Improving early years graduates’ prospects, career progression and reward

A joint research report and recommendations from Voice, the union and PACEY, the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years

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1. Introduction

For the past few decades, it has become increasingly recognised that high quality early years provision is closely associated with staff qualifications. Graduate leadership in particular has been associated with narrowing the gap between the most and least disadvantaged children. In 2004, the Labour Government introduced a target that every early years setting be led by a graduate. Although the target has quietly been dropped by subsequent governments, it is still an aspiration that much of the sector shares.

Two new graduate early years qualifications were introduced by government in the past decade: the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) in 2006 and the Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) in 2013. To date over 16,000 specialist early years graduates have been trained. However, there is now increasing concern that the number of early years specialist graduates, particularly in non-maintained settings, could begin to decline.

The most frequently cited reason for this is that neither EYPS nor EYTS comes with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) at the end of the course, which means they do not attract the same recognition, status, pay, conditions and opportunities as the wider teaching profession. It also means that graduates holding these qualifications are not permitted to lead teaching in maintained schools, significantly limiting their career options. Many have found that their pay, career prospects and pathways are not all that different from their colleagues with a Level 3 qualification, and on average they earn half the hourly rate of their QTS counterparts. This is despite the fact that entry requirements for Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT) leading to EYTS are identical to those for trainee primary school teachers.

The Department for Education (DfE) acknowledged last year that Early Years Teachers (EYTs) have ‘limited career choices’ and that PVI settings are finding it ‘difficult’ to recruit and retain graduate staff. The DfE’s Early Years Workforce Strategy outlined plans to consult on allowing EYTs to lead teaching in maintained primary schools. The DfE has also said it will consider ‘how wider work on strengthening QTS could offer positive opportunities for raising the status and parity of early years teachers.’ However, to date no further announcements have been made. Meanwhile, autumn enrolment for EYITT in 2017-18 was at its lowest yet at just 595, and reports continued to surface of courses closing and new EYTs having difficulties finding employment. On top of this, recent research has also found evidence of an emerging downward trend in qualification levels.

Our survey

In light of these developments, PACEY and Voice conducted a survey to gather evidence from Early Years Teachers, Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT) course leaders and past EYITT students about:

- the availability of EYITT courses and different routes;
- career aspirations, prospects and pathways of EYTs;
- barriers to recruitment and retention of EYTs; and
- how to improve graduate early years qualifications.

Our online survey ran between 27th November 2017 and 15th January 2018 and received 428 responses. A majority of these (286 or 67 per cent), were from past EYITT students whilst 18 per cent (78) were from EYITT course leaders and 15 per cent (64) from current EYITT students.
2. **Key findings and recommendations**

Respondents to the survey displayed a striking commitment to and passion for working in the early years. However, there was also widespread agreement that the status quo is not working. Nearly all respondents were concerned about the fact that an Early Years Teacher does not earn the same or have the same recognition as a teacher with QTS, even though they receive training of a comparable rigour, and are delivering the same curriculum. If the pay and conditions of Early Years Teachers do not improve, the sector will lose talented and dedicated teachers who understand the uniqueness of a child’s early development.

The key findings from our survey are:

- The picture concerning the number of EYITT routes offered and students enrolled is mixed; in some places these are declining, and in others they have remained steady or even increased.
- Most people that hold or are pursuing EYTS have a strong desire to work in an early years setting directly with children.
- The majority of EYTs find it difficult to gain graduate-level employment.
- Schools are by far the employer of choice for the majority of current and prospective EYTs, though a minority are currently employed by them.
- Most EYTs have not gone on to further courses to gain QTS, but a notable minority have.
- Half of current EYT trainees think it is likely they will go on further courses to gain QTS.
- A majority of course leaders are in favour of granting QTS to EYTs.
- There is a stark difference between the impact of EYTS on confidence and everyday practice compared to career and income. This is much less marked for QTS.
- Improved pay, conditions and recognition are crucial to recruiting and retaining specialist early years graduates, and improving the EYTS qualification.

Our children are losing talented early years teachers who understand the uniqueness of a child’s early development and are key to helping close the gap for disadvantaged children. This has to stop. We know that quality in the early years is reliant upon well-qualified staff who remain in post so that children can build a strong relationship with their key worker. The early years workforce has become more highly qualified in recent decades but there is evidence that this progress is now at risk. Recent research has pointed to a downward trend in qualification levels, as settings experience high staff turnover because they cannot afford to retain their experienced staff, invest in their training and development – or even recruit them in the first place.\(^2\)
To stem this exodus of specialist graduates working in early years, government needs to take urgent action. In view of our findings, PACEY and Voice have made a number of short- and medium-term recommendations.

As soon as is reasonably practicable, the Department for Education should:

1. **Allow Early Years Teachers to lead nursery and reception classes in maintained schools.**
   This proposal was consulted on last year as part of the Early Years Workforce Strategy and should be implemented as a stopgap measure until more meaningful reform can be achieved (see recommendations 7 and 8 below).

2. **Reinstate the target that every setting in England should benefit from graduate pedagogical leadership.**
   Some argue that not every early years setting needs a qualified teacher. We profoundly disagree: every child deserves the best quality early education available. There is also compelling evidence that this is the best way to narrow the persistent and significant inequality gap between the most and least disadvantaged children. For this reason, settings in disadvantaged areas should be prioritised in the first instance. Without further investment in more graduate-level roles, the sector will lack the career pathways and progression opportunities it requires to recruit and retain talented professionals.

3. **Provide sustainable funding for the free entitlement that enables all settings to be able to pay graduate-level wages to at least one member of staff.**
   Recent research has found that the primary barrier to employing an Early Years Teacher is the cost of their salary, particularly in light of the underfunding of the 15 and 30 hours of government-funded childcare. The cost of employing a graduate must be factored into the Early Years National Funding Formula (EYNFF), and the latter must reflect the actual cost of providing high quality early education and childcare.

4. **Provide better guidance and support for settings about graduate qualifications.**
   Many settings, particularly in the PVI sector, are not aware of what existing government funding is available to support graduate qualifications. Some settings are much better than others at supporting and releasing staff for this purpose. In addition, some settings do not provide appropriate mentors for student placements, with staff often unaware of the teaching standards the students need to meet. Guidance and support is needed from government to enable more PVI settings to support and release staff to undertake graduate qualifications.

5. **Require more transparency of EYITT course structures and outcomes.**
   It is clear from our research that many EYITT courses lack transparency in terms of the advertised course structure and outcomes, especially when modules are taught jointly or alongside more general teacher training courses (which may result in QTS). This is misleading and may seriously disadvantage some EYT graduates.

6. **Improve statistical data used for reporting and planning for EYITT qualifications.**
   Historically, DfE data has not differentiated between primary initial teacher training and early years initial teacher training. Although there are signs that this is being addressed, there is still lack of detail on the number of places allocated and filled, and qualifications achieved. It is also difficult to ascertain definitive details on the number and identities of course providers.
In the medium-term, the Department should:

7. **Replace Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) with a new early years specialist route to QTS, specialising in the years from birth to seven.**
   This is the only realistic way to improve the pay, conditions, career pathways and professional status of specialist early years graduates. It is simply **wrong** that an Early Years Teacher working in a PVI setting cannot earn the same or enjoy the same recognition as a nursery school or reception teacher – despite the fact that they are delivering the same curriculum and have undergone comparable training. As Cathy Nutbrown observed in her independent review of early education and childcare qualifications, “However hard we try, I do not believe a status that is not the same as QTS will ever be seen as equal to QTS.” This is all the more important given the proposed reforms to strengthen QTS, which, if currently implemented, would further widen the divide between QTS and EYTS. They will put off even more students from pursuing the latter. The new route must be the same as any other QTS route, save for its early years specialism. It would replace the current primary and early years (3-7) QTS route offered by many institutions.

8. **Establish accessible and affordable routes for individuals holding Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS), or its predecessor Early Years Professional Status (EYPS), to be able to access routes to obtain QTS as a priority.**
   As our survey shows, many Early Years Teachers are put off from going on further courses to gain QTS because they are expensive and time-consuming. They also feel it is fundamentally unjust that they have to undergo further study when they have already received a graduate-level qualification. The Department should remove this barrier to progression and make it significantly easier for EYTs and EYPs to obtain QTS.

9. **Require Reception teachers to have early years training.**
   Any primary school teacher with QTS can teach Reception without early years-specific training, but an Early Years Teacher is currently not permitted to teach older children. We therefore propose that all teachers delivering the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) be required to undergo a certain amount of early years-specific training. The content and amount of training required should be determined following consultation with the sector.

3. **Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT)**

**Background**
There are currently four EYITT routes: graduate entry (full-time), graduate employment-based (part-time), undergraduate (full-time), and assessment only (three months). Unlike its predecessor EYPS, EYITT is only open to graduates, with no route to gain a degree alongside the qualification. Training is delivered by accredited ITT providers, who must be graded ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted. Funding is available for training course fees, with additional funding (£7,000) to enable early years employers to release an employee to participate in training. There are also bursaries of between £2,000 and £5,000 available to eligible trainees.

The number of new students enrolling on EYITT courses has been falling over the past several years. Only 595 students enrolled in 2017-18, and there were 620 in 2016-17. In 2014-15, there were 860, and there is no available data for 2015-16. In contrast, in the first year of the programme, the National College for Teaching & Leadership (NCTL) recruited 2,327 students – 97% of its target of 2,400.
There have been reports of EYITT courses closing due to lack of applicants, with Nursery World reporting that at least 18 EYITT-accredited training providers, 16 of which have previously run the courses, would no longer offer EYITT. A recent survey of EYITT training providers backed this up. There have also been reports of EYITT providers shrinking the number of routes they offer.

What we found

Our survey revealed a mixed picture concerning the number of EYITT routes and students. The majority of EYITT course leaders (80 per cent) reported that their institution is offering the same number of EYITT routes this year as in the previous academic year. Whilst around 17 per cent of course leaders said there are more students enrolled this year; around a third reported the same number of students; and 43 per cent said that there are fewer students enrolled.

-In 2016-17, we had a cohort of 24. In 2017/18, we have a cohort of nine. —course leader

-This year we have 50 per cent less trainees. We did over recruit to allocated numbers, but trainees had to withdraw predominately because of failing skills tests. —course leader

The graduate employment-based (GEB) route is by far the most popular EYITT route, followed by the graduate entry (GE) pathway. Ninety-five per cent of course leaders reported that their institution offers the former, and sixty-five per cent offer the latter.

-This year we have slightly more GEB trainees, but fewer GE trainees. —course leader

Around thirty per cent reported offering the undergraduate route, and a similar number (28 per cent) the assessment only route. Some course leaders reported that their institution was closing down their undergraduate and even their graduate entry routes due to low numbers. One of the reasons cited for this is the low amount of financial support available for this route:

Although GE trainees receive bursaries, they are not sufficient to live on, and they do not have access to student finance. —course leader

Of the current and past EYITT students we surveyed, the majority had pursued the GEB route (61 per cent of current students and 53 per cent of past students), with smaller numbers pursuing the GE route (24 per cent of current and 29 per cent of past students). Only 16 per cent of current students and 13 per cent of past students reported following the undergraduate route. Very few respondents had taken the assessment only route (four per cent of past students and no current students surveyed).

There is a similarly varied picture around the number of students who have been awarded EYTS. Thirty seven per cent of course leaders said that the number has increased this year; 29 per cent said there has been little change; and nearly a quarter (24 per cent) reported that fewer students have gained the qualification this year. Of the past students surveyed, 91 per cent reported being awarded the qualification.

4. Employment of Early Years Teachers

One of the core aims of our survey was to better understand the career trajectories of EYTs. We asked current and past EYITT students about their past experience and their employment prospects, preferences, and plans, including whether they had pursued Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), or were likely to do so in the future.
Past experience

Many, though not all, EYITT students have prior experience in the early years sector. Around 18 per cent of current students reported having less than a year of experience in the sector, with eight per cent having no experience. A third of students had between one and three years of experience in the sector, and 39 per cent had between four and 11 years. Ten per cent had between 12 and 25 years of experience. Of those with prior experience in the sector, nearly half (47 per cent) had worked in a pre-school and just over a third (35 per cent) had worked in a day nursery. Around 16 per cent reported working as a childminder or in a school nursery.

Past EYITT students had more experience, with just over half (53 per cent) reporting between four and 15 years of experience in the sector. Just over a fifth (22 per cent) reported between 16 and 25 years of experience. Around 15 per cent had between one and three years of experience. The majority of past EYITT students have worked in group settings in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector, with 57 per cent reporting that they had been employed by a day nursery and 51 per cent by a pre-school. Around 31 per cent had experience in a school nursery, and around a fifth had worked in before/after school/holiday clubs (21 per cent), children’s centres (19 per cent) or as a childminder (18 per cent).

Difficulties gaining employment

Before we conducted our survey, we heard reports of EYT students finding it difficult to gain graduate-level employment. This was clearly borne out by our results. Just over half of course leaders (58 per cent) reported that students with EYTS have experienced difficulties in gaining graduate-level employment, with around 39 per cent saying that they had not had problems.

Previous, and especially current, EYITT students were even more pessimistic about their own employment prospects. Sixty four per cent of past students reported that they personally had difficulties, and 82 per cent of current students said they expect to have difficulties.

These difficulties were attributed by both course leaders and students to the fact that schools will not hire teachers without QTS, and PVI nurseries are unwilling or unable to pay graduate-level salaries:

_I have already been told this course will make no difference to my pay/role and I will remain on the same salary scale as a Level 3 practitioner, if I stay within my current setting._ –current student
There aren't many early years teacher vacancies it seems. Any that I do see are looking for someone with QTS. –current student

As a nursery practitioner now, my degree is irrelevant, and so is the course in my current job, as there is no job at the end. I'm doing it for my personal profession, and hopefully to open doors in the future. –current student

They gain jobs with a high degree of responsibility in many cases, but they are not specified as graduate jobs. Those that go on to be employed as class teachers in schools are mainly paid as unqualified teachers. –course leader

The picture is quite varied. Some GE trainees have gained roles as early years teachers in reception classes in academies or as unqualified teachers. Others have been given level 3 room leader roles with the expectation that they will move to an EYT role following further experience. The majority of GEB trainees remain in the same job roles they had at the beginning of their training. On gaining EYTS, some have more responsibilities without improved pay. Some have taken up jobs as unqualified teachers in academies and the maintained sector. Not all academies pay teachers with EYTS the same as teachers with QTS. Some are being encouraged to do the assessment only route to QTS by their employers. –course leader

Preferred role and employer

It was very clear from the responses to our survey that most people that hold or are pursuing EYTS have a strong desire to work in an early years setting. Eighty-four per cent of current students said that was their preference, and that they hope to teach in a reception class (45 per cent) or early years setting (39 per cent) after they complete their course. A majority (55 per cent) said they wished to work as a lead practitioner/teacher. Only 12 per cent reported wanting to take on a specialist early years role and eight per cent say they would like a management role or to be a business owner.

Schools are the emphatically employer of choice for the majority of both current and prospective EYTIs. For current students, the most popular of these are independent schools (chosen by 70 per cent) and academies (65 per cent), followed by local authority-maintained schools (59 per cent) and children’s centres (53 per cent). Unlike maintained schools, independent schools and academies are free to hire unqualified teachers and set their own pay scales. For previous students, local authority-maintained schools are the preferred employer of the majority (chosen by 67 per cent), followed by academy schools (60 per cent) and independent schools (54 per cent).

PVI settings were less popular, with PVI pre-schools or playgroups chosen by just over half of current students (51 per cent), and day nurseries by 47 per cent. Even fewer – around thirty per cent – of past students expressed an interest in working in a PVI pre-school, playgroup or day nursery in the future.

I would not work in a private sector again as the pay is low and the rewards are small the hours are long. As a manager of 100 place setting I worked 12 hours a day to keep afloat on paper work and working with staff to build morale and training. –past student

I would not consider anything that wasn’t school based as the pay is dramatically lower for the same job. –past student
Current employment
The majority of course leaders reported that between three-quarters and all of the students awarded EYTS are currently working in an early years setting, mostly in the PVI sector.

- The majority work in private day nurseries or pre-schools. A few are reception or nursery school teachers in academy schools but are not receiving the same pay and conditions as the other teachers there. –course leader

- Most of the EYT’s who took the EB route continue to work in their original PVI nursery settings. One is the owner of an after school and holiday club. Those on the GE route have mostly secured jobs in private day nurseries. A number of undergraduate EYT’s have gone on to undertake our early years PGCE. –course leader

- Undergraduate trainees tend to go onto PGCE Primary whilst GBE tend to remain in employment. Those employed in an academy have then gone on to do assessment only primary to gain QTS. –course leader

Just over three-quarters of past students (77 per cent) reported they were currently working in an early years setting, with the most common setting types PVI day nurseries (38 per cent); local authority primary or nursery schools (20 per cent); and PVI pre-schools or playgroups (18 per cent). Around 10 per cent reported working in an academy school, and around four per cent work in an independent school or a children’s centre.

QTS
We wanted to find out more about the link between EYTS and QTS: how many EYT’s have gone on further courses to gain QTS, and how likely those hadn’t thought they would in the future. An earlier study found that students commonly viewed both EYITT and EYPS as a ‘stepping stone to QTS’.25

Our survey revealed that most people awarded EYTS have not gone on to further courses to gain QTS, but a notable minority have. Just under a third of course leaders (32 per cent) reported that graduate-entry EYITT students subsequently moved on to QTS programmes before gaining EYTS. However, the majority of course leaders reported that the number of students awarded EYTS who go on to gain QTS is under a quarter or fewer.
Past students

For previous students, only 17 per cent reported holding QTS, and 84 per cent said they did not. In terms of the reasons behind their decision, nearly a quarter (24%) mentioned they lacked the financial means to go on a QTS course. Around 20% commented that they were either on a QTS course or were planning to go on one in the near future – mostly so that they could get jobs in schools or a better salary. A similar proportion (19%) mentioned that they were keen to stay in early years, and didn’t want to teach older children and/or work in schools. Around 11% explained that for them it was an issue of principle – EYTS should be sufficient to teach in early years, and they did not feel that they should have to undergo further study. The same proportion mentioned that they would find it hard to find the time to undertake the course – because they were working full time and/or had families of their own. Around seven per cent commented that they felt they had been misled about the EYT qualification – and didn’t realise its limitations when they signed up for the course. Finally, a small number of respondents (five per cent) mentioned the barrier of needing to show that you had experience working in a school, which is difficult without QTS.

- Lack of time and money. I actually feel disappointed that all my hard work, expertise and knowledge within the early years is not recognised. Most people with EYTS still have to go into further training and expense in order to gain QTS if they wish to apply for jobs within schools and with better salaries. The early years workforce deserve more recognition. –past student

- I am passionate about early years and I wish to be recognised for my passion and knowledge, not be forced into further training in order to gain recognition as a teacher. –past student

- I don’t want to become a primary school teacher. I feel I have more freedom in my sector to aid child development and shape learning that is specific to the individual child, something that schools just can’t seem to get right or value highly enough. –past student

- I did not want to do a PGCE as my heart lies in early years however, the parity with QTS just is not there with EYTS. –past student

- I am qualified with over seven years of experience of working in school, in both nursery and reception class. I feel angry that I have to pay over £2000 and spend time in another school to gain QTS. I strongly feel that I should have been awarded this even after my first year of working in a school nursery. –past student

- I worked and studied really hard to achieve my degree and EYTS, which focused on early years education. I do not understand why I need to achieve QTS in order to better my salary or career expectations. I found it incredibly unfair and diminishing. I have worked in early years for a decade and I believe I have the right experience and knowledge to be recognised as a qualified professional without having to study again to gain QTS. Unfortunately I do not have the time nor can I afford to gain QTS. I attend as many CPD courses as I can and continue to do research to ensure best practice, but cannot invest one or two years towards gaining QTS. EYTS should be recognised, people who have achieved EYTS are passionate about their work and have worked hard to better themselves and ensure best practice. –past student

It should be noted that a small number of EYTs reported having QTS before they went on to gain EYPS or EYTS.
Previous students who had not gained QTS were asked how likely it was they would go on to pursue it in the future. Most (66 per cent) said it was unlikely, while just over a third (34 per cent) said it was likely.

-If the process was easier and cheaper, although I don’t feel I need the training, as I am already school-based. I strongly feel that if you have EYTS with experience of working in school you should be able to lead a nursery or reception class. –past student

-I will jump at the chance as soon as I find a way. There is no recognition for EYTś in early years settings or in schools. We are not valued as professionals in our own right despite working so hard and jumping through the same hoops as primary ITT students. Pay for our profession is shockingly low. –past student

-I am disillusioned with the idea that I have to gain a PGCE (which is a step backward from the qualifications I hold now, and is expensive) to repeat a set of standards I have already met to start a career as a NQT – after having 11 years of experience actually teaching and educating in my field. –past student

-I would rather make a difference to children’s lives and help increase awareness of the qualification that I hold than made to feel I’m only doing it because I’m classed as a 'teacher'. –past student

**Current students**

In contrast, nearly half of current students (49 per cent) think it is likely they will go on further courses to gain QTS. Of these, 29 per cent said it is very likely, thought the same proportion also said it was not likely. Those that do plan to go on to gain QTS cite better pay, conditions and recognition as the key reasons. Those who think it is unlikely mostly cite cost as the key barrier.

-The cost of QTS is too great, even on School Direct (therefore being paid). I cannot commit to full time work due to my commitments to my own family. If School Direct was available on a part time basis, I’d be there in a heartbeat. –current student

-Qualified Teacher Status is my end goal; this was the easiest path to it. –current student

-The cost of this after taking a year out to do the EYITT puts me off. I also feel that as I know I want to work in early years I don’t think it will add to my knowledge base significantly. I would reconsider if I found it was the only way to get a graduate level job in early years. –current student

I am happy working within the early years sector and don’t plan to progress onto QTS.-

-current student

-I don’t really want to. The EYT standards are far more age appropriate. But teachers earn more. –current student

-This course is interesting and gives me confidence in my capabilities as an early years practitioner. However, there is no set salary scale, and for me, no career progression as a result of having EYTS. To advance my career further I will be forced to leave (nursery-based) early years, and progress to QTS to work in a school reception class. When level 7 practitioners are regarded within the same salary scale/band as level 3, there is little incentive to undertake this course. –current student
Views of course leaders

A majority of course leaders are in favour of granting QTS to Early Years Teachers. Nearly 68 per cent said they think EYTs should be granted QTS. However, some voiced concerns that this may simply lead to a lack of graduate staff in nurseries, and others expressed a preference for the now defunct EYPS qualification.

*It would seem logical now we have gone down the path of teacher’s status it needs to be equitable - But I still think that EYPS was a better qualification for this sector.* – course leader

*They are expected to have the same entry requirements and go through a very similar pressured programme to other ITT programmes that do have QTS. They become experts within early years. I want to up skill a sector, though, not lose the EYTs to primary schools.* – course leader

*Early Years ITT is as robust a training as QTS and therefore they should have the same recognition. EYTS is different in that trainees become specialists in early years whereas those who gain QTS are considered by the DfE to be part of the schools workforce and technically to be able to teach across the 3-19 age range, although usually divided into primary or secondary. Therefore being in favour of granting QTS to EYTs is not a straightforward question. EYTs should be recognised as trained, and therefore ‘qualified’, teachers.* – course leader

Impact of gaining EYTS and QTS

We asked past students what impact gaining the EYTS qualification had on their confidence; everyday practice; career; and income, as well as others’ recognition of their professionalism. We also asked current students what they thought the impact would be.

A clear majority of previous students said that gaining EYTS had improved their confidence (91 per cent) and everyday practice (90 per cent). However, it had less of a positive impact on others’ recognition of their professionalism and career (52 per cent said these had improved), and particularly their income (only 37 per cent said this had improved).

Only 40 per cent of current students said they thought EYTS was likely to improve their income, and 54 per cent said it was likely to improve their career. However, an overwhelming majority thought it would improve their everyday practice (94 per cent) and their confidence (86 per cent).

We also asked those respondents with QTS what impact that qualification had had, in contrast to EYTS. EYITT students who have gone on to gain QTS report less stark but more even improvements across the board, with 80 per cent saying QTS has improved others’ recognition of their
professionals and nearly three quarters (76 per cent) saying it improved their confidence. A majority said QTS also improved their everyday practice (74 per cent); career (68 per cent); and income (66 per cent).

![Perceived benefits of EYTS and QTS for current and past students](image)

5. Increasing graduates in early years settings

In view of the year-on-year decline in the number of early years trainee teachers, we asked course leaders, past and current students for their views on how to increase the number of graduates in early years settings. We also asked course leaders in particular what they think should be done to improve early years qualifications. There was a remarkable degree of consensus between these three groups of respondents that three ingredients are crucial to achieving both: improved pay, conditions and recognition for EYTs.

Past students

Nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) of past students argued that the pay and conditions of EYTs need to match those of teachers with QTS. Just under half (42 per cent) cited the need for the public, the sector and schools to gain a better understanding of the EYT qualification, and recognise EYTs as highly trained and skilled professionals. Around 20 per cent recommended that EYTs be granted QTS. A substantial number also mentioned the need for settings to receive sustainable funding for free entitlement places to enable them to pay graduate wages.

- Revisit the Nutbrown report and fully implement her strategies. Equivalent to QTS should mean we get the same benefits and pay. More funding to pay graduate wages. Teaching is not overly well paid, but the disparity between QTS and EYTS is huge. Especially when you consider that EYT’s working in the PVI sector do not get 13 weeks’ leave or PPA time either. ..Raise the status. An early years teacher should command the same respect as any other teacher! –past student

- Increase the pay: make a mandatory pay scale for graduates within early years settings such as private nurseries/pre-schools. If people are going to get their degrees and train incredibly hard to get their EYTS, they should be paid accordingly. People will not train to do a job where they will get paid the same wage they would have been paid before training! Having said that, it should be made possible for private nurseries to afford to do that, which they cannot currently do with 30 hour funding, which affects their income! Settings, schools etc. should be trained on the value of having EYTS and how it is equal to QTS not a lesser qualification! –past student

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I think a more defined role and pay scale is important. Also more ways to progress your career as career progression doesn’t really seem possible for me. I think the public should be taught about the importance of the 0-5 age range. Brain development at this age is not understood properly at all. So many people think learning is reciting numbers and repeating sounds – and that learning begins at school. If people realised how important early education was, maybe people would want to do the job. –past student

Raise the profile of the qualification so school leaders have a greater understanding. Award the qualification a proper equivalency to QTS as we have to undergo the same entry requirements. Allow EYTS the opportunity to work in reception class as a lot of EYT’s have trained or worked in them for many years. –past student

Training for nursery owners to understand the qualification and therefore respect the level and quality of teaching an EYT can provide. Provide funding for PVI settings to pay EYT teachers a graduate salary, which will also encourage owners and managers to employ graduates. Make it compulsory to have a graduate member of staff within a certain number of years. Build this level of leadership and teaching into early years Ofsted inspections, to increase the value of the training within PVI settings. –past student

Current students
The views of current students on how to increase the number of graduates in early years settings were nearly identical to those of past students. A majority of respondents (64 per cent) mentioned the need for greater pay commensurate with the qualification and responsibilities of the job, and/or the implementation of minimum pay scales. A third highlighted the need to raise awareness and recognition of specialist early years qualifications so that they are valued by the sector and public. Nearly as many (29 per cent) recommended granting EYTs with QTS. Finally, around ten per cent mentioned permitting EYTs to teach in maintained schools.

Course leaders
Again, the views of course leaders largely echoed those of current and past students. Half of course leaders mentioned improving pay and conditions of Early Years Teachers, with 13 per cent specifically mentioning QTS. Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) mentioned bringing back graduate retention schemes such as the Graduate Leader Fund, which give settings the financial incentive/means to hire/train a graduate. Around a fifth mentioned the need for greater public awareness of the different early years qualifications, and the benefits of having graduates working in early years settings. Around ten per cent recommended making it a requirement for every setting to have at least one graduate.

When asked what they think should be done to improve early years specialist graduate qualifications, the responses were the same. Nearly half of course leaders (46 per cent) recommended either granting QTS to EYTs, or harmonising the pay, conditions and status of EYTs and teachers with QTs. Just over a fifth also mentioned improve recognition of the value of a specialism in early years, and how this can benefit the youngest children in school. Around ten per cent recommend creating a new early years specialist PGCE for either 0-5 or 0-7.

There is not much wrong with the qualifications per se; the issue lies in the pay and working conditions of those employed in the PVI sector. The EYTS does not seem to offer those staff a significant difference in their current positions. –course leader

We run both QTS and EYTS. I teach on both. There is no distinction between the quality of the offer, just how it is viewed post qualification. –course leader
I think there needs to be more recognition given to them [EYTs] by the government to improve understanding across, not just the early years PVI sector, but particularly in primary schools, as often head teachers and school governors are not aware of the value of EYTS and how employing someone with this specific qualification can highly benefit the youngest children in our schools. –course leader

As indicated in the Early Years Workforce Strategy, consultations should take place to enable teachers with EYTS to be lead teachers in Nursery and Reception classes in maintained settings. NEG funding for early years places should include the costs of graduate leaders for the PVI sector. –course leader

The key issue is terms and conditions of graduate leaders in early years. Until these are on a par with teachers with QTS, the issues will not be solved. It is not really about the training - but more about the post qualifying status and pay. –course leader

One early years qualification 0-7 based on EYTS. Formal Newly Qualified year. And compulsory CPD. Registration and explicit disciplinary system....we need to align to other professional standards. –course leader

In conclusion, those working in the early years sectors see it as an injustice that EYTs and EYPs are treated differently to teachers who hold QTS. There is a great opportunity for Government to finally tackle this imbalance once and for all. In doing so, encourage more people to see early years as a profession that holds the same status and reward –course leader

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In conclusion, those working in the early years sectors see it as an injustice that EYTs and EYPs are treated differently to teachers who hold QTS. There is a great opportunity for Government to finally tackle this imbalance once and for all. In doing so, encourage more people to see early years as a profession that holds the same status and reward as teaching in primary school. VOICE and PACEY look forward to working with Government and other stakeholders to make this a reality.

6. References

3 For example, there is no mention of it in the Early Years Workforce Strategy. See Department for Education (2017), Early Years Workforce Strategy (London: Department for Education).
4 Ibid.
5 Academies and independent schools, however, are free to hire teachers without QTS and pay whatever they like.
8 The requirements for both are a degree, at least a C grade in English, maths and science GCSEs, and passing a numeracy and literacy test.
9 Department for Education (2017).


22 Osgood, Elwick et al. (2017).

23 For example, Kingston University has cut its graduate entry route, though will continue running a graduate employment-based route. Worcester University dropped the undergraduate pathway to EYTS, but has retained its postgraduate courses.
