



Association for the Professional Development  
of Early Years Educators

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## **TACTYC Response to *More Great Childcare***

**It is indisputable that the quality of early years provision is related to better intellectual/cognitive and social/behavioural development in children at entry to and throughout primary school. It is also understood that settings with higher proportions of qualified staff are associated with more effective early years provision. However, the planned changes to the care and education of babies and toddlers will reduce quality for the following reasons:**

### **Care and education**

These are not separate but closely and inexorably linked in early childhood, from birth through to at least seven years of age. Emotional intelligence needs to be emphasised as much as the cognitive and young children are learning from all their experiences whether these are intended to be 'educational' or not. It is unfortunate that current government terminology consistently refers to 'childcare', when a much broader awareness of early years provision covering both education and childcare is required.

The statement: '*We are also going to reform the current cumbersome statutory processes required of schools if they want to take children lower down the age range*' is of concern if it means that schools can formalise the learning of younger and younger children. It is vital that young children are perceived as 'learners' rather than 'students/pupils': they learn best through their own auspices, that is, learning from playful, meaningful experiences, rather than those activities dictated by adults. If schools take younger children they will need to understand the requirements of a play-based curriculum for such young children and not merely incorporate them into a KS1-type teaching environment.

### **Ratios**

TACTYC strongly opposes the increase in ratios of babies and toddlers to adults, however well-qualified the staff. Research has shown that within the same types of early years provision, quality falls as ratios rise<sup>i ii</sup>. This is particularly important with regard to the care and education (which are intrinsically linked) of babies and toddlers. Years of research and practice development have shown that babies' and toddlers' development is best fostered by closely responsive interaction and warm, consistent relationships with adults. This is particularly vital for babies during their first year. Clearly, this will be more difficult to maintain if staff are responsible for more children. Staff well qualified in early years education will already know that this is not in the best interests of the youngest children.

### **Qualifications**

We welcome the development of the Early Years Educator qualifications to improve rigour and depth in level 3 training. Experience in working and playing with children gives insights into children's ways of thinking and learning, but a sound knowledge of child development, learning

theories and multi-professional practices are also vital for early years educators. We maintain that this should cover the birth to seven age range.

The Early Years Teachers (EYT) proposals leave many unanswered questions and raise concerns about the future of those with Early Years Professional Status. An Early Years Teacher qualification that does not have QTS is a puzzling and unhelpful concept. The document states that '*Early Years Teacher Status will be seen as the equivalent to QTS*' but without QTS (p.45). We have been down this route before with EYPs, who were proclaimed to be equivalent, but did not enjoy the same terms and conditions of service or therefore the same status as teachers. Changing the name is unlikely to remedy this. Without clear identification of EYTs within the ranks of qualified teachers, the goal of attracting high calibre individuals into this demanding and skilled profession will not be realised. What is required is a QTS route which fully integrates the strengths of the EYP programme in working with children and families from birth, and includes assessed teaching practice in line with other teachers. Early Years Teachers (EYT) should also cover the age range birth to seven. Further, the contribution that multidisciplinary Early Childhood Studies degrees can make to the development of a growing cadre of professionals, with the depth of knowledge and understanding required for the continuing improvement of practice in early years settings, should be recognised.

The statement that '*Existing Early Years Professionals will be recognised as the equivalent of Early Years Teachers*' (p. 28) gives further weight to the expectation that the EYT will not represent a change in professional recognition for EYPs, but will leave them in the limbo of a promised status which has not materialised.

Of particular concern is the aim to have '*more school teachers teaching younger children*' with rules changed '*so that it is easier for schools to offer provision to the under-threes*' (p. 29). Primary teachers should be required to undergo Early Years Teacher training, including early years pedagogy and child development, before teaching young children who are younger than compulsory school age.

We are keen that an even wider gulf than currently exists should not open up between those working with children up to two or three years of age and those working with older children. Regardless of any potential (and disastrous) relaxing of ratio rules that may be introduced, we are concerned that the more highly qualified members of staff will be more likely to work with the older children in an even more pronounced division than currently exists.

### **Childminders**

Childminders are preferred by many parents because they offer a family context for children rather than a formalised 'education' context. Any expectation that they are 'teaching' children should be accompanied by training programmes to ensure quality and effectiveness. The current proposals risk developing a two-tier system of childminders, with agency-based childminders being seen as providing 'childcare' only rather than as early years professionals. There are no qualifications listed as requirements for childminders to be able to work with larger numbers of children.

### **Inspection**

We are concerned about the plan not to inspect all childminders if they are part of an agency. Together with increased ratios possible for childminders, this will not instil confidence in quality and safety.

The plan to establish Ofsted as the 'sole arbiter of quality' is of significant concern. Handing sole power to Ofsted returns control to a central position and out of local hands. Ending the local authority quality improvement role removes a powerful source of immediate, well-informed and on-going support and challenge. Local authority teams have local knowledge of the context, maintain a

picture of settings' development, and are best placed to drive improvements in quality. Ofsted judgements are often at odds with the more detailed awareness of provider strengths and weaknesses held by LA teams, and the snapshot of quality obtained at an Ofsted inspection on a particular day cannot possibly provide as accurate a picture as that held by the LA. It is particularly worrying that Ofsted will decide whether a setting can receive funding for early education. Ofsted may inspect a setting previously judged to be 'good' only after four years or more, which cannot guarantee quality and safety in a volatile sector where a change of staffing can have enormous ramifications.

We are concerned about the proposal to remove the requirement for schools to register separately with Ofsted in order to provide for children under three. A policy that treats two-year-olds as the same as three- and four-year-olds risks inappropriate practice that fails to meet two-year-olds developmental needs, undermining their well-being and development. Experience shows that inspections of the Early Years Foundation Stage in schools vary greatly in the knowledge and understanding of the inspector in child development and early years pedagogy. We would like to raise the question of what additional requirements (in terms of knowledge, understanding, qualifications and training) would be made for the Ofsted inspectors themselves. The harmful effects of inappropriate expectations and recommendations would be exacerbated by applying approaches usually associated with the primary phase to such young children.

### **Other**

Rather than extending school provision, care and education for young children, especially two-year-olds, could be provided more effectively through children's centres with their expertise in interprofessional working. This is important in working with families and young children from disadvantaged backgrounds and planning for positive early interventions.

Early education is not simply about accountability and value for money. It is about the lives and prospects of our youngest citizens who are entitled to education and care appropriate to their current needs.

**February, 2013**

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<sup>i</sup> Mathers, S., Sylva, K. & Joshi, H. (2007) *Quality of Childcare Settings in the Millenium Cohort Study*. DfES Research Report SSU/2007/FR/ 025.

<sup>ii</sup> Munton, T., Barclay, L., Mallardo, M. R. & Barreau, S. (2002) *Research on Ratios, Group Size and Staff Qualifications and Training in Early Years and Childcare Settings*. DfES Research Report RR320.