

EARLY YEARS (ENGLAND)

MORE PAY AND LESS RESPONSIBILITY V LESS PAY BUT MORE REWARDING PROFESSION

Recent surveys have highlighted that, despite the enormous benefits of early years education to children, parents and society, those who deliver it are often forced to weigh professional rewards against the lure of more money for less responsibility, and better work-life balance, in the retail sector.

According to the **Education Policy Institute (EPI)**, 'high quality early years education can have a considerable impact on a child's life chances.' Despite this, its report, ***The early years workforce: A comparison with retail workers***, found that the childcare sector faces 'great uncertainty over recruitment and retention', with more workers switching to the retail sector for more favourable working conditions, and 'serious implications for access to and quality of childcare.'

Key findings

- > **Childcare worker pay is undergoing a sharp real terms decline: on current trends, it may be overtaken by retail worker pay by 2021.** Since 2013, childcare real wages have fallen from £8.59 to £8.19 per hour, whilst retail wages have increased in real terms from £7.34 to £7.75.
- > **Some childcare workers are already paid less than those in retail, even when they have the same qualifications.**
- > **Around one in four of former childcare workers stated 'unsatisfactory pay' as the main reason for leaving the sector,** compared to one in six retail workers.

Read the report: www.epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/early-years-workforce-comparison-retail-workers.



'More attractive retail jobs with improving pay and fewer responsibilities are luring qualified nursery practitioners away from working with young children', was also the conclusion of the **National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)**'s **sixth early years workforce survey for England**. Read the report: www.ndna.org.uk/workforcesurvey

Key findings

- > **Turnover is higher than average,** with the majority (48%) of staff leaving the sector for better paid jobs in retail, with salaries and policy changes being the main reasons given.
- > **The workforce is younger, less qualified and less experienced,** with higher skilled experienced staff leaving the workforce mid-career or approaching retirement.
- > **Only 52% of the early years workforce is now qualified at Level 3 or above,** with a further 17% qualified at Level 2 (compared with 83% trained to Level 3 in the 2015/16 survey).
- > **26% of the workforce is made up of unqualified assistants, trainees or apprentices** (up 16% on last year).
- > **There was an 8.4% drop in the number of graduates and a drop in student numbers** (365 entrants compared with 2,300 in 2013/14).
- > **Nurseries are struggling to recruit** – especially at Level 3 and increasingly at Level 2. Staffing costs are rising while funding remains stagnant.

- > **55% of employers planned to spend less on training staff this year,** with 85% citing underfunding as the most significant factor.

Voice's own 2015 UK workforce survey revealed that many employers rely on the 'goodwill' of staff to work unpaid overtime: www.voicetheunion.org.uk/nursery-survey.

Voice General Secretary Deborah Lawson said: 'These reports highlight the low pay and low status endured by highly skilled, well trained professionals.'

'These pay levels are not commensurate with the skills and education required for early years professionals, especially for those at graduate level.'

'I've been saying for years that many skilled early years professionals could earn more stacking supermarket shelves but stay in the profession because it is their vocation.'

'The early years sector has relied on the goodwill of its staff for too long. Is it any wonder that there is a recruitment and retention crisis?'

'Voice is calling for appropriate investment and a coherent national pay and career structure to reward the professionals who work in childcare, and to raise the status of the sector and profession.'

'Failure to address this situation will worsen recruitment and retention in the early years workforce.'