

# Shaking the foundations of quality? Why 'childcare' policy must not lead to poor-quality early education and care

**Cathy Nutbrown**  
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On the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2012 following a rigorous public consultation, I published my government-commissioned report '*Foundations for Quality*', an independent review of early education and childcare qualifications in England. I began my report with the statement that:

*'Learning begins from birth, and high quality early education and care has the potential to make an important and positive impact on the learning, development and wellbeing of babies and young children, in their daily lives and the longer term.'*

Conscious of the century-long tradition in England of high quality early education through nursery schools, I noted the developments to improve quality and include provision for very young children that had occurred in recent decades, and I said that '*every child in home and group settings today deserves the very best early education and care*'. It was on this principle that I based my Review and my final recommendations.

If it seems obvious, it is still necessary to reassert that what matters most in the early years workforce is the quality of the experiences they can offer young children. I made clear my view that early years carers and educators are professionals who themselves need continually to develop their own knowledge, skills and understanding. They need to be confident in their own work with children and in engaging with parents and professionals, such as health visitors and social workers. I wrote a report that I hoped would give good advice to Government about the importance of the people who make up the diverse early years workforce having opportunities to progress in their careers, and to become effective pedagogical leaders who understand the learning and development needs of children and can enhance and extend teaching and learning opportunities whatever form the provision takes.

In my report I set out and justified recommendations to improve the quality of early education and care for young children so that:

- *every child is able to experience high-quality care and education whatever type of home or group setting they attend;*
- *early years staff have a strong professional identity, take pride in their work, and are recognised and valued by parents, other professionals and society as a whole;*
- *high quality early education and care is led by well-qualified early years practitioners; and the importance of childhood is understood, respected and valued.*

*(Foundations for Quality 2012:10)*

My recommendations were widely welcomed by the sector and I received many messages of support from key agencies, organisations, and individuals involved in early childhood education and care. There were clear indications that providers from private, independent, voluntary and state-maintained sectors, childminders and parents were in broad agreement with my recommendations and were looking forward to a positive response from Government.

I knew that my aspirations were achievable because I had seen them happening in so many settings. However, they did not always happen, and children's preschool experiences varied too much. Therefore I made recommendations to Government to ensure the following:

- *An increase in the number of qualified teachers with specialist early years knowledge who lead practice in settings who - working directly with babies, young children, and their parents, - demonstrably use their pedagogical expertise to support young children's learning, play and development.*
- *The recognition of Early Years teachers who lead, and are supported by, an effective team of early years practitioners, qualified at a minimum of Level 3, with all staff taking professional pride in their work, and continually seeking to extend and develop their knowledge and skills.*
- *The requirement that those who are working towards early education and childcare qualifications should be taught and supported by qualified and knowledgeable tutors, who are themselves experienced in the early years. Tutors, as much as the practitioners in the setting, must take pride in their professional development, and regularly engage in practice in settings, ensuring their skills and pedagogy are current.*
- *That only those candidates who are confident and capable in their literacy and numeracy are admitted to these level 3 courses; in parallel, Level 3 qualifications must be rigorous and challenging, requiring high quality experiences in placements, giving students time to reflect on and improve their own practice.*
- *The demonstration of a rigour of qualification such that employers can have confidence that those who hold a recognised qualification have the necessary depth and breadth of knowledge and experience to be ready for work in the setting.*
- *The requirement on employers to support new members of staff, and take the time to induct them to the setting and their role, and ensure they have this ongoing support and mentoring in place for at least their first six months.*

*(Foundations for Quality 2012:11)*

So why, on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2013, when the document 'More Great Childcare' was published, was I not delighted that the Government was announcing the introduction of Early Years Teachers, enhanced entry requirements to level three qualifications and a stronger level three qualification?

Why? Because, as they say, 'the devil is in the detail'. As I read beyond the headlines of the government proposals I realised that most of my

recommendations had, in effect, been rejected. Turning to the Appendix of the 'More Great Childcare' document, the disappointing response is only too clear. Whilst I felt that my recommendations taken together, would enhance quality, I am not at all convinced that accepting just five, and tinkering with many others, will achieve the outcomes for children and for their professional practitioners that many had hoped for. The table below shows that, of my 19 recommendations it has been proposed that:

- 5 are 'Accepted'
- 7 are 'Accepted in principle'
- 3 are 'Still under consideration and subject to consultation'
- 1 is noted to 'Keep under review'
- 2 are 'Not accepted'
- 1 is noted as 'No action for Government'.

**Table 1 Nutbrown Review recommendations and Government Response (from appendix to 'More Great Childcare')**

<b>Nutbrown Review recommendation in Foundations for Quality (2012)</b>	<b>Government response and recommended action More Great Childcare (2013)</b>
<p><b>Recommendation 1</b> The Government should continue to specify the qualifications that are suitable for staff operating within the EYFS, and the Teaching Agency should develop a more robust set of 'full and relevant' criteria to ensure qualifications promote the right content and pedagogical processes. These criteria should be based on the proposals set out in this report. (FfQ p 29)</p>	<p><b>Accepted.</b> Teaching Agency will consult on revised set of 'full and relevant' criteria and proposals for the Early Years Educator. (MGC p 41)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2</b> All qualifications commenced from 1 September 2013 must demonstrate that they meet the new 'full and relevant' criteria when being considered against the requirements of the EYFS. (FfQ p 29)</p>	<p><b>Accepted in principle,</b> but timescale changed to September 2014. The Teaching Agency's 'full and relevant' consultation will state that we will ensure that new Early Years Educator Level 3 qualifications will be in place from 2014. (MGC p 41)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 3</b> The previously articulated plan to move to a single early years qualification should be abandoned. (FfQ p 29)</p>	<p><b>Accepted.</b> The Teaching Agency's 'full and relevant' consultation will state this plan will not happen. (MGC p 41)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 4</b> The Government should consider the best way to badge qualifications that meet the new 'full and relevant' criteria so that people can recognise under what set of 'full and relevant' criteria a qualification has been gained. (FfQ p 29)</p>	<p><b>Accepted.</b> The 'Early Years Educator' title will offer a recognised badge of quality for qualifications which meet the new 'full and relevant' criteria. (MGC p 41)</p>

<p><b>Recommendation 5</b> The EYFS requirements should be revised so that, by September 2022, all staff counting in the staff:child ratios must be qualified at level 3. (FfQ p 34)</p>	<p>Still under consideration and subject to consultation. (MGC p 41)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6</b> The EYFS requirements should be revised so that, from September 2013, a minimum of 50 per cent of staff in group settings need to possess at least a 'full and relevant' level 3 to count in the staff:child ratios. (FfQ p 34)</p>	<p>Still under consideration and subject to consultation. (MGC p 42)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 7</b> The EYFS requirements should be revised so that, from September 2015, a minimum of 70 per cent of staff in group settings need to possess at least a 'full and relevant' level 3 to count in the staff:child ratios. (FfQ p 34)</p>	<p>Still under consideration and subject to consultation. (MGC p 42)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 8</b> Level 2 English and mathematics should be entry requirements to level 3 early education and childcare courses. (FfQ p 34)</p>	<p>Accepted in principle. The Teaching Agency's 'full and relevant' consultation will set out that entrants to Level 3 Early Years Educator courses will be expected to have secured at least a C grade in GCSE English and mathematics. We will consult on proposals on how this might be made a requirement, including by inserting a requirement for English and maths GCSEs into the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework, in due course. (MGC p 42)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 9</b> Tutors should be qualified to a higher level than the course they are teaching. (FfQ p 40)</p>	<p>Accepted in principle. DfE will work across Government (i.e. with BIS) to help Further Education and other post-16 providers to promote good practice in this area. (MGC p 42)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 10</b> All tutors should have regular continuing professional development and contact with early years settings. Colleges and training providers should allow sufficient time for this. (FfQ p 40)</p>	<p>Accepted in principle. DfE will work across Government (i.e. with BIS) to help Further Education and other post-16 providers to promote good practice in this area. (MGC p 42)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 11</b> Only settings that are rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted should be able to host students on placement. (FfQ p 42)</p>	<p>Accepted in principle. DfE will work across Government (i.e with BIS) to help Further Education and other post-16 providers to ensure that placements are normally only in settings that are rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. (MGC p 42)</p>

<p><b>Recommendation 12</b> Colleges and training providers should look specifically at the setting's ability to offer students high quality placements. (FfQ p 42)</p>	<p><b>Accepted.</b> DfE will work across Government (i.e. with BIS) to help Further Education and other post-16 providers to promote good practice in this area. (MGC p 43)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 13</b> The Department for Education should conduct research on the number of BME staff at different qualification levels, and engage with the sector to address any issues identified. (FfQ p 49)</p>	<p><b>Keep under review.</b> The Teaching Agency's 'full and relevant' consultation will seek views on whether or not the proposals for the content and standard of new qualifications have equality implications, and we will consider including questions in future Childcare and Early Years Provider surveys. (MGC p 43)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 14</b> Newly qualified practitioners starting in their first employment should have mentoring for at least the first six months. If the setting is rated below 'Good', this mentoring should come from outside. (FfQ p 51)</p>	<p><b>Accepted in principle.</b> Settings should consider how they can put mentoring arrangements in place for new front line staff. (MGC p 43)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 15</b> A suite of online induction and training modules should be brought together by the Government, that can be accessed by everyone working in early education and childcare. (FfQ p 53)</p>	<p><b>Accepted in principle</b> but no action by Government. Rather the sector/settings should seek to draw this together. (MGC p 43)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 16</b> A new early years specialist route to QTS, specialising in the years from birth to seven, should be introduced, starting from September 2013. (FfQ p 59)</p>	<p><b>Not accepted.</b> We agree with Professor Nutbrown that there is a need to transform the status of the profession and we want more high quality graduates to consider a career in early education. We do not, however, consider a route to the award of QTS is necessary to do this. We will introduce Early Years Teachers who will be specialists in early childhood development trained to work with babies and young children from birth to five. The training route and the new Teachers' Standards (Early Years) will build on the strengths of the EYPS programme. Early Years Teacher Status will be seen as the equivalent to QTS, therefore entry requirements to Early Years Teacher training courses will be the same as entry to primary teacher training. This change will give one title of 'teacher' across the early years and schools sectors which will increase status and public recognition. (MGC p 43)</p>

<p><b>Recommendation 17</b> Any individual holding Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) should be able to access routes to obtain QTS as a priority. (FfQ p 61)</p>	<p><b>Not accepted.</b> Those with EYPS are graduates already trained specifically to work with babies and children from birth to five years. Existing Early Years Professionals will in future be seen as the equivalent of Early Years Teachers. Early Years Professionals will therefore not need to obtain QTS to increase their status, although routes are already available to QTS if they wish to take them. (MGC p 43)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 18</b> I recommend that Government considers the best way to maintain and increase graduate pedagogical leadership in all early years settings. (FfQ p 62)</p>	<p><b>Accepted.</b> We will introduce Early Years Teachers to lead the further improvements in quality we want to see. We will set out funding arrangements for Early Years Teachers in due course. (MGC p 43)</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 19</b> I am not recommending that the Government impose a licensing system on the early years sector. However, the Government should consider supporting a sector-led approach, if an affordable and sustainable one emerges with widespread sector support. (FfQ p 63)</p>	<p><b>No action for Government.</b>  (MGC p 44)</p>

The decision to accept only five of my recommendations needs some examination in the context of other measures put forward by Government on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2013, most specifically the plan to reduce the number of staff working with groups of very young children.

So I want in this paper to unpack some of the detail. Government proposes that Early Years Teachers will be introduced and given a training that covers the years birth to five (not birth to seven as I recommended). They will not follow a Post Graduate Certificate in Education, not be awarded Qualified Teacher Status, and not undertake a mentored Newly Qualified Teacher year. In my review I said:

*A typical route to the early years specialist QTS will be an early years degree (Early Childhood Studies being an appropriate example) followed by a PGCE. Many EYPs will already hold early years specialism at degree level, so should be able to gain QTS after a PGCE course.*

*(Foundations for Quality 2012: 60, 5.23)*

But the early years teachers now proposed by the Government will not have QTS, nor will they follow a PGCE course, in other words, they will not have the same status as teachers of children over five years of age. One of the many email messages I have received recently came from a teacher working with three to five year olds who wrote:

*My main concern is with the proposal for the introduction of Early Years Teachers - if EYT's are required to meet the teaching standards expected of classroom teachers why are they not to be awarded QTS? This in my view will not raise the status of graduate practitioners in the early years field as they will not have the same pay and conditions as those holding*

*QTS. Will the introduction of EYT's mean that school settings no longer need to employ a teacher with QTS to lead nursery and reception classes?*

Someone with Early Years Professional Status wrote to me saying:

*I am SO pleased that I can now be given QTS and work in schools, at last parity with teachers!*

Sadly this practitioner, like others, had misunderstood (or been misled by) the government headline. Because my recommendation on QTS was not accepted, the hoped for parity with primary and secondary school teachers will not be realised.

We need some more answers here to be assured that this is not simply 'changing the label on the tin'. Are Early Years Professionals simply being renamed? If so, is this not insulting? (To EYPS, to existing early years teachers - of whom there are many, and indeed with QTS- to children, and to parents?). Will this name change without any other apparent change, mislead parents? And is this not insulting and misleading to those who undertake Early Years Teacher courses? How would it be if the reverse was the case and it was decided, at relatively short notice, with no justification, to rename teachers in secondary schools 'Secondary Years Professionals'? It would not work, and I sincerely believe that it would similarly fail in the early years.

So how will the Early Years Teacher feel when told that she or he cannot teach children in Year 1 because they are not sufficiently qualified to do so? And how will they feel about the investments they have made in their qualifications when they realise they cannot achieve the kinds of promotion opportunities open to teachers of older children? And why is the title 'teacher' being used to mean something quite different from the commonly understood, established and accepted meaning? This reaches deep into the heart of the culture and nomenclature of UK practice.

Since the first introduction of Early Years Professional Status, those who worked hard to obtain that status have been questioning the lack of parity with QTS. In my review I sought to end the disparity that many people holding EYPS were concerned about. It seems now that one form of inequality is now to be replaced with another. Yet again, those who work with young children are offered a lesser status (and, we should realistically anticipate, poorer pay and conditions than those who work with older children) but a title that makes them appear to have the same role and status.

Another email message asked me:

*What is the difference between a 'teacher' and an 'educator'?*

So, what is the difference between a 'teacher' and an 'educator'? Do teachers not 'educate, and care, and support, and guide, and observe, and talk with parents'? And do not early years educators do those things too? The Rumbold Report in 1989, suggested that all who lived and worked with young children (including parents, childminders and volunteers and professionals in groups settings) should be known by the collective term 'educator' for they all had a part to play in young children's early education (which also involved 'caring').

Now 'educator' is being redefined from a generic and conceptually universal term referring to all those in working with young children, to a delimited and specific qualification and role.

Childminders have battled long and hard to be recognised as equal to their peers in daycare and pre-school settings, and my recommendations with regard to childminders appear to have fallen on stony ground. There is no planned requirement for childminders to hold any formal qualifications even though the number of children they can work with seems set to rise. What reasonable justification is there for treating part of the workforce – also working within the Early Years Foundation Stage – differently from the rest?

So, yet again, babies, toddlers, young children, and their families, have to be content with something different, something that is 'not quite' the same in status as that offered to older pupils and students in the education system, something confused and confusing. In England, the Early Years Foundation Stage (birth to five) marks the beginning of the education system. The question as to why those working with children in these challenging and complex years of early development and of learning, should be less well qualified and afforded a lower professional status than those teaching older children remains unanswered.

So, yet again, an opportunity truly to value the thousands of women and the small number of men who dedicate energy, intellect and commitment to providing the best they can for our youngest children is to be dissipated, and - *plus ça change...* - they are to content themselves with something less than their colleagues working with older children. And they are also to be asked to do this in a context of diminishing support (as Local Authority responsibilities for this disappear) and increased inspection (with OFSTED being the sole arbiter of quality). Measurement and inspection alone will not enhance quality for young children; support, continuing professional development and time are needed to do that.

In the last few weeks the question most often posed to me has been: *do you think changing ratios will make a difference if staff are better qualified?* This is the question that is vexing many parents, early years practitioners, key early years agencies and organisations, and Further/Higher Education institutions and tutors. If the small children whose early years settings could be affected understood what was going on, I think they too would be worried. This is my answer:

The positive impact of raising the quality of level 3 qualifications to make them stronger and more appropriate for work with young children and their families from birth to five will be weakened if ratios are weakened. *Reducing* the number of adults available to work with very young children will *dilute* any positive effects on the quality of the experiences children could expect to receive. When I made my recommendations, I made them taking into account the context in which I undertook my Review. To change the context, yet use the hoped-for enhanced quality of staff as a justification for reducing the number of adults to children in a setting, makes no sense at all. I made it clear



in my Review that, though with properly qualified teachers (trained to teach children aged from birth to seven, and with Qualified Teacher Status) it might be sensible to look at the ratios for working with children aged three to five, that ratios for working with younger children should not be tampered with. I said:

*I do not think there is any case for changing the ratios for babies and two-year olds, but I think it is worth exploring whether better-qualified staff could reasonably work with more three- and four-year-olds (as is the case for teachers in nursery and reception classes).*

*(Foundations for Quality, 2012: 69, 6.23)*

I fear that any positive effects for children that might have come about through enhancement in qualifications will be cancelled out because there will be too few early years professionals working with them.

So, do I think changing the ratios will make a difference if people are better qualified? The difference will be too few adults with too many little children; too few moments in the day for a toddler to have uninterrupted time with their key person, and too few early years practitioners to talk and work with parents. Who will suffer most? The youngest, most vulnerable children. Their parents who will know that their little children will get less attention, less conversation, less holding, than they need. And with them, their early years practitioners who – though they may be well qualified – are unable to provide the best that they can because they have had their greatest resource (their time for children) reduced. Here is the nub: there is nothing relaxing about the proposal to ‘relax’ ratios. It will lead to stress – for children, for parents and for early years practitioners (whatever their title or qualification). Practitioners will continue to do their best knowing that it is not the best that they could do (if they were not working with too many children). Trading staff:child ratios for higher qualified staff is nonsense. Watering down ratios will threaten quality. Childcare may be cheaper, but children will be footing the bill. High quality early years provision in home and group settings means high quality staff and a staff:child balance that can positively support young children’s development, learning and well being.

At the heart of early childhood education and care are children and their families and, again, it may be a truism but it is worth reiterating that no changes in policy should be made unless they are demonstrably beneficial to them. It is not possible to provide good foundations for life and learning for the youngest children on the cheap. But it should be possible, with political will, to provide quality experiences for children that are affordable. When the budgets are set the question to be asked is not ‘Can we afford high quality early education and care with well qualified professionals?’ Rather, when we take account of the strongly evidenced benefits of high quality and appropriately caring early learning experiences to later life, the question to be asked is ‘Can we afford *not* to provide high quality early education and care with well qualified professionals?’ I do not mind sounding like a Cassandra if I warn passionately that later generations of politicians will count with regret

the social and economic costs of insufficient investment in early years provision.

As I said in my Review:

*'Babies and young children must have the very best early education and care. If those working with young children have the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding, they have the potential to offer the formative experience all young children deserve, supported by the significant Government investment in the early years.'*

*(Foundations for Quality 2012: 10)*

Current proposals will shake the foundations of quality provision young children. Watering down ratios, regardless of the level of qualifications held by staff is likely to lead to worse, not 'great', childcare and will undermine intentions to provide quality early learning experiences.

I want to thank the many who contributed to my Review, and those who welcomed its outcomes, for their contributions and their continued commitment to getting this right for young children. I hope they, and many more will read the detail of *'More Great Childcare'* with a careful eye, and will continue to alert Government to any concerns they have about the weakening of ratios, the watering down of good quality qualifications, and the implementing of a two-tier status for 'teachers'. Inequality has deeply adverse effects on society, and particularly those who are most vulnerable. High quality early education and care provides one effective means of combatting those inequalities. Young children must not bear the costs of Government getting this wrong. Put most simply: the foundations of quality are being severely shaken, and the price of quality in the early years is surely a price worth paying; and in terms of the life-course this can only be a solid, sound investment for future generations.

**Professor Cathy Nutbrown**  
**The School of Education**  
**The University of Sheffield**  
**[c.e.nutbrown@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:c.e.nutbrown@sheffield.ac.uk)**  
**+44 (0) 114 222 8139**

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**For further information please contact: Paul Mannion, Media Relations Officer, on 0114 2229851 or email [P.F.Mannion@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:P.F.Mannion@sheffield.ac.uk)**