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Exclusive: Poor pay and status risk exodus of qualified early years teachers

Union raises concerns about early years teacher status not being equivalent of qualified teacher status

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Early years staff who have gained official early years teacher status are now struggling to find graduate-level employment, a survey has found.

The findings of a survey of early years teachers, early years initial teacher training (EYITT) course leaders and past EYITT students have

raised concerns that there could be an exodus of skilled professionals from the sector.

PACEY (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years) and Voice: the union for education professionals, are calling on the government to take "urgent action" on the pay and status of early years teachers.

PACEY chief executive Liz Bayram said: "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."

Qualified early years teacher status was introduced in 2013 but has a separate set of standards from those for mainstream teachers – meaning that early years teachers do not have QTS and are not on the same pay scale as teachers in schools.

There have been long-standing concerns about the status of early years teachers, with Save the Children telling MPs almost two years ago that the lower status of the job putting people off from applying.

A report outlining the findings of the survey, carried out by the two organisations and completed by 428 people, says: "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. 64 per cent of past students reported that they personally had difficulties, and 82 per cent of current students said they expect to have difficulties.”

The report lists nine recommendations for the DfE:

1. Allow early years teachers to lead nursery and reception classes in maintained schools.
2. Reinstate the target that every setting in England should benefit from graduate pedagogical leadership.
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.
4. Provide better guidance and support for settings about graduate qualifications.
5. Require more transparency of EYITT course structures and outcomes.
6. Improve statistical data used for reporting and planning for EYITT qualifications.
7. Replace early years teacher status (EYTS) with a new early years specialist route to QTS, specialising in the years from birth to seven.
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.
9. Require reception teachers to have early years training.

A Department for Education spokesperson said: “We want to boost the status of our dedicated early years professionals and encourage the brightest talent into this already thriving industry – that’s why by 2020 we will be spending an additional £1 billion a year to deliver 30 hours of free childcare and fund the increase in rates that we

introduced in April 2017.

"We recognise the skills that early years teachers bring to the early years workforce. We continue to support graduates into the sector through bursaries and employer incentives, as well as developing the skills of those already working in the sector and we are considering a range of approaches to supporting graduates in the early years workforce."

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