

# EARLY YEARS (ENGLAND)



## SUPPORTING THE EARLY YEARS WORKFORCE THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

By the Early Years Workforce  
Commission

Against a backdrop of an escalating funding crisis and other well-documented challenges facing the sector, the impacts of COVID-19 are being felt by early years staff and settings. The pandemic, lockdown and declining economy have begun to take their toll.

**A**t the centre of these challenges sit the providers and workforce who continue to work in stressful, challenging roles, while delivering a service imperative for the country's workforce and economy, and its long-term future.

The Early Years Workforce Commission, of which Voice is a member, was set up to address the challenges facing the early years workforce, and offer workable solutions to support the sector. During this challenging time, the Commission is working to ensure the sector is able to continue providing its vital service.

The Commission has been gathering data from the sector, which will inform a report to be published later this year. It will address some of the workforce's biggest concerns highlighted by our research, and provide workable solutions that can be embedded into a revised workforce strategy.

### Impact of COVID-19

Our research gathered data on key areas affecting the workforce, including COVID-19. When asked what they felt was important for them to thrive in their roles following the national lockdown, respondents said:

- > contingency planning for another potential local lockdown;
- > wellbeing initiatives; and
- > internal and external training opportunities.

Having additional support in place for staff to feel safe and comfortable at work can make a huge difference to the care and education they provide.

### Ideas settings can implement to support the workforce

- > **Having strong contingency plans and protocols** in place for various eventualities is essential for any business, and can make a huge difference to staff. Communicating these plans to the staff team is important. Regular updates and meetings, individually or as a group, can provide the opportunity for employees to ask questions, share their thoughts and suggestions, and ultimately, ensure they feel informed and included.
- > **Mental health workshops and training** can be great for morale and job satisfaction. A designated mental health lead can support the team and provide training to keep staff morale and wellbeing high. This support could come in the form of workshops or more

formal training. National education services charity NCFE ([www.ncfe.org.uk](http://www.ncfe.org.uk)) has developed qualifications and tools to support staff wellbeing and remove the stigmas around mental health.

- > **Increased training and CPD make jobs more fulfilling.** Making sure staff have up-to-date knowledge and continue to broaden their understanding of child development and wellbeing through continuing professional development (CPD) and training ensures they feel that they are continuing to learn and develop in their role, and that the job holds opportunity for progression, as well as having a positive impact on the children they care for. At this challenging time, staff and children need additional guidance to navigate new and unprecedented circumstances.

### Recommendations and further information

The Commission's report will explore these challenges and many more much further, and will have recommendations which address **our overarching goals to:**

- > **support the sector to identify, and recover from, the impacts of COVID-19;**
- > **promote wider recognition of the importance of the early years sector and its staff;**
- > **identify ways the sector can offer more rewarding and attractive career opportunities that reflect the intrinsic role the sector plays in supporting the economy and national workforce; and**
- > **establish ways to boost recruitment and safeguard job retention within the sector.**

Find out more about the Commission on **Twitter @EYWC2020** or by email: [eywc@plmr.co.uk](mailto:eywc@plmr.co.uk).