

‘Over-shadowed by Brexit’

Deborah Lawson, general secretary of Voice: the union for education professionals, fears that Brexit will inevitably increase the frustrations for the early years sector when it comes to pushing its issues to the top of the agenda. She says: ‘In the last three years, we have experienced two general elections, two referendums, two political party leadership elections, one change of Prime Minister and two Education Secretaries.

‘Brexit has, of course, been behind all of these changes, and will continue to dominate the political agenda for years to come. However, Brexit – and the political manoeuvrings at Westminster – must not be allowed to push education and childcare policy and funding down the agenda to ‘any other business. The early years sector needs to be able to achieve sustainable growth which both meets the needs of children and families and the aspirations of the Government in terms of the economy.

‘Voice believes that what is needed is a clear, concise early years and childcare policy, supported by a comprehensive, coherent and properly funded strategy – a strategy which ‘works for everyone’ to meet the needs of children and government aspirations. The policy must be clear on the purpose of early education and childcare. Is its primary purpose to improve outcomes for children or parental employment? One does not cancel out the other, and it is possible to achieve both, but only if sufficiently funded.’

During the election, Voice presented its ‘Election Statement’, and it is now calling on the Government to make the following its early years and childcare priorities:

- Provide sufficient funding to fully fund the expansion of early years and childcare to ensure that all types of providers are sustainable.
- Implement an early years and childcare workforce strategy that is supported by a clear career pathway and national pay structure.
- Develop, publish and implement a set of professional standards for teaching assistants in schools and colleges, supported by a standard job description and national pay scale.
- Develop and implement an effective strategy to reduce workload for the whole education and early years workforce which recognises all the drivers of workload.
- Commit to a strategy to enable all education and early years professionals to achieve well-being through work-life balance.
- Review the purpose, value and necessity of baseline assessment, taking account of impact on young children.
- Commit to a model of primary assessment which values the professional judgement of teachers and ensure moderation standards are consistently applied.
- Ensure that the primary curriculum influences primary assessment and that assessment does not drive the curriculum.
- Commit to development of policy for all phases of education and childcare that is led by the profession through positive, meaningful engagement with relevant stakeholders.
- Adopt a policy to reduce political interference in the curriculum, acknowledging the expertise, knowledge and evidence of the profession to inform and lead policy development.