

Voice

community

# The Future of Education





## Preface

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented challenge to the education and early years system and all who participate and work in it. Its impact will be felt for years, even decades, to come.

Our members have shared many of their concerns with us during and about the pandemic, but also about education and the early years post-pandemic – concerns about their profession and employment, concerns about the mental welfare of children and students, and concerns about the future direction of government policy.

I would like to thank them for their input through the survey that forms the basis of this report, which represents their hopes and aspirations. I would also like to thank colleagues in Community, as this report represents our first published report on education since Voice became Community's education and early years section in October 2020.

The members who took part were from across the UK and from a wide range of different settings, but from their responses came through the clear consensus that we cannot return to how things were, and we need to move forward differently.

The aftermath of the pandemic represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change education and early years education – what we learn, how we learn it and how we assess it – and ensure it meets the needs of children, parents and the economy.

This opportunity must be about long-term recovery and progress – not short-term 'catch-up'. There is no quick-fix solution for politicians to make headlines with, tick some boxes and pretend it's 'job done'. Adding some hours to the school day here, shaving a week off the summer holidays there, in an attempt to return to the old ways of a system that needs to be reformed, will not do and will not work. The new system must meet the needs of learners, not learners the needs of the system.

**Deborah Lawson**

Community Assistant General Secretary,  
Voice Section

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## About our survey

Voice Community circulated a survey to all its members in the education sector. The survey was open between 1 and 22 February 2021. We shared the interim findings of the survey in April 2021.

Respondents to the survey came from all four nations, with the following breakdown: 10.4% Scotland, 0.5% Northern Ireland, 4.46% Wales and the remaining 84.65% from England. There were 607 respondents to the survey.

Responses were from all parts of the sector including:

- Classroom teacher 25.42%
- Early years practitioner 21.1%
- Teaching assistants and classroom support 26.08%
- Supply teacher/tutor/ peripatetic teacher 3.82%
- Head teacher/school leader/head of department 5.98%



## Introduction

In February 2021, Voice Community reached out to our members to understand more about their experiences during the coronavirus pandemic and their hopes and fears for the future of work and education.

This report looks holistically at the education workforce and considers the variety of settings in which our members work. It sets out a vision for what a sustainable flourishing education sector looks like.

This report covers the following key areas which members have highlighted as their key priorities:

- retention of experienced teachers;
- supporting children to recover from the coronavirus lockdowns; and
- early years provision and funding.

Voice Community represents all types of workers in the education sector, including those in nursery and early years settings, school teachers, senior leaders and classroom assistants, self-employed tutors, and those working in the state and private sectors.

Despite this variety, we found significant congruence between the issues that are affecting all of our members.

In this report we explore the data from our survey and make a series of recommendations for what is needed to support recovery. This report draws on the evidence of other research into education as well as the findings from our work with our members.

Whilst much has been written about the topic, we hope that this report brings the voices of workers on the frontline in the education sector to the fore. Any changes to the education sector must be made based on their views and experiences from the frontline. In sharing their frustrations, hopes and fears, we aim to contribute to the conversation about the future of education and ensure their invaluable contribution is heard.



## Summary of findings

### Experiences during the pandemic

1. Online learning has not been as effective as in-person learning.
2. Staff in the sector have worked incredibly hard under challenging circumstances.
3. The gap between the most and least advantaged students has widened.
4. Students' social skills as well as their academic abilities have been dramatically affected.
5. Many staff haven't been supported to manage online learning.

### Early Years

1. Staff in the early years sector do not feel valued.
2. Pay in the early years sector is too low.
3. Funding in the sector is inadequate and inconsistent.
4. Young children have lost social skills during the pandemic.

### Recovery

1. The mental health of students is members' overwhelming concern.
2. The challenge of recovery will be broader than academic catch-up.
3. The burden of administration and standardised achievements are hampering the ability of staff to focus on supporting and educating children.

### Retention

1. As a result of the pandemic and as part of long-term trends there is a retention crisis facing the sector.
2. 22% of Voice Community members plan to leave education within the next three years.
3. Staff want to leave the sector primarily because of the pressures of the role and workload.
4. Low pay is a specific problem in early years settings, and for classroom/teaching assistants.
5. Career development has taken a backseat during the pandemic.



# Summary of recommendations

## Recommendations to support recovery

1. Recovery not catchup, through dialogue, funding, and expectations for staff and students.
2. Mental wellbeing support needs to be provided for students and staff.
3. More support staff in the classroom combined with effective use of support staff.
4. Increase in funding targeted towards disadvantaged learners.
5. Increase the pupil premium and special needs funding. Make both sets of funding more reactive.
6. Value the creative subjects.
7. Support in-person learning with digital technology.
8. Encourage greater engagement with parents/carers and the local community to embed and enrich learning.
9. Any additional or extended hours must not come at the expense of teachers' workloads and must be either paid or avoided.

## Recommendations to support teachers to stay in education and early years

1. Increased PPA (planning, preparation and assessment) time for all school staff and added flexibility, including the ability to take it at home.
2. Value support staff through pay, conditions, and career development.
3. Regular personal development time for staff and a personal training allowance.
4. Increased numbers of health and safety reps in schools as well as added rights and protections for those reps.
5. Protection for staff raising health and safety concerns across the sector.
6. A reduction in workload, especially in relation to data demands.

## Recommendations to the early years sector

1. Value the sector with appropriate training, qualifications, and funding.
2. Ensure a fair wage is paid to every worker in the sector.
3. Fix the "free entitlement" so it is truly free and works for both early years settings and parents.
4. Career development for workers in early years.
5. Focus on social skills and mental wellbeing.
6. Return to learning through play.



Staff highlighted difficulty in engaging students remotely: “they tend to play computer games as much as they can!”, as well as the reduced levels of attainment students had achieved.

Another member explained that staff are

**“being put under increasing scrutiny for results to tackle declining achievement without the resources to get it right for the children concerned”.**

This is supported by other work on the topic. The Association of Colleges published the results of a survey revealing that 77% of 16-18 year olds are performing below normal expectations - at between one and four months behind<sup>1</sup>. With talk in some circles of hybrid learning models being used in future, policymakers should take note that this is unpopular with the staff who would be delivering it: 63% of our members told us they didn’t think that it was a good idea.

Many of our members made the best of a difficult situation, with 82% reporting that they had learned tools and techniques that they would use in the future. However, unlike in other sectors where the pandemic may have promoted a shift in working methods and practices for good, it is clear that being in the classroom is best for students and should be the prevailing model going forward.

What is positive is that people have learned new techniques - work can be done to explore ways of helping staff to learn about new technologies in the future.

**Staff in the sector have worked incredibly hard under challenging circumstances**

Those working in the sector have continued to work throughout the pandemic. Among Voice Community members just 3.36% had been placed on furlough, whilst 76.47% were working from their setting in person at least some of the time. 49.24% were working from home at least some of the time.

This illustrates a pattern of combining home working with working on site for much of the sector.

Staff had also been teaching in a combination of settings.

## Experiences during the pandemic: The evidence

In our research, members reflected on their experiences of teaching and supporting students during the coronavirus pandemic.

**Online learning has not been as effective as in-person learning**

We asked members what it had been like supporting online learning.

**92% of our members in the sector disagreed or strongly disagreed that online learning is just as good as learning in person**

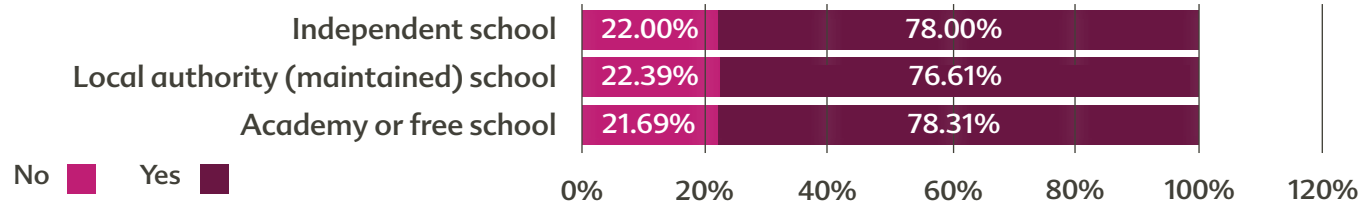
<sup>1</sup> College Catch-up Funding and Remote Education-AoC Survey Spring 2021 <[www.aoc.co.uk](http://www.aoc.co.uk)> [accessed 20 April 2021].



## Have you been required to teach online or support online learning?

67.52% of respondents have been required to undertake online teaching or support remote learning in some way. Of those working in schools, this rose to 77.51% with very consistent responses from independent, local authority and academy or free schools.

Staff in many cases were working longer hours. One member said “online teaching was easier for young teachers than older [teachers]. Some of the teachers at my school were doing 13 hour days as they found technology difficult”.



Source: Voice Community survey

## The gap between the most and the least advantaged students has widened

The pandemic has also had an impact on social mobility and equality.

78% of our members told us they believe that online learning increases the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged learners.

This has been confirmed in a number of pieces of research, including findings of the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST)<sup>2</sup> which observed that school closures have widened the disadvantage gap due to lower access to technology, spending less time learning, and having reduced support from parents and carers.

There has been a well-reported contrast between those students with access to technology and those without. Our work echoes this finding and offers some measure of how widespread the problem has been. Around 26% of our members’ students did not have the equipment needed to work remotely. And only 55% of those students who did not have their own device were able to be provided one by their school, college, university, or nursery.

Those working full time or requiring the use of the family’s only device have not had this privilege.

Around 26% of our members’ students did not have the equipment needed to work remotely

Yet even where settings did provide devices to students, there was still a significant gap between students who were supported at home to learn and those who were not.

One school teacher told us there is a “Huge gap between those that have not attended or taken part in online lessons. In some of my classes this is 80% of the students! I teach in an area of social deprivation and even though our school has provided about 300 Chromebooks, the students still do not access learning. Our school has done everything possible to support families with limited success.”

“I teach in an area of social deprivation and even though our school has provided about 300 chromebooks, the students still do not access learning.”

<sup>2</sup> Clare Lally and Rowena Bermingham, COVID-19 and the Disadvantage Gap, 2020 <<https://post.parliament.uk/covid-19-and-the-disadvantage-gap/>> [accessed 20 April 2021].



The most advantaged students often have parents who are willing and able to take the time to support them with their work. However, many students have families who are not able to take the time away from their own work to support learning or may have “low aspirations”. This has resulted in a situation where the attainment gap between the most and the least advantaged has been further compounded by the pandemic.

Members highlighted students who “have not been encouraged or supervised with work at home” and whose homes were either not conducive learning environments or places where learning is valued.

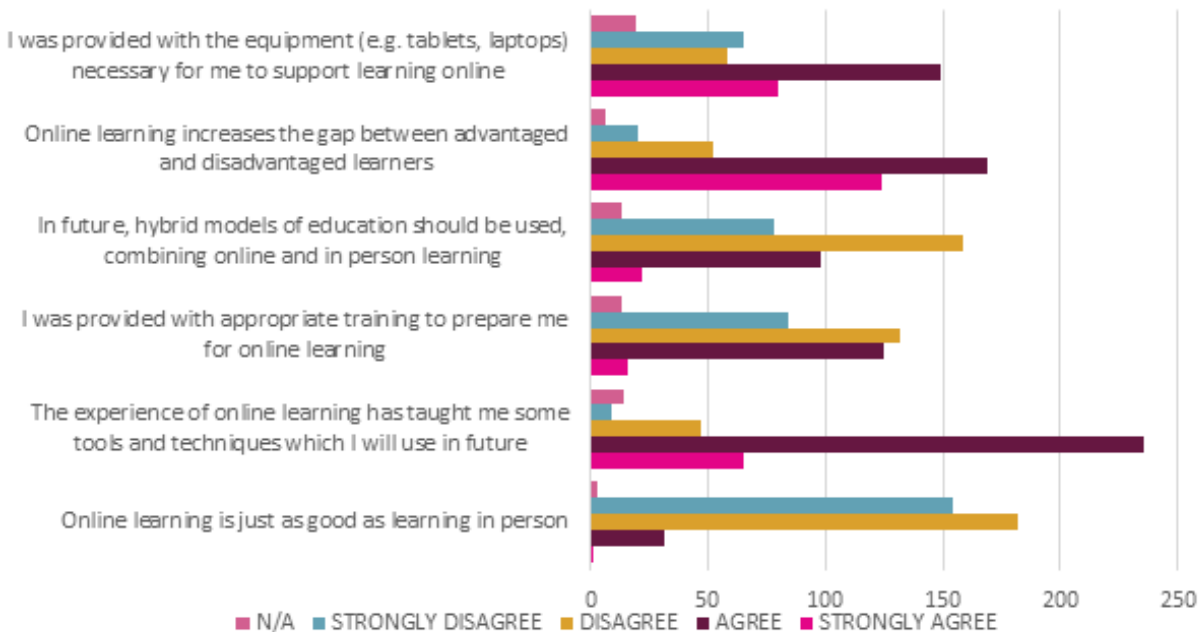
**Students’ social skills as well as their academic abilities have been dramatically affected**

The evidence is clear that prolonged time at home, away from peers and teachers has affected the ability of children and young people to manage socially.

One member told us “The fact that the majority of children have been at home for so long means that it is not just educational or academic catch-up that is needed, it is also re-conditioning them into the stable routine of the class environment and disciplined focus, that they will find hard both in terms of behaviour and mental wellbeing. These two aspects will contribute to what the future holds for school staff, as well as impact on learning levels.”

A number of members highlighted that a lack of social skills was a particularly prevalent problem amongst younger children. One staff member told us they felt the sector was facing “unrealistic expectations... regarding targets to catch up academically when social skills and wellbeing are just as, if not more important”.

**Many staff haven’t been supported to manage online learning**



Source: Voice Community survey

The level of support our members received to help them manage this challenging period has not been sufficient. Only 38% of members had been given appropriate training to prepare them for online learning. And, while 62% of members had the equipment they needed in order to deliver online learning, that still left more than 1 in 3 without.

Whilst it is understandable that the suddenness of the pandemic meant that staff were initially thrust into a new environment, at the time of our survey, there had been almost a year for training to be put in place to support staff.





## Recovery: The evidence

In our survey, we asked members to explain what they saw as the biggest challenges facing the education sector.

**The mental health of students is members' overwhelming concern**

Mental health was the single biggest concern voiced by our members. It was clear that the impact of coronavirus would be felt for a long time and that children would need to develop social skills and that the curriculum needed to support this.

Among staff, many raised the connection between mental wellbeing and retention, and the issue of staff leaving the profession due to stress levels and burnout. The high stakes accountability system against which staff are held to account only exacerbates this. One member noted that, "there will be long lasting physical and mental effects on staff and pupils for some time to come".

Members raised concerns about the social challenges facing students and the extent to which education staff are expected to deal with this, citing the "pressures on education to address all the issues of society".

**The challenge of recovery will be broader than academic catch-up**



Source: Voice Community survey

This word cloud illustrates what our members' biggest concerns were and shows a number of themes. As you can see, mental health, education recovery and the attainment gap were clearly top of the list of members' concerns, as well as staffing and funding levels.

Mental wellbeing for both staff and students have been affected. Staff told us these "mental health issues [come] from the effects of isolation and coronavirus anxiety".

Our members observed the challenges of tackling this problem without sufficient financial resources to do so and pointed out the challenge of "supporting mental health issues without funding".

Many highlighted the key priorities for the sector going forward had to be supporting their mental wellbeing and social behaviour (interaction with other children) again.

Education recovery was another major theme of our research. Members had an unfavourable view of the Government's approach to education recovery, with one criticising the approach, saying "government pressures to get back to how things were without allowing time and money to address the wider challenges."

Staff highlighted that helping students to get back into a routine and get used to socialising and being in a learning environment again is important.

The pandemic provides a once in a generation opportunity to reset the way we think about education. Rather than increasing the pressure on students to try to get them to jump through unrealistic hoops, education should be refocussed on giving students the time and support they need to achieve the required standards.



**The burden of administration and standardised achievements are hampering the ability of staff to focus on supporting and educating children**

There is little doubt that early years settings, schools and colleges all need to regularly assess students, but in some settings this has transformed into ever-increasing demands for data. Members raised the “burdens of administration”, and the amount of data collection staff are asked to do, with some describing this as “useless data”. Staff raised the challenges of standardised achievement expectations, one member put it clearly when they observed: “The pressure on teachers to ‘get them up to the standard level’ [which is] impossible”.

Another member criticised “too much emphasis put on paperwork and ‘tracking’ etc. leaving you too tired to prepare/teach”.

All of this focus on attainment and data risks diverting the focus away from the needs of the children.

It has been noted that every child will have experienced the coronavirus pandemic in a different way, and they will all need to be supported to recover and anything which conspires against recovery should be set aside.



## Recommendations to help with education recovery

### Recovery not catch-up, through dialogue, funding and expectations for staff and students

It is important that the focus of our dialogue is on recovery - the pandemic and lockdowns have been a collective trauma and steps to help students recover must account for all aspects of this.

In the immediate wake of the pandemic a number of steps are needed:

- Funding for additional education support for students to help them achieve the expected standards. This could be provided through specialist in-class support, additional staffing, 1-1 tutoring programmes, or broader recovery programmes
- Sufficient notice of the funding to allow schools and colleges to access it and plan effective programmes which are tailored to support those most in need
- For younger children, reducing the targets, removing the burden of accountability from staff, and allowing time to support recovery over the next few years

### Mental health support needs to be provided for students and staff

In the new world, it will be support for mental wellbeing that will be a key driver in enabling staff and students to flourish.

Increasingly, statutory agencies, local government and health services are no longer able to provide support, as funding is being withdrawn. Schools are having to step in to fill the gap with the necessary support and funding out of already stretched education budgets. The bar for receiving mental wellbeing support has gone up, leaving many staff and learners showing early signs, without support. Early intervention in a school environment would help some of those who would otherwise go on to reach a crisis point.

Studies have analysed the impact of various mental wellbeing interventions and broadly show that evidence-based treatment delivered in school

settings are effective. Although further research is required into which types of interventions are the most effective, this should not stop widespread mental wellbeing interventions from being implemented, including:

- trained counsellors in all schools;
- mental wellbeing training activities embedded into the curriculum; and
- working with and educating parents.

### More support staff in the classroom combined with effective use of support staff

Teaching is most effective where it is tailored to the needs of the learners. It is more difficult to tailor work to the needs of an individual in larger classes. Many schools make excellent use of additional teachers and support staff to work with small groups of students. In some cases, this is to accelerate, deepen and broaden their learning. In other cases, it can be to support the children to enable them to access the learning in a way that works for them.

In all cases it seems that tailored support is the best way to support and encourage learning and that this can only happen where there are appropriate and suitably trained staff, including both teachers and learning support.

### Increase in funding targeted towards disadvantaged learners

One important step to bridge the disadvantage gap is to address the unfairness in the pupil premium. It is particularly unfair that further education colleges are ineligible to receive pupil premium at all, and that early years settings receive a significantly lower pupil premium in comparison to schools. This is particularly problematic given that it is the more disadvantaged learners who are most likely to use FE provision.

The Government must also increase funding to the most disadvantaged areas. Depth of poverty is a key driver of attainment. While there are currently no direct measures of depth of poverty, incorporating a persistent disadvantage factor into the NFF (National Funding Formula) would go some way to shifting funding towards those areas



with the largest disadvantage gaps. However, the pattern is not uniform. Some of the areas with the largest gaps would be unlikely to gain by much and others could even lose out.

Area-based classifications such as the Office for National Statistics's neighbourhood 'pen portraits' might be another way to better target funding towards those communities where attainment is lowest without introducing perverse incentives on schools.

### Increase pupil premium and special needs funding. Make both sets of funding more reactive

A number of Voice Community members highlighted the importance of special needs funding. Members described increasing numbers of children with additional learning needs in areas such as speech and language, and reductions in funding to support these students.

Going forward, the allocation changes from 2021 will base funding on the October Census and we hope that this will bring funding support into schools sooner<sup>3</sup>.

However, the changes that the Government has made to the pupil premium funding have caused huge concern throughout the sector. We know that members are very concerned about the impact that the initial shift to basing funding on the October Census rather than the traditional January date will have. Many more families have recently become eligible for pupil premium funding as a direct result of coronavirus, yet this won't be reflected for a delayed period, meaning schools will not benefit from the additional funds they need to provide additional learning support.

Money provided quickly to schools through the pupil premium could assuage some of the likely short-term effects on students and prevent the attainment gap from growing. Therefore, this change could prevent schools from providing the support that children so desperately need.

We will continue to campaign for students to be eligible for pupil premium funding at the point of need rather than having to wait for the annual census submission.

### Value the creative subjects

There is a temptation in the wake of the pandemic to focus only on the core skills of English and maths in order to try to advance catch-up. This would be a mistake - focusing on developing creative skills is important for the UK economy and students' engagement in learning.

The evidence is clear that the creative economy is a key strength of the UK economy. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport said in 2020 that the creative economies had been growing more than five times faster than the national economy, contributing more than £111 billion to the UK economy in 2018<sup>4</sup>.

And yet that has not stopped the Government from proposing a 50% cut in arts funding for universities and higher education colleges<sup>5</sup>. The value of creative subjects is not only economic, but also benefits students, enhancing and ensuring their education is enjoyable and engaging.

One member described today's education system as "an outdated Victorian based education system" characterised by "obsession with exams, obsession with academic excellence and defunding of SEN support, defunding of the arts and dehumanisation of the children" and this is echoed by former Education Secretary, Kenneth Baker who said:

*"I think that they've [GCSEs] run their course now. I'm in favour of them not continuing. We have an enormous chance this year, because there's not going to be any — whatever we do we have to watch very carefully how this operates and try to prove to people that sort of regular assessment is just as good and just as effective — and there'll be big feudal armies on both sides of that debate."*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Pupil Premium - GOV.UK' <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pupil-premium/pupil-premium#eligibility-and-funding>> [accessed 12 May 2021].

<sup>4</sup>UK's Creative Industries Contributes Almost £13 Million to the UK Economy Every Hour - GOV.UK' <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uks-creative-industries-contributes-almost-13-million-to-the-uk-economy-every-hour>> [accessed 23 April 2021].

<sup>5</sup>'Plans for 50% Funding Cut to Arts Subjects at Universities "Catastrophic" | Arts | The Guardian' <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/may/06/plans-for-50-funding-cut-to-arts-subjects-at-universities-catastrophic>> [accessed 12 May 2021].

<sup>6</sup>'GCSEs Must Go Says Former Education Secretary Kenneth Baker | Tes' <<https://www.tes.com/news/state-and-private-schools-movement-scrap-gcses>> [accessed 12 May 2021].



Voice Community has proposed reforms<sup>7</sup> which could include modernising the curriculum, reconsidering the role of GCSE exams and the all-pervasive accountability systems.

Education must focus on opportunities and outputs rather than outcomes. This involves providing a rich and broad curriculum for all with cross-subject learning, sport and enrichment activities and not one which is simply focused on achievement in a narrow range of subjects.

### Support in-person learning with digital technology

Learning in-person is overwhelmingly supported by the vast majority of staff in the sector.

Whilst there will be exceptions such as tutoring, where there will be a place for some online relationships, the majority of education settings and the majority of students benefit most where there is in-person learning.

That does not mean that technology should not be used in the classroom, in particular, giving staff more time to upskill themselves would help them to develop their skills and provide an enriched learning experience for their students.

Technology can also be used to extend learning into the home environment and through dedicated resources to support a deeper understanding of work. Whilst these tools cannot and should not replace direct teaching, they can allow students to revisit and consolidate their learning at their own pace. For example, they can be used for homework.

Where these tools are especially useful is where they adapt to the skills and abilities of the learners, providing activities to embed learning, and providing feedback to the teacher to help with planning and assessment, but crucially without increasing their workload.

It is also imperative that if digital technology is going to be used this way in the future, all students have equal access to avoid deepening any attainment gap.

### Encourage greater engagement with parents/ carers and the local community to embed and enrich learning

The pandemic has shown the critical role that parents play in the education of their children with both teachers and parents appreciating more fully the importance of a strong home/school partnership built on trust.

Learning that happens in schools is only a part of the learning jigsaw. Family learning is key to a child's engagement because it allows for classroom learning to be brought into the home and for parents and carers to engage in that learning.

Our members have highlighted the importance of parental aspirations in driving students' achievement. One member told us there would be a significant challenge in "supporting families whose children's ability, focus [and] ambition has decreased". In many cases this is down to gaps in the parents' own education.

According to Parentkind, "such collaboration may be the only way of mitigating as much as possible any lost classroom learning, and the swiftest way to ensure oversight of increasing amounts of remote online learning as local shutdowns become a fact of life, most probably throughout this academic year."<sup>8</sup>

So how can we build on and improve home/school co-working? Measures to improve engagement include:

- regular updates of curriculum content; and
- where possible, engaging and involving parents with the skills they have including classes for parents — especially for those families with the greatest need.

Family learning opportunities are sadly rare today, yet they are important in building aspirations for children, and help to increase the value placed on learning by the whole family.

<sup>7</sup>For example, Deborah Lawson, 'Recovery Won't Be Easy- but We Must Succeed', SecEd, 2021 <<https://www.sec-ed.co.uk/blog/recovery-wont-be-easy-but-we-must-succeed-build-back-better-coronavirus-assessment-exams/>> [accessed 12 May 2021].

<sup>8</sup>The Pandemic Has Shown Us That Parents Have a Bigger Role to Play in Education | Involve.Org.Uk' <<https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/opinion/pandemic-has-shown-us-parents-have-bigger-role-play-education>> [accessed 12 May 2021].



**Any additional or extended hours must not come at the expense of teachers' workloads and must be either paid or avoided**

Whilst it is important that additional resources go into supporting education recovery, it is important to recognise the effects on staff, both deliberate and unintentional.

As observed in our evidence, staff have been working intensely in difficult circumstances and many are exhausted to such an extent that there are worrying reports of an imminent staff exodus.<sup>9</sup>

The Department for Education has indicated that extended hours are likely to play a part in its plans for education recovery, a recovery they estimate will take four years.

If the Government is seriously considering expanding learning time by increasing working hours, then it must find ways of doing so that do not unfairly increase the burden on an exhausted staff.

A start could be ensuring that staff who already provide extra-curricular activities, which many do voluntarily, are paid to do so and allowing these after-school activities to become compulsory for students.

Sir Kevan Collins, the Government's Education Recovery Commissioner, confirmed that he believes it is about "growing the system", but that staff should not be asked "to do any more for no more" and that comes "with a very significant price tag"<sup>10</sup> running into the billions.

In some settings, work can also be divided into that which requires staff support and that which does not. For example, some colleges are planning to concentrate practical teaching sessions during certain days and asking their students to carry out theory-based work at other times.

It has been indicated that any extended hours will be delivered on a voluntary basis, but it is important that urgent clarity is provided as to whether staff will be remunerated for this. Voluntary should not mean unpaid.

<sup>9</sup> Weale, S in The Guardian 18 Nov 2020 'Exodus of Exhausted Headteachers Predicted in England after Pandemic | Schools | The Guardian' <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/nov/18/exodus-of-exhausted-headteachers-predicted-in-england-after-pandemic>> [accessed 12 May 2021].

<sup>10</sup> Gibbons, A in TES, 21 April 2021 'News Briefing: What the Catch-up Tsar Wants for Schools | Tes' <<https://www.tes.com/news/news-briefing-what-catch-tsar-wants-schools>> [accessed 12 May 2021].



# Retention in the education sector: The evidence

**As a result of the pandemic and long-term trends there is a retention crisis facing the sector**

The findings of Voice Community’s survey are reinforced in the results of the most recent School Workforce in England survey<sup>11</sup> (the latest data available is for the reporting year 2019). The latest data shows that:

- 33,565 teachers took a break from teaching or left the profession (84.6% of all leavers);
- just 5,979 retired, making up 15.1% of all leavers; and
- the overall leavers rate was 9.2%.

In addition, changes to working hours, such as going part time, affected 5.4% of teachers while 3.7% increased their working hours. Overall, these changes had a net result of a decrease in working time equivalent to 3,200 qualified teachers between 2018, and 2019.

Of the teachers who qualified in 2018, just 85.4% were still in service one year after qualification.

In fact, the data shows that the retention rate is actually falling over time, although there may have been a slight uptick in 2018.

		England				
		2019 November				
		1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years
Retention Rate (%)	2014	86.3	79.4	74.0	70.3	67.4
	2015	86.1	78.6	78.3	69.9	n/a
	2016	85.1	77.8	73.2	n/a	n/a
	2017	85.1	78.3	n/a	n/a	n/a
	2018	85.4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: School Workforce in England survey

The pressures of coronavirus have not improved this situation and although the data had not, at the time of publication, been collected for 2020, the data Voice Community has collected indicates that the problems with retention in the sector have not gone away.

The evidence is clear that experienced and skilled teachers are leaving the profession in droves. This has knock-on effects for the sector, not only are the costs of recruitment to fill this gap significant, but the effects of large numbers of newer teachers reduces the pipeline of staff with greater experience to take on senior leadership roles. One member said; “I personally think the biggest challenge will be experienced teachers leaving education”.

Note that though the data varies in different nations of the UK, the themes are clear, and the issue of retention affects the education workforce across the UK and in all types of settings.

**22% of staff plan to leave education within 3 years**

One of the biggest challenges facing the education sector is retention of experienced teachers. This is not a new trend, but rather one that has persisted over time since well before the coronavirus pandemic.

Voice Community data shows that 22.39% of our members plan to leave the education sector within the next three years.

<sup>11</sup>‘School Workforce in England, Reporting Year 2019 – Explore Education Statistics – GOV.UK’ <<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england>> [accessed 14 April 2021].



There were differences among roles:

- 24% of classroom teachers intended to leave;
- 19% of HLTA and classroom support;
- 28% of nursery staff;
- 22% of lecturers;
- 14% of head teachers or senior leaders;
- 23% of supply teachers; and
- 20% of teaching assistants.

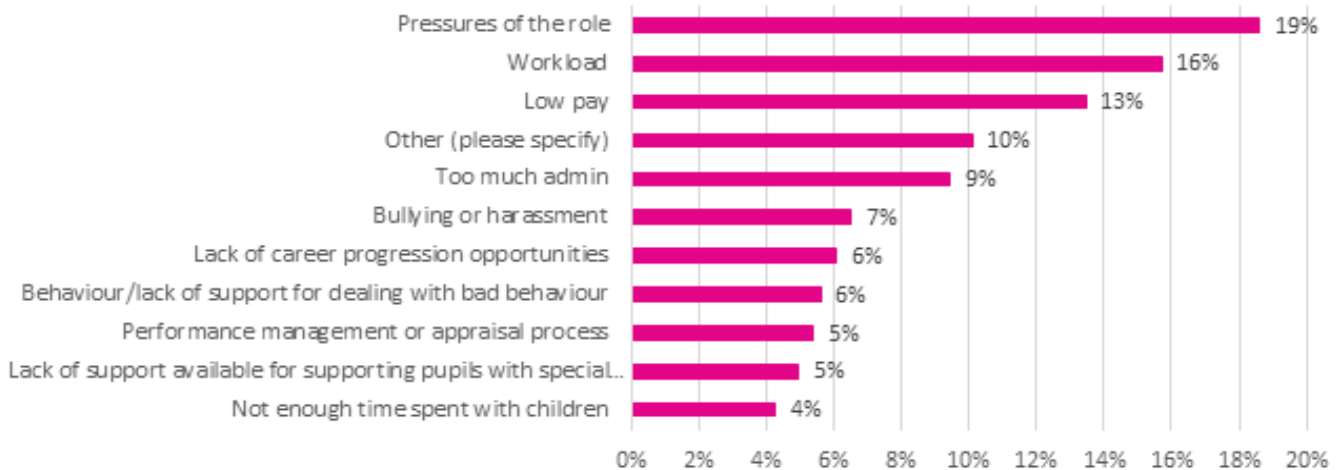
### Why do people leave the education sector?

#### Staff want to leave the sector primarily because of pressures of the role and workload

Our analysis highlights that the most common reasons for staff wanting to leave the sector were the pressures of the role and workload. Low pay was also highlighted as well as too much administration.

One member highlighted that many staff are leaving “because the job itself is challenging enough but the way we have been treated throughout the pandemic has been shocking. Staff will either be off with stress or just want out”.

#### If you plan to leave the sector, what are your reasons?



Source: Voice Community Survey

In our survey, of those who chose “other”, age and retirement were the major responses (4.29%).

Some respondents expressed concerns about their susceptibility to coronavirus and the protections available in their workplace (0.95%), whilst others were just disillusioned with the job (1.91%).

In our feedback staff told us pressure was a significant issue facing the sector going forward. Respondents told us about the pressure they experienced: “we seem to be being asked to do more and more with less free time to do it in”.

For classroom teachers, it was workload, followed by pressures of the role, that were the key drivers causing staff to want to leave the sector, and it was the same situation as for head teachers. Pressures of the role were also particularly affecting nursery leaders and managers.

#### Health and safety

Another push factor was health and safety concerns. Those who feel less safe than before or much less safe were significantly more likely to plan to leave the sector. 26% of those who planned to stay in the sector said they felt less safe





or much less safe. But of those who planned to stop working in the sector in the next year, 63% felt unsafe or much less safe.

There have been challenges applying the Government's recommendations in the classroom, which have especially affected these groups. One teaching assistant told us "TAs are more vulnerable than any other profession in the building because we work so closely with children with mental and physical impairment. We have to work up close to do our job effectively".

### **Low pay is a specific problem in early years and for classroom support and teaching assistants**

Our research found differences by role. Low pay affected those who worked in nurseries particularly.

For classroom support (such as teaching assistants) low pay and pressures of the role were significant drivers. For people working in classroom support roles, many felt that during the pandemic they had been taking on teaching type roles but had not been rewarded for doing this even when they had been the primary contact responsible for the education of a "bubble" of children.

Other staff also felt that low pay for classroom support was causing their colleagues to leave, and that they could not teach effectively without sufficient classroom support. One member told us that "reduction in funding for additional and special needs pupils... [leads to] reduction in support staff therefore reduction in support leading to increased pressures/stress on teaching staff and management".

We also analysed the divergence between different types of settings. Interestingly it was in local authority settings that staff were most likely to want to stay in the sector.

- Local authority nursery/pre/school/early years - just 13% considering leaving.
- Local authority school - 19% considering leaving.
- Independent school - 21% considering.
- Academy or free school - 26% considering leaving.
- Private nursery - 35% considering leaving.

The difference between local authority settings and private settings may be down to the differences in progression opportunities available.

It is clear that private nurseries are a particular hotspot for staff wanting to leave, due to low pay and a strong sense that the sector is not valued.

Funding and support staff pay were other notable issues we found when asking staff what the biggest challenges facing the future of education were.

### **Career development has taken a backseat during the pandemic**

In our analysis of the data, we found other push factors likely to encourage members to leave the sector. One of these is lack of professional development.

Those who had undertaken CPD (continuing professional development) within the last six months were significantly more likely to say they did not plan to leave the sector – 83% of those with CPD in the last 6 months had no plans to leave the sector compared to 62% who last had CPD more than a year ago.

Notably, although not surprisingly, head teachers and classroom teachers, as well as HLTAs (higher level teaching assistants) were most likely to have taken part in CPD, whilst TAs, other support staff, and nursery nurses were least likely to have undertaken CPD recently. This reinforces a sense that support roles, despite their critical importance in supporting students' learning, are not sufficiently valued.

Finally, indicative of the lack of focus on training staff, failure to provide training to support online learning was a significant factor in affecting members' views of continuing to work in education.

100% of those who said that they planned to leave the sector within a year said that they had not been provided with appropriate training to prepare them for online learning. This compared to about half of those who planned to stay in the sector.

This complements our finding that giving staff adequate training and support not only gives staff the confidence and ability to do their job better, but also increases their sense of feeling valued in the role.



## Recommendations: Retention

**Increased PPA (Planning, Preparation and Assessment) time for all school staff and added flexibility, including the ability to take it at home**

One of the key challenges that staff highlighted as affecting their view of work was workload. It is clear that giving staff proper time to prepare their work, particularly in school settings, allows them to manage their workloads.

International comparisons show that teachers in England spend more time working than in many other high-performing countries, with some estimates suggesting teachers work an average of 50 hours each week, with much of this work undertaken in the evenings and at weekends, having a detrimental impact on teachers' homelives.

We call for:

- an increase in PPA time for all school staff;
- time for support staff to engage with the planning process and, where they are leading small group sessions and specific interventions, time to prepare for these; and
- all staff to have the flexibility to take their PPA time at home.

**Value support staff through pay, conditions and career development**

Support staff are key to supporting the necessary individualised learning which drives attainment among the high-attainers as well as those with specific learning needs. There is evidence that working with highly-trained TAs can lead to improvements in students' attitudes, and also to positive effects in terms of teacher morale and reduced stress.

Voice Community has repeatedly called for increased recognition and professionalism for support staff, wanting to see proper career support and development and suitably increased funding which adequately recognises the crucial role they play in the classroom.



**Regular personal development time for staff and a personal training allowance**

Staff should be provided with an allowance to invest in their own training and development. Whilst part of the training budget will be devoted to training recommended by the employer, staff should have a ringfenced budget to invest in their own development as they see fit.

**Increased numbers of health and safety reps in schools as well as added rights and protections for these reps**

Health and safety reps should be given increased protections and increased time to raise issues and work with managers and leaders to implement solutions which address them. There should also be an increased number of health and safety reps to ensure there is at least one union health and safety rep trained per school in addition to any site health and safety staff.



### Protection for staff raising health and safety concerns across the sector

There are particular concerns in nurseries, special schools and alternative provision where the health and safety of staff can seemingly come second to the right of the child to attend. There is a balance to be found which protects this right and the health and safety of staff whilst recognising that young children and students with additional needs may struggle to control their behaviour.

Where staff do raise health and safety concerns with colleagues and senior leaders, they should be able to do so without fear of detriment, and yet we know that this is not always the case. There should be an increased right for health and safety concerns to be raised without risk of detriment as we know that in some instances health and safety concerns are not taken seriously.

### A reduction in workload, especially in relation to data demands

Back in 2016, the Department for Education published three independent reports into workload<sup>12</sup>, looking at practical strategies to reduce workload on planning, marking and data. This was further supplemented in 2018 by *Making Data Work*<sup>13</sup> which committed the Government to reducing data demands on schools and trusts.

Voice Community continues to work with the Department for Education and schools to promote the reduction of workload for all staff in schools. In particular we recommend that:

- data collection should be no more than is necessary;
- staff should not be held to account for student targets derived from data; and
- appraisal targets should not include progress data target.

<sup>12</sup> 'Reducing School Workload - GOV.UK' <<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/reducing-school-workload>> [accessed 12 May 2021].

<sup>13</sup> 'Teacher Workload Advisory Group Report and Government Response - GOV.UK' <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teacher-workload-advisory-group-report-and-government-response>> [accessed 12 May 2021].



## Early years: The evidence

The early years sector has specific needs which are unique to the sector. In this segment of the report, we highlight some of the key trends.

### Staff in the early years sector do not feel valued

The evidence is clear that the early years workforce is not valued and does not feel valued.

One member told us: “The society and media, I suppose, have no awareness and knowledge under what kind of high-pressure people work in early years ... as soon [as I have] the opportunity to leave early years, I will do. It feels sad as children are so wonderful to be with, to look after, helping and supporting them in their development and well-being. But I have reached the point where it feels, **enough is enough.**”

One respondent told us: “The Government has made it quite clear that early years are not educators and are a babysitting service” while another said, “we are an undervalued, underpaid sector that clearly no-one cares about”.

Another member said, starkly: “Early years staff will leave the sector in droves. We are unsupported, unprotected and furious.”

### Pay in the early years sector is too low

It was clear from our data that low pay was a particular push factor in the early years sector. 14.29% of respondents in the early years sector highlighted this as a reason they were considering leaving education, equal with the other major factor - the pressures of the role.

According to the Social Mobility Commission, the average wage in the early years workforce is just £7.42 an hour compared to £12.57 for the general population<sup>14</sup>.

Low pay has significant effects on workers in the sector and follow-on impacts on the children they support.

Workers find themselves find themselves in poverty, and reliance on food banks and universal credit is high amongst workers in the sector.

Clearly this has consequences for retention and recruitment. The low salaries do not incentivise workers undergoing development to enhance their skills further.

This can be seen in our data, with just 57.93% having done any CPD in the last 6 months compared to 63.76% of our respondents in the population as a whole.

<sup>14</sup> Early Years Workforce Commission, ‘A Workforce in Crisis : Saving Our Early Years’, January, 2021.

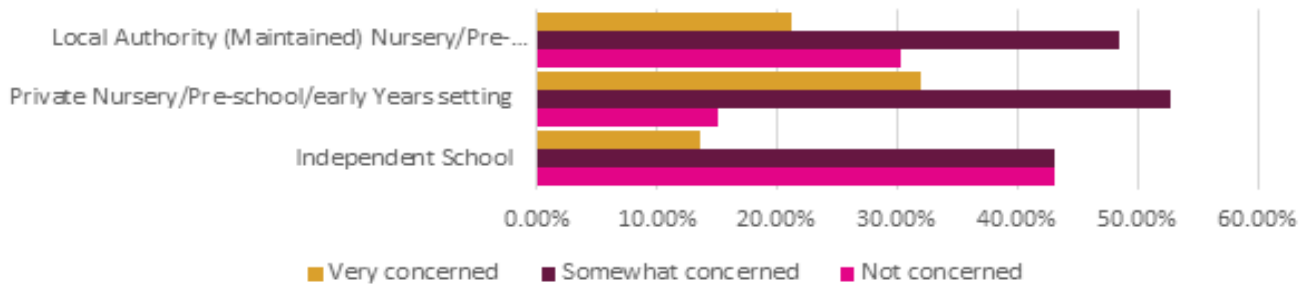


### Funding in the sector is inadequate and inconsistent

Across the board our members told us they were concerned about the viability of their settings. 58.32% of members overall were either somewhat concerned or very concerned that their setting would have to shut down or provide a reduced service as a result of coronavirus.

When looking specifically at early years settings the percentage raising concerns about their setting rose to 69.69%, and in local authority nurseries and early years settings, 84.91% of respondents were somewhat concerned or very concerned that their setting would have to shut down or provide a reduced service as a result of COVID, potentially leaving them at risk of furlough or facing redundancy.

### Are you concerned that your setting will have to shut down or provide a reduced service because of COVID?



Source: Voice Community Survey

These fears are not unfounded given the funding pressures that have faced nurseries and pre-schools during the pandemic. As the Local Government Association observed in a recent briefing<sup>15</sup> many settings operated at a loss whilst open during the national lockdowns, and funding arrangements only covered around half the normal income of private, voluntary and independent (PVI) early years settings.

The current funding model is inadequate both for parents and for staff. Parents in England face the highest childcare costs in Europe. According to the Money Advice Service, parents now pay an average of £7,000 per year for a part time nursery place, and costs can be even higher in London<sup>16</sup>.

There are some policies currently in place to support parents in England:

- up to 30 hours of free childcare; and
- tax free childcare – for every £8 a parent pays into the childcare account, the Government will pay in £2, up to a maximum of £2,000 per child each year or £4,000 per disabled child each year.

These policies are clearly insufficient. One member specifically criticised the “3–4-year olds’ ‘free’ entitlement”. It’s clear that in reality the entitlement is not ‘free’, as it does not cover the cost of delivering the provision in many parts of the country.

Notably, in Scotland, where the prevailing model is for local authority nurseries, there is a less significant issue with retention as shown in our survey results.

As one member put it “childcare costs are very expensive, pricing parents out. Low pay for staff drives people out”.

### Young children have lost social skills during the pandemic

Our members in the early years sector observed significant issues with the social skills of young children in particular.

This reflects trends in education of older students, but is particularly concerning given the importance of the early years in future social development.

<sup>15</sup> Local Government Association, ‘Effect of the COVID-19 Outbreak on Early Years Settings, House of Commons, 12 January 2021 | Local Government Association’ <<https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/effect-covid-19-outbreak-early-years-settings-house-commons-12>> [accessed 20 April 2021].

<sup>16</sup> Money Advice Service, ‘Average Childcare Costs - Money Advice Service’ <<https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/articles/childcare-costs>> [accessed 19 April 2021].



## Recommendations to support the early years

### Value the sector with appropriate training, qualifications, and funding

An awareness campaign needs to be put in place to highlight how critically important early childhood education is and the impact this has on children's life chances.

We would like to see all stakeholders, from government to unions and early years settings, working together to raise awareness of the critical importance of early childhood education.

Stakeholders should emphasise that early years professionals are just that, skilled professionals whose work adds significant value and this should be reflected with appropriate training, qualifications and funding.

### Ensure a fair wage is paid to every worker in the sector

Low pay "impacts quality primarily by preventing qualified and committed individuals from considering working in child-care or early education in the first place".<sup>17</sup> Therefore, ensuring fair wages across the sector would remove the choice between working in the sector and having a income and should significantly improve retention in the sector.

The real Living Wage is currently £9.50 in the UK, 28% above the average wage in the sector.

Poor pay leads to increased turnover of staff and a lack of stability for the children with whom they work. OECD evidence suggests "stability in care has been found to be strongly and consistently positively related to child outcomes". Initially, there should be an aspiration to pay the real Living Wage, with a stepped plan directed towards this goal based on a sliding scale by business type, to ensure that the smallest settings do not suffer initially.

One of the reasons for low pay is the broken funding model, so to fix the funding model, would have a knock-on positive impact on staff wages in the sector.

### Fix the "free entitlement" so it's truly free and works for both early years settings and parents

A number of respondents to our survey highlighted issues with the free entitlement within early years, pointing out that the amount that the Government makes available for the entitlement does not fully fund the places, leaving settings to attempt to subsidise the entitlement by charging parents. This results in varying income for early years settings, meaning that the job security of staff is uncertain, especially in periods of recession. The Government must ensure that the free entitlement reflects market costs in every part of the country.

The concept of "free entitlement" is very seductive, meaning that settings risk losing clients if they do not make this available despite the fact that they may be doing so at considerable financial loss. In order to recoup some of their losses, settings are obliged to charge additional costs for food, nappies and personal care materials and higher hourly fees for those who do pay.

As was recommended by the Early Years Workforce Commission, additional funding is required for settings in disadvantaged communities. At the moment, supplements are a maximum of 10% in the EYNFF (Early Years National Funding Formula). This should be increased to 18%, which would be reflective of the additional needs funding of 17.6% of the schools' formula. The early years pupil premium should be increased - currently it is £302 per child compared to £1,345 per student in primary schools.

The Government must increase the funding for the early years sector particularly in the most disadvantaged parts of the country if it is to realise the significant benefits of high quality early years education.

<sup>17</sup> OECD, Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Research Brief: Working Conditions Matter <<https://www.oecd.org/education/school/49322250.pdf>> [accessed 12 May 2021]



### Career development for workers in early years

The Government's/Department for Education's previous Early Years Workforce Strategy was published in 2017 and an update is due.

We recommend that staff are given clear pathways to higher pay, and that previously abandoned targets for increasing the number of graduates in the sector are reinstated in order to raise the profile and professionalism of the sector.

The aspiration should be for a graduate workforce. The evidence is clear from the OECD<sup>18</sup> that in countries such as in Scandinavia, where a bachelor's degree is required as a minimum qualification, not only does the role have higher status, but committed and skilled staff are incentivised to work in the sector.

The Nuffield Foundation also reports a clear relationship between graduates in the setting and educational outcomes, the strength of which increases when children spend more hours in the setting<sup>19</sup>.



### Focus on social skills and mental wellbeing

The early years recovery should have a specific focus on social skills, helping the very youngest children to have the best start in life.

The amount of pupil premium should be increased in the early years sector to more accurately reflect the influence that can be had on children's lives during this critical life stage. It is during this time that behaviours and attitudes are developed, and a love of learning can be fostered. Evidence suggests that money spent during this phase can be more effective, pound for pound, than investment in later years. Therefore, it is appropriate for adequate funding to be in place to properly support the individual needs of the children and to reflect the diverse skills of a highly trained workforce.

### Return to learning through play

The recent change to the early learning goals in the Early Years Foundation Stage has re-ignited previous debates about learning through play, with a renewed focus on communication skills, literacy, and numeracy. To be clear, there is no reason that these cannot be delivered and observed through student-lead activities, but members are concerned that "early years have lost the sense of learning through play". This could be particularly key as we emerge out of the pandemic where, as a member explained "messy play and social interaction are so important in the early years."

Voice Community is clear that early years must continue to be child-focused, recognising and celebrating their achievements across all of the early learning goals, without any undue focus on 'school readiness'.

<sup>18</sup> QECD.

<sup>19</sup> "Bonetti Sara and Blanden Jo, Early Years Workforce Qualifications and Children's Outcomes, An Analysis Using Administrative Data, 2020 <[www.nuffieldfoundation.org](http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org)> [accessed 11 May 2021]."



Voice  
community