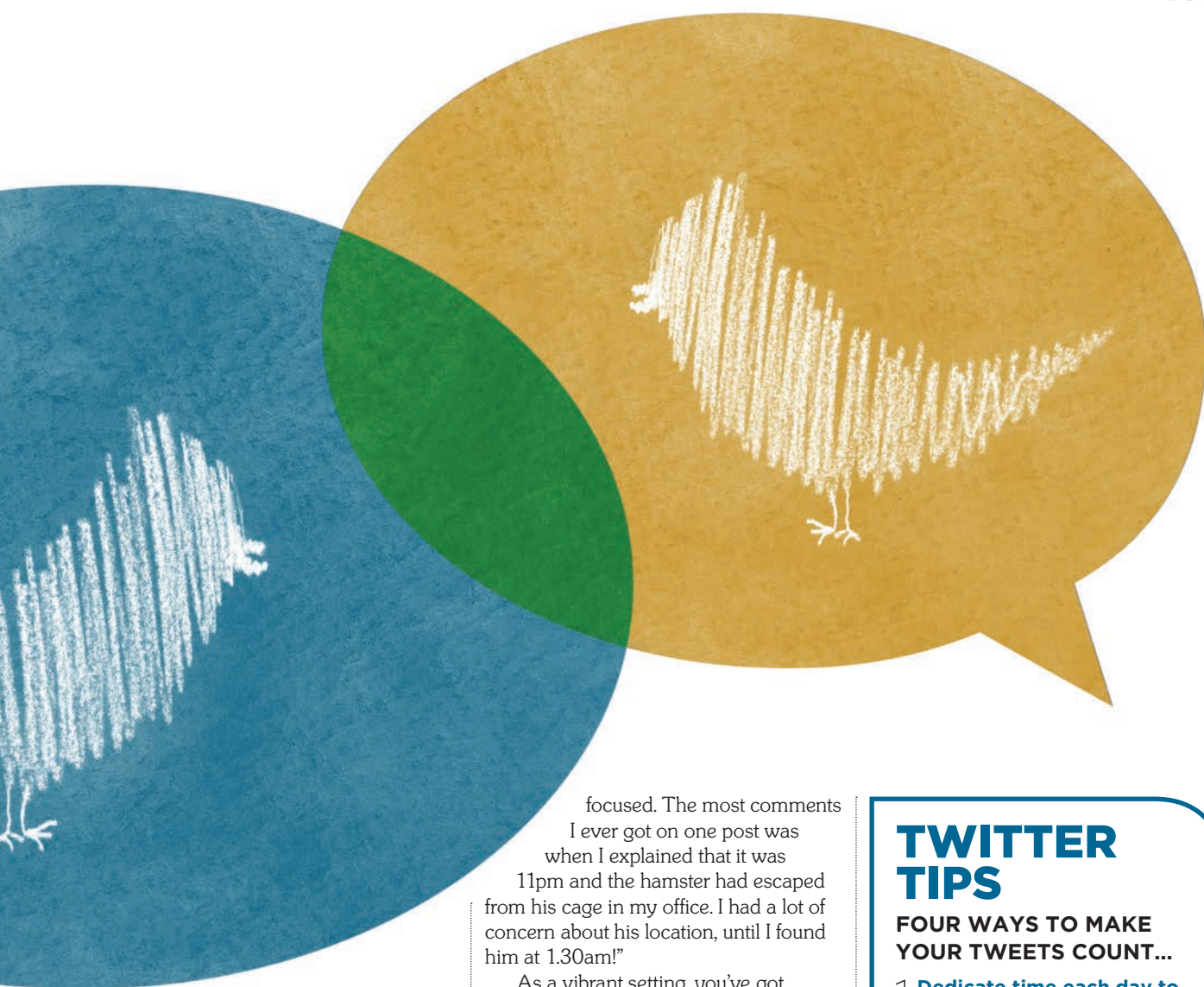
6 Interact with people – Twitter is all about being sociable and this means looking at what other people tweet, having conversations, retweeting interesting posts and 'liking' posts.

And that's it – six easy steps to starting out on Twitter. It really is that simple!

THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

Once you're all set up on Twitter, you need to plan what you are going to tweet about and how often – frequency and quality of tweets are the two critical factors for success. To build an engaged following, tweet daily, or several times a week, as a minimum. This might feel like a big commitment, but you'll soon get used to it and the business benefits will be worth the time invested.

Before getting started, though,



explain what you're doing to parents and staff, and get them on board. Mary Llewellyn of Snapdragons Nurseries (@snapdragonsltd), advises, "The biggest area for caution is ensuring that all parental consents for images of their children are watertight. We have a thorough process for informing parents about how we use all our social media platforms; they can select which ones they wish their children to appear on and can change their minds at any time." Also, avoid using names of children alongside photos – even first names.

When planning the content of your tweets, don't be too 'salesy'. Perhaps set yourself a ratio of sales:social tweets, with just one promotional tweet in every 10 – and even then keep it low key. Sarah Steel, MD of The Old Station Nursery Group (@nurserysarah), comments, "I tweet about things that are going on in my nurseries and personal things, to stop it from being too 'sales'

focused. The most comments I ever got on one post was when I explained that it was 11pm and the hamster had escaped from his cage in my office. I had a lot of concern about his location, until I found him at 1.30am!"

As a vibrant setting, you've got masses of attractive content just waiting to be shared, including

- ❖ events – fundraising, open days, festivals;
- ❖ news – successes, awards, inspection reports, new developments, comments on sector news;
- ❖ activities – images of children playing and learning, children's artwork, outdoor fun, role play, visitors to the nursery.

The list of tweetable topics is as big as your imagination! So what are you waiting for? Get tweeting!



Julie Waite is a writer and marketing consultant working in the early years sector. Visit jwaitemarketing.com or follow on Twitter @JWaiteMarketing

TWITTER TIPS

FOUR WAYS TO MAKE YOUR TWEETS COUNT...

- 1 **Dedicate time each day to tweet, and stick to it! If you can't do it every day, then you could use a free scheduling tool such as Hootsuite or Buffer to set up several tweets and choose when you want them to be posted.**
- 2 **Have a purpose for each tweet – are you showcasing your facilities? Demonstrating good practice? Directing people to your website? Engaging people in an event?**
- 3 **Use appropriate hashtags for a wider audience, e.g. #NationalStorytellingWeek, #earlyyears, #Yorkshire (or your location).**
- 4 **Include an image – posts with pictures or videos get more likes, retweets and clicks.**



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Is your data at risk?

The personal information you store and process must be kept secure.

Andy Mills discusses the benefits to your business of gaining ISO/IEC 27001 certification...



In an environment where trusting technology to store, manage and share data is the norm, and data storage applications such as cloud-based systems develop year-on-year, introducing a robust information security management system is of increasing importance to nursery owners.

ISO/IEC 27001:2013 is the latest version of the global standard for information security, published in 2013. It defines a risk-based management system for protecting information and information-processing facilities. Although the title is 'information security management system' it includes requirements for physical security as well.

IDENTIFY RISKS, TAKE CONTROL

It is essential for any organisation, no matter its size, to proactively address information security issues, and this ISO standard is a first line of defence against hackers, viruses and the theft of intellectual property. It ensures that your information security is under control through specified and audited management systems. It also raises awareness of possible threats to information and how you can put procedures in place to protect it.

A UKAS-accredited certification to the standard demonstrates that your organisation is following international information security best practices, that it has been audited by an approved certification body and ultimately provides children and their parents with the reassurance that their information is protected.

SECURITY STRATEGIES

To implement an effective information security management system, you should begin by understanding its

context and the internal and external issues that can affect the organisation and the *confidentiality, integrity and availability* of the information you hold about your children. You will also need to identify the interested parties and your assets (tangible, intangible assets including data, particularly sensitive and personally identifiable data). Once they have been identified you can conduct a risk assessment and identify the security controls needed.

Consider the 'rule of three', i.e. ensure you have three layers of protection between the asset you need to protect and the threat. A multi-layered information security strategy can apply equally to data and the information-processing facilities, which are the computers and filing cabinets where data is processed/stored. Your communications infrastructure, such as WiFi, LAN, Broadband etc. also needs to be secured.

PREPARING FOR GDPR

A crucial element of ISO/IEC 27001 for educational institutions is its information security processes for handling children's data, such as name, address, home contact details, next of kin and medical information such as allergies, etc.

On 25 May 2018 the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, see ico.org.uk) comes into force. It makes a number of specific provisions in relation to the handling of children's personal data and will introduce potentially massive fines for a data breach. Note that under GDPR 'personal data' includes

- ❖ racial or ethnic origin,
- ❖ religious or philosophical beliefs,
- ❖ genetic data and biometric data,

- ❖ health,
- ❖ ID number, and
- ❖ location data.

GOVERNANCE, RISK & COMPLIANCE

Compliance with obligations, applicable legislation and regulation is important for all organisations, including nurseries. ISO/IEC 27001 embraces *governance, risk and compliance* in its requirements for an information security management system.

Many cases of data theft are a human resources issue. The ISO/IEC 27001 security controls cover HR functions such as roles and responsibilities of employees, contractors and third-party users. It requires you to have the processes needed to perform security screening and background verification checks on all candidates for employment, contractors and third parties, and have both robust terms of employment in place and termination processes to ensure that assets are returned and access rights removed.

It's also important to raise awareness of information security risks within the nursery and to educate personnel within the organisation. As long as the security control systems are in place, you can develop data-sharing control among staff to improve processes, so there are many benefits.



Andy Mills is an ISO auditor and founder of Applied Risk Management Ltd.

Better places to play

*Your outdoor area is a major part of your educational offering, so don't take chances when it's time to upgrade, says **Mark Hardy**...*

The benefits of free-flow play in early years settings are well documented. Children view the world with fresh eyes outdoors and the Early Years Foundation Stage recognises outdoor play as an important part of child development, nurturing independence and communication skills while supporting physical and mental health and wellbeing.

A large outside space is every nursery manager's dream, but for many, this simply isn't possible. Small spaces, however, needn't limit opportunities for children to play, learn and be active. With expert knowledge, planning and creative design skills, an outdoor area can be transformed into a fantastic space for play and physical activity.

UPDATE REQUIRED

How can you tell if it's time to update your outside space? Watch out for the four telltale signs, as identified by Association of Play Industries (API) members, that a nursery's outdoor facilities need an upgrade:

- 1 Equipment has come to the end of its usable life, poses a safety risk or is dangerous. Rotting timber, rusty metal and broken parts all signal the need to replace equipment.
- 2 Facilities no longer meet the requirements of the EYFS or are failing to support children's learning and development.
- 3 Children have lost interest. Tired spaces and equipment with limited play value hold little appeal for children or staff.
- 4 There is little or no relationship between the nursery's indoor and outdoor spaces to support free-flow play.



Improving your outside space can be a significant investment, so choose a reputable supplier.

If your nursery's outdoor space is exhibiting these symptoms, it's time to update your facilities. When planning outdoor improvements, there are eight key points for nurseries to consider...

- ❖ **Aims and outcomes:** what do you want to achieve? The best free-flow play spaces enable free movement between the indoor and outdoor environments, and allow flexibility to reflect changing factors like weather conditions and seasonal themes.
- ❖ **Budget:** whether making CAPEX investment or fundraising for improvements, the API website's Funding section (bit.ly/1Anf2oT) is a good place to start. See our budget guide later in this piece.
- ❖ **Capacity:** how many children will use the facilities at any one time

and what will they use it for? Play equipment standards are based on minimum user numbers, not large numbers of children playing at the same time; API member designs are based around maximum usage.

- ❖ **Surfacing:** safety surfacing protects against injuries and can be used to create different themed areas. There are man-made and natural surfacing options to consider.
- ❖ **Risk:** don't panic! Risk assessments needn't restrict children's enjoyment of playing and being active. Children enjoy and benefit from a degree of risk when playing, so make sure the solution you choose incorporates suitable challenge.
- ❖ **Standards:** play equipment and surfacing should conform to relevant standards – they are viewed as best practice. Avoid contractors that dismiss standards.
- ❖ **Post-installation inspection:** before children use new equipment, a post-installation inspection should take place. A registered, certificated Register of Play Inspectors International (RPII) inspector (playinspectors.com) should check facilities before use.





❖ **Repair and maintenance:**

regular servicing and replacement of worn-out parts is essential to keep play equipment safe and compliant. API members provide nationwide maintenance and repair services.

WHAT SHOULD I SPEND?

So you've made the decision to update your facilities, but how do you decide how much to spend and what to buy? As a rough guide, and allowing for variables, minor improvements that make the most of a fairly small area with multipurpose equipment and appropriate surfacing will cost under £5,000. For large-scale improvements that enable effortless free flow from indoors to outdoors, including fixed equipment, allow £10,000+, and for a complete transformation of existing play areas or the creation of new facilities from scratch, costs could be significantly higher.

Of course, every nursery is different and the number of variables considerable. Good contractors will approach every design individually to meet your specific objectives, budget and brief.

THE BENEFITS

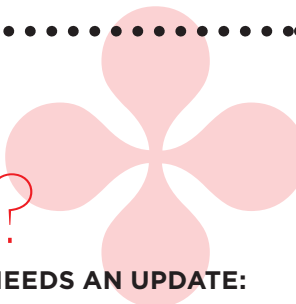
Rest assured, by improving your outdoor facilities for learning and play, you'll be making a sound investment. API members design equipment specifically to support learning and development. High-quality facilities can also help improve Ofsted judgements and attract new admissions.

Most beneficial to under-fives' are resources that encourage exploration and discovery, and support gross and fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination – from imaginative play, den-building and sensory play, to mark making and nature play. For nurseries on a tight budget, flexible, multipurpose or non-prescriptive equipment that addresses multiple development priorities is an effective solution.



*Mark Hardy is chair of the Association of Play Industries. For further advice, visit api-play.org or contact Deborah Holt, API Association Manager, on **024 7641 4999** or email api@api-play.org*

TIME FOR A CHANGE?



TELLTALE SIGNS YOUR OUTSIDE SPACE NEEDS AN UPDATE:

1. **Equipment has reached the end of its usable life or is unsafe.**
2. **Facilities no longer meet the requirements of the EYFS.**
3. **Children have lost interest.**
4. **Lack of relationship between indoor and outdoor space for free-flow play.**

REASONS TO USE AN API MEMBER:

- ❖ **Experienced, expert play professionals.**
- ❖ **Committed to high standards, quality and customer service.**
- ❖ **Abide by a Professional Code of Conduct.**
- ❖ **Financially stable.**

Need inspiration? Visit Schools Get Active, API's dedicated hub for education settings – api-play.org/schoolsgetactive

PLAY MATTERS

The API campaigns for policy recognition of the value of play because government is yet to acknowledge play's vital importance to child development, health and wellbeing. Physical inactivity poses as big a threat to public health as smoking, and children need time, space and opportunity to be active. Nurseries have a vital part to play in that and the API is here to help them make the very most of their outside space.

Partnering with parents

*Your team must work with mums and dads to secure the best outcomes for children – Busy Bees' **Lisa Snell** explains how...*

Education doesn't, and shouldn't, finish at school or nursery. A child's developmental journey starts well before their first word, and continually evolves, meaning parents have a vital and ongoing role in inspiring their lifelong appetite for learning. As childcare professionals and teachers, we have a combined responsibility to work with mums and dads to ensure they feel comfortable and supported, as we work together to provide children with new experiences and learning opportunities that spark their imagination and encourage their natural curiosity as they grow.

At Busy Bees, involving parents in the work we do in nursery is considered incredibly important. We work as a team to introduce activities that children can engage with, and as well as encouraging and supporting an ongoing positive relationship with learning, these activities can all be easily replicated at home with household items.

After all, learning happens in everyday life! As children, we observe how the adults around us communicate before we begin to speak; we compare, describe and look for patterns in play. Our job as parents and practitioners is to encourage this natural curiosity in children, capturing their imaginations and encouraging them to search for solutions independently as they use their natural problem-solving abilities.

In practice

By introducing child-led measuring and counting activities into play or everyday situations we are able to introduce

learning concepts in an organic way without children losing interest or switching off. Simple activities such as searching for leaves and treasures in the garden or measuring the height of straws in sand all help to bring learning outside of the traditional classroom setting, changing the way children acquire knowledge. Rather than sitting at a desk, children are immediately encouraged to be more creative as they have the freedom to use their whole bodies to learn as they explore the world around them.

Activities like this also lead the way for the natural development of communication skills as practitioners and parents alike have more freedom to prompt children to use descriptive words, and make more complex sentences to express themselves, all whilst building on fine and gross motor skills through games and play.

SHARING INFORMATION

Building a relationship with parents, based on communication and trust ensures knowledge can be freely shared and, ultimately, that children can benefit from a consistent and united approach. Part of our daily routine as practitioners is to observe and record the developmental progress of the children we look after, making sure that every child is receiving the best quality care, so it is only natural that this becomes one of the most important things we share with parents.

A strong relationship between a child's parents or carers and their key person provides practitioners with vital



information about the child's family, hobbies and interests. This helps us as practitioners to get to know a bit more about the individual child, allowing us to introduce activities based on their likes, strengths or hobbies, which helps to make the child feel comfortable and confident, and substantially improve their outcomes.

We've also found that building this relationship encourages parents to feel more comfortable asking practitioners for support and guidance, or advice on activities or games they can try with their child at home.

DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

Using a learning journal to record observations, developmental milestones and special or 'wow' moments affords parents a complete picture of their



START A DIALOGUE

THREE WAYS TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH HOME...

- 1 **Share details of activities that the child enjoys. This will help parents support learning that has taken place in nursery.**
- 2 **Share progress updates, milestones and wow moments. Providing updates helps to ensure parents are not covering old ground or overestimating a child's abilities.**
- 3 **Encourage a two-way flow of conversation. The more information that's shared about a child, the more tailored the activities can be, at home or in nursery.**



child's progress at nursery. They benefit the child's key person by tracking progress in activities, and mean that parents are able to supplement activities carried out in nursery by introducing new and exciting challenges at home. Alternatively, practitioners can talk parents through activities the child particularly enjoys, or struggles with, so they can be worked on at home, giving the child the best, all-encompassing learning experience.

The introduction of electronic learning journals and digital platforms, such as the iConnect app we use in a selection of our Busy Bees nurseries, has only helped to strengthen this relationship by allowing an instantaneous two-way flow of communication. Unlike traditional, paper-based learning journals, digital

solutions allow parents and practitioners to instantly share photographs and videos of key events in the child's day, and record children taking part in activities.

As well as ensuring that parents don't miss out on important steps in their child's life, they encourage dialogue, and we often find that while children are away from nursery, parents share important milestones with practitioners. This stretches beyond the typical pick-up or drop-off conversation, giving the child's key person a clearer picture of a child's development at home.

SUPPORTING PARENTS

Essentially, the relationship between parent or carer and practitioner is

almost as important as the relationship between key person and child. Children often spend more time at home than they do in nursery, which makes it our responsibility as practitioners to see that our parents are equipped to support children with learning activities that have been developed in nursery. Working cohesively, sharing information and continuing to support parents all helps to give children the best learning experience, and ultimately, make a dramatic difference to their relationship with education, and their outcomes.



As early years director at Busy Bees Childcare, Lisa Snell, has been influential in shaping childcare and education standards

across the nursery group's 268 nurseries. Alongside her innovative team of childcare practitioners, Lisa has worked tirelessly to create better outcomes for more children.

STANDARDISE YOUR MENUS AND SAVE

*It's possible to cut food costs without sacrificing quality, but you must know what you're serving, says **Nigel Denby**...*



For any business that provides food to its service users, efficiency is essential to survival.

Yet all too often it's overlooked in nurseries. There is no single strategy to save money when it comes to food, but by implementing a few simple steps you can save small amounts here and there that will make a real difference to your food bills. As importantly, this strategy is critical to knowing the nutritional value of your food, and to being able to demonstrate that value.

SERVING SUGGESTIONS

Grub4Life carried out a very simple exercise that illustrates how nursery food budgets are often inefficiently managed. Nine chefs working across different sites within a nursery group were asked to write down the list of ingredients they would use to prepare a shepherd's pie for 10 children.

The results showed that while nurseries within the group used a centralised menu, this menu was interpreted at a local level, with chefs

using their own recipes. The lack of a standardised menu was having a deleterious impact on nutrition and food budgets, and in effect had left the business with no measurable financial or nutritional food standards at all. Each shepherd's pie recipe

- ❖ produced a different portion size,
- ❖ provided different nutrient levels,
- ❖ cost a different amount to produce.

It's this simple: you cannot feed 30 or 130 children all day, every day without observing some simple rules on the way your food budget is managed.

Standard recipes

Standard recipes are critical. Cooks tend to carry all their knowledge in their head, but that makes your business vulnerable: what happens if your cook is sick or leaves? All that knowledge goes with them.

From a budgeting point of view, you cannot cost a meal without a recipe. You need the recipe to tell you the quantity of ingredients needed to produce a specific number of portions. This is the information you need in order to negotiate discounts and special deals with local suppliers or wholesalers. If you don't know how much you use of an ingredient, you will always struggle to get a good deal. Waste can also be significantly improved using a portion-controlled recipe; it ensures you produce the right amount of food and acts as a very useful guide to serve the right-sized portion for each child.

From a nutritional point of view, portion-controlled recipes and standard

menus are essential. Nutritional analysis relies on accuracy of ingredient weights and recipe yields; without these it's impossible for you to demonstrate the nutritional value of your food.

PURCHASING POWER

Whether you are an independent nursery or part of a national chain, you have the power to negotiate preferential rates with your suppliers, providing you have standard menus and portion-controlled recipes.

Independents

Local suppliers are often keen to advertise their links with local businesses, so you might want to consider displaying your local food supply network in the nursery. It's a good marketing tool and USP for the nursery, and goes down well with parents. They will be much more able to negotiate a discount for you than a supermarket can – you have to ask, and be confident about the volumes of ingredients you need.

Markets

Would you pay £2 for a pineapple in a shop when you can get three pineapples for £1 on the fruit and veg



***You cannot
cost a meal
without a recipe.***



one free' and other special offers, for a nursery group it's a long way from being the most efficient way to buy food:

- ❖ You have no control over use-by dates.
- ❖ Replacements foods sent when a product is out of stock will not always be suitable replacements for children.

Wholesalers

Grub4Life has worked with a number of nursery groups to help them plan and negotiate food supply from catering wholesalers. While this can be a big project, the savings that can be made with economies of scale cannot be ignored. The key tools you need are planned menus, recipes and clear ingredients requirements. You'll also need an accurate estimate of your annual or monthly food spend. Some wholesalers are clued up to the needs of early years settings and understand under-fives' nutritional needs; others are not so knowledgeable. Identify some key under-fives-friendly ingredients like tuna in spring water or low-salt stock cubes and see if a wholesaler stocks these.

market? If you're lucky enough to have a local market, check it out.

Talk to stall holders and establish a relationship with them. A single nursery is a very attractive regular customer to a trader; use your buying power to establish a discount.

Supermarkets

Supermarkets can be a convenient, time- and money-saving one-stop shop. Budget fruit and vegetables are just as nutritious as premium or organic fruit and veg; they're just not as uniform in size and shape. Processed foods, like cereals, fruit juice, cold meats and bakery goods may vary nutritionally from the mainstream brands, so it's important to compare labels before choosing the cheapest.

While online shopping does allow you to take advantage of 'buy one, get

CONSISTENTLY CREATIVE

AGREEING A STANDARD MENU DOESN'T MEAN BEING INFLEXIBLE...

- ✿ Use a rotational menu that operates over 3-4 weeks, with accompanying recipes that specify the number of portions they produce.
- ✿ Your recipes can and should be from your cook's own repertoire. Efficiency is not about stifling creativity.
- ✿ Your menu and recipes can be flexible in order take advantage of special offers - e.g. you may want to include a weekly roast on the menu but leave the meat choice optional to take advantage of changing prices.
- ✿ Similarly, fish pie can be made with a wide range of fish without adversely affecting its nutritional value. Fish prices vary enormously according to availability: coley, Vietnamese cobbler, haddock, plaice or pollock are equally as nutritious as cod, but will often be cheaper.

.....



Nigel Denby is a registered dietician and founder of Grub4Life. To find out more about the support he

offers early years settings, email feedback@grub4life.com



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Samantha Squires - Manager

The Children love the food and we are able to demonstrate to our parents the nutritional benefits their children receive.
Shaumit Saglani - Manager

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TALKING TABLEWARE

Confused about which cups, plates and cutlery to give your children?

Carol Moodie has seven pointers to help you make up your mind...

Mealtimes at nursery are never going to be the cleanest of events, but choosing the right tableware can help to minimise mess and breakages, and even add some welcome colour and fun to proceedings. Here's what you need to keep in mind when purchasing your next set...

1 SAFETY & DURABILITY

Safety is one of your top priorities but encouraging children to eat independently will obviously lead to dropped plates and cups. So finding tableware that is virtually unbreakable and thus capable of withstanding daily abuse from toddlers makes sense.

Crockery and glass are great, and will certainly give the children a more grown-up eating experience, but consider the implications if they get broken. Tableware that bounces when dropped means that only food and drink will need to be cleaned up after an accident. Likewise, be careful if you choose melamine as it can be sharp if it gets broken. Tableware needs to be durable to ensure value for money and safety.

2 COLOUR

Using fun, colourful tableware can entice even the fussiest babies and toddlers to try something new. Why not use different colours for different rooms, for different diets or simply to help children learn the colours?

3 BUDGET

The old saying 'buy cheap, buy twice' is relevant to tableware purchases too. Cheap products won't withstand regular dishwashing as they will warp and their colour will fade. A good investment will mean



your tableware shouldn't let you down, saving you money in the long term.

4 INDEPENDENT FEEDING

Mealtimes would be even more hectic if your staff had to help each child feed themselves, so encouraging independent feeding is a must. Look out for cutlery with a slight grip, which is easier to hold and feed with. Generally a fork and spoon are sufficient, but a blunt knife can be introduced as the children get older.

Cups without spouts lead to many accidents, but this is the only way the children will learn – introducing a plastic open cup (perhaps initially with two handles) is definitely the way forward.

Why not try a bowl with high sides and even handles to hold, or a plate with a slight rim to help the children?

5 RANGE OF PRODUCTS

Do you want all your tableware to be the same? If so, look for a range that has all the products you need. Sourcing from one supplier can often save you money as well as time.

6 MEALTIME SERVICE

Some nurseries will plate up meals in the kitchen, in which case you will need to consider whether a tray would be suitable. Others like to offer self-service within the individual rooms, especially as the children get older. You might like to look at the option of larger – but not too deep – serving bowls and dishes for the children to help themselves from.

7 HOUSE-KEEPING

Time is of the essence when it comes to mealtimes with children. You need tableware that is easy to handle and likewise quick and easy to clear away. For this reason, make sure you choose products that are dishwasher safe. Cleanliness is also important. Opt for tableware that is made from a non-porous material, so if it gets scratched or chipped then bacteria will not be absorbed into the scratches and staining will be minimised.



*For further advice on choosing tableware for your nursery, contact Carol at Harfield Tableware on **0161 477 5678**, or by emailing **carolmoodie@harfieldtableware.co.uk***

LEAD A TEAM THAT GETS ALONG

*It's not only children who exhibit challenging behaviour. **Cath Hunter** explains how to help your practitioners develop positive relationships...*

A large part of my job involves supporting staff in developing strategies to manage challenging behaviour in children. I also spend a significant amount of time supporting senior staff in managing challenging behaviour from other staff members. In my experience, although the behaviour may differ, challenging children and challenging staff have a lot in common. The vast majority of people do not choose to present difficult behaviour, and in the same way as children are communicating through their behaviour, so too are adults. When children are challenging adults, refusing to do things and being difficult, they are often feeling scared and anxious, and when adults show similar behaviour, the feelings are often the same.

So, how can we respond to challenging adults and create a positive working environment?

POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The importance of a positive working environment cannot be underestimated. Ensuring people feel they belong and are needed and valued, along with dealing with negativity, blame and gossip, so that people feel happy and experience job satisfaction, is crucial if you want an effective workforce. The quality of staff relationships affects practitioners' ability to work together effectively and create an emotionally safe environment for the children.

Relationships between staff should incorporate open and honest communication along with mutual

respect and appreciation. This can be demonstrated in front of the children so they are able to experience the positive impact of relating to other people in this way. Conversely, if relationships between staff are characterised by mistrust, resentment and animosity then this may be witnessed by the children through verbal and non-verbal interactions, which can result in them becoming anxious and their behaviour changing.

It's essential that staff look after and support each other's emotional wellbeing and are able to identify positive ways to manage their stress. If staff are feeling fragile or vulnerable, this can affect their ability to develop and maintain relationships with the children. So how can this be achieved?

Learn to reflect

The key to maintaining any good relationship is the ability to self-reflect. It's beneficial for all practitioners to reflect on themselves and their practice in an honest and open manner while also considering how their behaviour may impact on other members of their team in a positive or negative way.

In order to develop this self-awareness, staff need to feel comfortable, and for other members of the team to demonstrate mutual support and a commitment to excellent practice. This creates a positive environment that encourages practitioners to identify and work together on areas that need improving – conducting honest appraisals of what they react to and why, along with listing strengths and areas to improve on, and cultivating a willingness to change.

The quality of relationships and levels of professionalism between staff across a setting can create either a supportive and effective team, or a divided group of people who are all struggling to go to work every day.

CASE STUDY

Sonia, a nursery practitioner, loved working with the children in her setting but was often negative and confrontational towards other members of staff. When challenged about this she would get upset, say that no one liked her and found it hard to understand her part in it. Her manager encouraged her to keep a brief journal entry at the end of each day and asked her to list what she enjoyed and didn't enjoy and why. At the end of the week her manager was able to gently explore with her how she may have contributed to the conflicts and supported her to attend an assertiveness course, which she found invaluable.





IMPROVE YOUR STAFF

SIX THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN WORKING ON YOUR TEAM'S BEHAVIOUR...

- ✿ Take care of the impact that being a manager has on you; remember to look after yourself so that you can look after and support others.
- ✿ Remember that challenging staff are often dealing with challenging feelings.
- ✿ Feeling valued and motivated is an essential ingredient of good practice.
- ✿ Poor staff relationships can have a negative impact on children and their behaviour.
- ✿ Self-reflection in a safe environment encourages ownership of behaviour and a willingness to change.
- ✿ Model good practice to staff and children – all this applies to you too!

Prioritise training

High-quality professional development is of paramount importance for all staff, so opportunities to access additional, relevant training need to be made available to everyone. Good training can impact an entire team by motivating individual staff members and providing opportunities to share good practice and encourage new ideas and initiatives.

Improve morale

Staff need to feel valued and supported in their work in order to be productive, and their morale can impact children in a positive or negative way. While it is a rewarding and enjoyable job, working in a nursery can be demanding and exhausting. To give their best to the children, they need to feel happy and fulfilled. It is important that staff feel they are making a difference and that they are essential cogs in the wheel of nursery life. A setting needs to be

Staff need to feel valued and supported in order to be productive.

emotionally safe for staff in order to be emotionally safe for children.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In order for a nursery setting to be successful it's crucial to nurture, support and empower the staff in the same way as you do the children. When staff feel valued and happy there is less likely to be conflict, and its absence will have a positive impact on staff, parents and children, resulting in a more harmonious place of work.



Cath Hunter is a play therapist (BAPT), trainer, therapeutic consultant and author specialising in understanding children's behaviour.

Her books include Understanding and Managing Children's Behaviour through Group Work Ages 3-5 (Routledge). Visit therapeuticfamilyinterventions.co.uk

The vital role of qualifications and CPD

*PACEY's second Building Blocks survey reveals a sector that's highly experienced and increasingly well-qualified, but further investment is needed, says **Liz Bayram...***

Building Blocks is the largest annual sector-wide survey open to all early years and childcare professionals working in England, from childminders to nannies to staff working in schools, nurseries, preschools and playgroups. Addressing a wide range of issues affecting the childcare and early years workforce, it provides a regular health check on the state of the sector.

We know the early years profession is fluid, and that people move in and out of different, related roles throughout their career, but this latest research proves that individuals are staying in the sector for the long haul. Just under a third of respondents (32%) reported having worked in childcare/early years for 20 years or more.

But perhaps one of the most striking findings from the survey is the significant impact that qualifications and

continuing professional development (CPD) have on everyday practice and confidence for professionals in all types of settings. It's evident that early years professionals are really seeing the benefit of qualifications.

BOOSTING QUALITY & CONFIDENCE

The Building Blocks research indicates that gaining early years qualifications and undertaking CPD has a significant impact on not only everyday practice but also confidence across all types of settings.

The statistics show that professionals in 'outstanding' settings are nearly 10% more likely to have undertaken 20 hours or more of CPD per year. Plus they are also around 10% more likely to have a degree-level qualification, putting a direct correlation between quality of setting and

qualifications and commitment to CPD.

Early years specialists agree that the key to providing high-quality childcare and early education is well-trained and qualified professionals (bit.ly/2mJDyy5). In England, the quality and qualifications of the childcare and early years workforce are steadily improving and 91% of early years registered providers are now 'good' or 'outstanding' according to Ofsted (bit.ly/2m7Zqzo).

Our research shows clearly that childcare and early years professionals find their work highly rewarding and are motivated to improve through gaining qualifications and CPD. But CPD has an even more pronounced influence: 83% of those we questioned cited an improvement in everyday practice and 74% said it improved their confidence.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The survey results do reveal divisions – professionals in non-

IN FIGURES

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE BUILDING BLOCKS SURVEY...

32% of early years professionals have worked in the sector for 20 years or more.

96% of professionals report that they find working in childcare and early years rewarding.

83% of childcare providers cited an improvement in everyday practice as a result of CPD; 74% said it improved their confidence.

53% of respondents reported that qualifications improve others' recognition of their professionalism.



The key to providing high-quality early education is well-trained and qualified professionals.

high levels of job satisfaction.

A career in childcare is fulfilling: nearly all (96%) professionals report that they find working in childcare and early years rewarding, and the vast majority (80%) report they plan to still be working in childcare and early years in 12 months' time.

But there's more that can be done. Partnership working between schools and early years settings is on the rise, but in the wake of 30 hours, it's imperative that we improve the quality of these partnerships and increase the involvement of childminding settings. Just over a third of early years professionals said schools were not willing to work with them – something that clearly needs to change.

This year Building Blocks has shown clearly that childcare providers are investing in their careers through their time, commitment and furthering their knowledge. So now it's time for the government and local authorities to really show their support, by investing in the exceptional workforce that we have.



Liz Bayram is chief executive of the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY). PACEY offers a range of training options for early years professionals working in nurseries and home-based settings. For further information, visit pacey.org.uk



domestic settings are much more likely to perceive the benefits of both qualifications and CPD than childminders, particularly when it comes to the impact on others' recognition of their professionalism, career and confidence.

Around half of respondents reported that qualifications and CPD improve others' recognition of their professionalism (53% for qualifications and 48% for CPD) and just under half also reported an improvement in career (48% for qualifications and 41% for CPD). Sadly, however, the impact of qualifications and CPD is far less marked on income; under a third (30%) reported that qualifications improve income, and for CPD the figure is only 14%.

Despite this, just under half (47%) said their highest qualification was a full Level 3 or Level 4, and only 7% of respondents reported not holding any sector-related qualifications. Professionals from non-domestic settings were significantly more likely to hold a degree-level qualification than those from childminding settings (51% vs 15%).

COMMITTED TO CPD

Training is also essential to high-quality practice, and nearly half of all respondents had committed to more than 20 hours of CPD over the last year. But more needs to be done to incentivise people by making it more affordable and more accessible. With practitioners working long hours, being able to afford the luxury of time to undertake CPD is a key issue for the workforce.

But it's extremely encouraging to see that the sector recognises the importance of CPD; in fact a quarter favoured converting CPD into higher qualifications over time. Specialist training is also proving more popular, especially in the areas of children with SEN; the Prevent duty; and speech and language.

REWARDING ROLES

Despite the turbulent times, and the sector's diversity, the Building Blocks survey shows that early years professionals still have a great deal in common, including similar levels of experience, a strong commitment to continuous improvement, and very



Mind your own business

Dr Jo Verrill

About Early Years will uncover the information the sector needs to provide high-quality childcare...

Managing a business can be tough, especially if you are heavily involved in hands-on delivery too. Finding protected time to look at what is happening right now and into the future in terms of your business costs, income, staffing, changes in local provision and the number of children in your area... it's a very tall order. Do you feel like you have more questions than answers?

- ❖ How much does it cost to deliver one hour's care for the three- and four-year-olds in your setting?
- ❖ What makes up this cost and are the prices for these things changing?
- ❖ What will these figures be in a year's time when the National Living Wage goes up again?
- ❖ Are you covering these costs in the fees you charge?
- ❖ Do the funding rates you receive cover these costs?
- ❖ What is your occupancy rate and what is affecting it right now – new provision in the area, changes in the number of children living locally, changes in employment?
- ❖ What changes lie ahead and how

will they affect your occupancy?

- ❖ How long does it take you to fill a staff vacancy? If it's tough, why is that?
- ❖ How long do staff stay, why do they leave, where do they go?

If you struggle with all of this, you are not on your own. Information is thin on the ground. Not just in early years settings but at policy level too, where huge decisions get made about the funding rates you will receive, the qualifications your staff must hold and the amount of childcare parents will be entitled to free of charge. Decisions that affect your organisation every day!

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

We believe that big decisions should be informed by a strong evidence base, an evidence base that just isn't there right now. Poor information leads to poor decisions that take a long time to reverse, and it takes longer still to undo the damage caused. GCSE English and maths requirements are a case in point.

Whether it's reliable large-scale analysis of what it costs to deliver quality childcare or workforce research

to get to the bottom of staff recruitment and retention issues in the sector, there is a gaping hole that needs to be filled.

ABOUT EARLY YEARS

About Early Years is an exciting new research programme about and for the early years sector. It's different. Led by independent research company Ceeda, informed by a sector advisory group and sponsored by organisations with a passion for early education, it will collect large-scale sector data three times a year, year-on-year.

We are delighted that the Pre-



Big decisions should be informed by a strong evidence base.





school Learning Alliance is taking a lead role as founding sponsor of the About Early Years programme. A leading voice for the sector, the Alliance will ensure that the intelligence gathered is used to inform national policy direction.

“Having worked with Ceeda on a number of research projects, we are pleased and excited to be part of this exciting new venture,” commented Neil Leitch, the Alliance’s chief executive. “We know first-hand the value of robust, independent early

years research and at a time of intense sector debate,

About Early Years

will provide a vital intelligence base

from which to inform and influence early years policy.”

The London Early Years Foundation will also play a key role as sponsor of the quality

and capacity theme, with other early supporters including the Childbase Partnership, Connect Childcare and NEyTCO.

HOW IT WILL WORK

We will be recruiting a representative panel of 3,000 day nurseries and preschools and 1,000 childminders during May 2017. The panel will be surveyed three times a year in spring, summer and autumn. Each wave will collect key measures such as occupancy and staff vacancies, plus a wave-specific subject focus like the workforce or delivery costs. This will mean the burden of giving information is spread across the year and for the first time, the peaks and troughs in occupancy can be captured and their impacts properly understood.

We will also be pulling together the existing facts and figures that sit in lots of different places, joining the threads to uncover the story they can tell us and what it means for provision in your area – for your business.


SPONSOR THE PROGRAMME


We are inviting all organisations working with, in or on behalf of the early years sector to get involved and support this work. Help fund this vital programme and promote your organisation at the same time with a range of sponsorship opportunities – find out more at bit.ly/2nom62Q

JOIN THE PANEL


IF YOU ARE APPROACHED TO BE ON THE PANEL, PLEASE GIVE IT YOUR SUPPORT.

YOUR TIME IS PRESSURED, YOUR INFORMATION CONFIDENTIAL AND WE COMPLETELY UNDERSTAND THAT YOU MAY OFTEN FEEL LIKE TELLING RESEARCHERS TO ‘MIND THEIR OWN BUSINESS’ – BUT THIS IS OUR PROMISE TO YOU:

 **We will streamline data collection as much as we can and involve the sector in its design so that it ‘makes sense’ and has practical value.**

 **We will provide you with your own confidential results so you get a *direct benefit* from taking part.**

 **We will *always* protect your data and anonymity.**

 **The research will be used to influence and inform the big decisions made by policy-makers, ultimately *helping you to manage your business and deliver the best care you can for families.***

Watch out for more information coming your way soon!

.....

Dr Jo Verrill is managing director at Ceeda. To find out more about Ceeda research services, email Jo at enquiries@ceeda.co.uk or call **0845 680 0631**. Visit ceeda.co.uk or share your thoughts by tweeting [@ceeda_uk](https://twitter.com/ceeda_uk)

The power of Play Therapy

*Your nursery could make a real difference to children with mental health problems or psychological issues, says Play Therapy UK's **Jeff Thomas...***

One in five UK children have a mental health problem or other psychological issues. Unless treated quickly these problems can become deep-rooted in adulthood, causing social problems. They already worry their parents.

Nursery settings have wonderful opportunities to address this issue because developing brains have more plasticity, enabling children's minds to change – especially when they receive the right therapy.

CREATIVE APPROACHES

Many children cannot talk about mental health problems because the underlying cause is lodged in their unconscious. Carolyn Kelly, a Play Therapy UK registrant, wrote a

therapeutic story for a little boy who just couldn't ask for help. It starts

Once upon a time there was a sailor called Mallory Twitch who lived on a little red boat in Pebbletown. Mallory Twitch was a very talented sailor and his skills were admired by everyone who saw him.

All the sailors moored their boats in the safety of Pebbletown Harbour. But Mallory Twitch kept his boat anchored outside the harbour because Mallory Twitch did things his own way. He spent every morning sailing and every afternoon eating cheese and chutney sandwiches.

If you want to read the rest, and find out more about how play therapy works and how you can use it in your nursery,

please email Monika at mokijep@majemail.com or call **01825 761 143**. For further information, visit playtherapy.org.uk and playtherapyregister.org.uk



Provide more help for the children and support for parents!

Train one of your staff as a Registered Practitioner in Therapeutic Play Skills or as a Certified Play Therapist.

- ✓ Alleviate children's emotional, behaviour problems and learning difficulties
- ✓ Increase children's happiness and emotional well-being
- ✓ Address attachment problems
- ✓ Help parents who want to improve their relationship with their children
- ✓ Increase services offered at a reasonable cost
- ✓ Improve the job satisfaction of your staff
- ✓ Strengthen your nursery's holistic approach
- ✓ Differentiate your services from the competition
- ✓ Reinforce your drive for high quality care
- ✓ Gain points in inspection visits

The APAC courses are the only ones that provide entry to the 'Register of Play and Creative Arts Therapists'.

The register is accredited by the Professional Standards Authority and managed by PTUK. This adds to the status of your nursery.



Nursery staff, with two or more years experience, are ideally suited to train as Play Therapy professionals.

Attend a one-day Introduction to Play Therapy course. Find out more:

Email: mokijep@majemail.com
Web: www.playtherapy.org.uk
Phone: 01825 761143

13 convenient training venues:

London Central (Waterloo), Tunbridge Wells, Birmingham, Bristol, Chester, Barnsley, Manchester, Huntingdon, Windsor, Glasgow, Edinburgh Truro, and Antrim.



Dee Rose, Play Therapy UK
The Coach House, Uckfield,
East Sussex TN22 1BU

What's new?

The latest tools, services and opportunities for your nursery business...



OUTDOOR ADVICE

Time outside is crucial to early development – it gives young, growing children access to one of the most enriching environments in which to access key areas of learning, from language, literacy and mathematics, to PSED, physical development and understanding the world. Timotay Playscapes has a free inspiration guide to outdoor play spaces and play equipment, packed with innovative and engaging educational ideas, which can help you bring your outdoor space to life. For your copy, email enquiries@timotayplayscapes.co.uk or call 01933 665 151.

MUDDY PUDDLE WALKS!

Peppa Pig's Muddy Puddle Walk for Save the Children is coming soon, so don't miss your chance to sign up! More than 5,000 nurseries, childminding groups and families are already planning a walk for their little ones between 8 and 14 May. The money they raise will make life better for children around the world. Will you be joining in the fun?

Sign up at MuddyPuddleWalk.org and get a free fundraising pack full of walk inspiration, amazing stories to show how your money will help, and free Peppa stickers and activities too!



THE MONTESSORI METHOD

Modern Montessori International is an organisation that was established with the purpose of maintaining Montessori tradition by promoting the most up-to-date and comprehensive childcare courses. MMI's top priority is to make Montessori information, resources and training more accessible to parents and teachers around the world.

For more information on the variety of courses offered, please call **020 8686 2727** or visit modernmontessori-intl.com



PLAY & PERFORM

Gopak knows more than a thing or two about making the most of your available space. You can transform your nursery with its multipurpose, lightweight Folding tables for daily activities, flexible Ultralight staging system for plays and performances, and its range of exceptional Early Years tables, available in a host of shapes, sizes and vibrant colours to provide stimulation for the youngest of children. Visit gopak.co.uk or call **0800 195 4255**.

ONLINE OBSERVATIONS

Kinderly's aim is to help early years settings give children the best start in life. This award-winning online learning journal and accounting package enables childcare practitioners to securely record EYFS observations, developmental progress and daily diaries without the need for paperwork.

Kinderly helps improve efficiency, enhance parent communication and provide instant, at-a-glance information to help manage one or more settings. Going digital means less time needed for EYFS paperwork, so more time can be spent on the children's development.

For more information, visit Kinderly.co.uk or email support@kinderly.co.uk



PROMOTION

All aboard!

Addgards' Kiddi Train Space Dividers offer the flexibility busy nurseries need...

Addgards' Kiddi Train Space Dividers are perfect for creating specific play or activity areas for young children. The dividers are designed to be durable and maintenance-free, ideal for use in a busy childcare environment, and are supplied in sets of four panels, including an engine and three carriages. Extra carriage panels can be



added using Addgards' patented hinge, allowing you to create a play area of any size or shape.

SAFE & EASY TO STORE

The Kiddi Train Space Dividers can be used to set up a quiet area, reading corner, messy space or an enclosed play area, and can be stored indoors or outdoors. A range of accessories is also available, including wall posts, gates and foot bases, giving you even greater flexibility.

The panels are bright, colourful and easy to clean, and fold away for easy storage when not in use. Most importantly, the dividers are safe and comply to BSEN 71-1:2011.

For more information, visit addgards.com



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FIRE!

How to reduce the risks

*Do you have the right processes and procedures in place to prevent a disaster? **Laura West** shares her advice on best practice...*

Fire is a serious matter for nurseries – remember, the EYFS states, “Providers must take reasonable steps to ensure the safety of children, staff and others on the premises in the case of fire or any other emergency, and must have an emergency evacuation procedure.”

It is the duty of the ‘Responsible Person’ to ensure the safety of employees and other relevant persons. This role should be taken very seriously, as failure to do so could result in you being liable.

ASSESS RISK

The Responsible Person is the employer and/or building owner or occupier; he/she must ensure that a fire risk assessment (FRA) is carried out and kept up-to-date. I recommend it’s completed by a professional fire risk assessor.

The FRA will identify what potentially could start a fire

and who may be a risk; you can then take appropriate action. The big question to consider is whether you can avoid the risk altogether. If you can’t, you must try to reduce the risk, e.g. by separating sources of fuel from ignition sources.

Think about where you keep items within your nursery. Is bedding stored near sources of heat or too close to electric outlets? How many electrical items do you have plugged into electrical sockets; are they overloaded? Is your tumble dryer filter full of lint? Good housekeeping is an essential part of fire prevention management.

CHECK EQUIPMENT

If a fire was to start, could all adults and children get out safely? As the employer you must ensure that appropriate safety measures are in place to minimise the risk of injury or loss of life.

Do you have adequate fire detection? This generally is a combination of both smoke and heat sensors. It’s essential to detect a fire and raise the alarm as fast as possible. Once you have this equipment, make sure it works by checking each call point regularly. I recommend testing your alarm system weekly, but it should be inspected by a

competent person at least twice a year.

Other fire safety checks should include a daily walk of the premises, and a monthly inspection to ensure that all fire exits and ‘means of

escape’ have clear access at all times, and that all emergency lighting is working. Fire extinguishers should also be checked monthly, but must also be inspected and certificated yearly by a fire protection equipment company. All these checks should be recorded in your fire log book.

PROVIDE TRAINING

It’s important that everyone has appropriate training on procedures they need to follow, including fire drills. I recommend that drills are completed at least once a quarter and should be carried out on different days and times, so that all staff and children can practise what to do and which route to take in the event of fire. Consider equipment that could assist in evacuating young children quickly, e.g. evacuation cots.

Remember that it is a requirement under The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order 2005) to provide staff with fire safety training. The training needs to be provided on induction and periodically following this, and a record of the training needs to be kept.

PRIORITISE PREVENTION

A FIRE NEEDS THREE THINGS TO START:

❖ **a source of Ignition**
(heaters, naked flame, etc.);

❖ **a source of Fuel**
(something that will burn, e.g. paper, cardboard, etc.); and

❖ **Oxygen.**

Remove any one of these elements from the ‘fire triangle’ and you will prevent a fire starting.



Laura West is the childcare health & safety specialist at MCW – a family-run business

specialising in the streamlining of health & safety and auditing processes in the childcare industry. For more information, visit mcwconsulting.co.uk





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Stay on top of safeguarding

How should you ensure the safety and welfare of your children?

Eve Piffaretti considers the statutory guidance...

Q WHAT IS THE STATUTORY FRAMEWORK FOR SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN IN EARLY YEARS?

A There is currently no general legal requirement on those working with children in England to report known or suspected child abuse or neglect. However, providers should follow statutory guidance on safeguarding children. Providers must have regard to the government's statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013', and the 'Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage' (EYFS, see bit.ly/1qoLqA7) sets out the requirements that all providers of early education and care must meet. Additionally, last year, Ofsted issued guidance for inspectors to use when inspecting safeguarding under the common inspection framework, 'Inspecting safeguarding in early years, education and skills settings' August 2016 ("the Ofsted guidance", see bit.ly/2bTUa1O).

Q HOW SHOULD YOU HEALTH-CHECK YOUR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES?

A Use the statutory framework and agreed procedures of your Local Safeguarding Children Board to form the basis of your safeguarding policies and procedures. Ensure that this is regularly reviewed and updated. Also, you must include an explanation of the action to be taken in the event of an allegation being made against a member of staff, and cover the use of mobile phones and cameras in the setting. Ensure staff understand these policies and procedures and have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding issues. The training you provide must enable them to identify signs of possible abuse and neglect at the



earliest opportunity, and to respond in a timely and appropriate way.

Providers must also ensure that people looking after children are suitable and this will require them to check suitability through a criminal records check.

Q HOW WILL OFSTED ASSESS YOUR SAFEGUARDING ARRANGEMENTS?

A The Ofsted guidance is a useful summary of your responsibilities. Inspectors will be looking for evidence of five main aspects of the setting's safeguarding arrangements:

- 1 the extent to which leaders create a positive culture where safeguarding is an important part of everyday life in the setting, backed up by training at every level;
- 2 the content, application and effectiveness of safeguarding policies and procedures, and safe recruitment and vetting processes;
- 3 the quality of safeguarding practice, including evidence that staff are aware of the signs that children or learners may be at risk of harm either within the setting or in the family or wider community outside the setting;

- 4 the timeliness of response to any safeguarding concerns that are raised; and
- 5 the quality of work to support multi-agency plans around the child or learner.

This guidance is not exhaustive and will be read in conjunction with the inspection handbook.

Q WHEN SHOULD YOU TAKE ACTION?

A If there are concerns about children's safety or welfare, a provider must notify agencies with statutory responsibilities without delay. This means the local children's social care services and where a child is in immediate danger or is at risk of harm, children's social care services and/or the police should be informed immediately.

Registered providers must inform Ofsted of any allegations of serious harm or abuse by any person working, or looking after children at their premises (whether the allegations relate to harm or abuse committed on the premises or elsewhere). Ofsted should also be notified of the action taken in respect of the allegations. These notifications must be made as soon as is reasonably practicable, but at the latest within 14 days of the allegations being made. Be aware that failure to do so without reasonable excuse is an offence.



Eve Piffaretti is a Partner at Blake Morgan LLP. She specialises in safeguarding and child protection

law and has a particular interest in children and young people's rights. For further advice, contact Eve at 029 2068 6143 / eve.piffaretti@blakemorgan.co.uk

WHAT DO PARENTS WANT?

Struggling to fill your places? Sarah Ockwell-Smith shares the six key concerns of discerning mums and dads...

I recently asked a group of 20 working parents what they most wanted from their child's nursery. Their responses all echoed the same six themes – so how many of the following are you paying attention to?

1 SHOW EMPATHY

The more empathy shown the better – to parents, children and fellow staff members. Parents want staff to know how difficult it is to leave their children in somebody else's care while they go to work. Several described wanting staff to know how much trust they've had to place in them. Parents also want nursery staff to model empathy to each

other, in order that their children grow up around good role models. They are concerned that children should be supported with their feelings, whatever those feelings may be. Their hopes are that crying children are cuddled and angry children are sat with and soothed while they calm down.

2 BE FLEXIBLE

Nurseries should treat children and their families as individuals, and appreciate that all children are different, with different needs at different times. Parents are concerned that staff should respect their unique parenting styles and beliefs. They want their children to be given flexibility to move, play, drink, eat and sleep when they need to – not when a setting schedules. These times will naturally look different for each child and will change on a daily basis. Finally, parents want staff to encourage independence at the child's pace, especially when it comes to dropping off and settling in.

3 BUILD A BOND

The idea of children being treated as if they were at home crops up lots. Parents want more hugging and less hot-housing; a strong attachment with one member of staff, but good natural relationships with all. They want small staff-child ratios, less structure and schedule, and more free play.

4 TELL IT LIKE IT IS

Parents want to know all about their child's day, even if it doesn't seem as if anything important has happened to staff. They want more photographs and conversation, and less written correspondence. They also want to be told the truth, even if that truth hurts. If their child cried all morning after they left, they don't want to be told she didn't cry for long at all. If their child hurt himself, or hurt another, they want to know.

5 EMBRACE NATURE

The only point raised concerning the physical environment was voiced repeatedly. Parents uniformly want their children to spend as much time in a natural environment as possible. They want the nursery to be home-like: soft cushions, rugs and sofas, soft lighting and calm sounds with no bright lights or hustle and bustle. Nature itself matters; the ideal is free access to the outdoors all day in a natural environment, no paving or climbing frames – trees and grass top the wish list, with a forest school being the ultimate dream.

6 LOVE WHAT YOU DO

When it comes to personal attributes, passion and patience are key. Parents also want staff to be as informed as possible, especially when it comes to current understanding of child psychology and neuroscience. Knowledge of attachment theory and the clash with many common discipline methods used in nurseries was mentioned repeatedly, along with a good understanding of the developing brain and having appropriate expectations of child behaviour, based on this knowledge.

Above all, though, parents want practitioners who enjoy working in the nursery – this passion and love for the job is what they appreciate most.

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Sarah Ockwell-Smith is a parenting expert, author and mother of four.





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