

TWO-YEAR-OLDS in England: an exploratory study

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with

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Summary of Report

Our study investigated the provision of funded places for two-year-olds in England. From September 2013 free early education has been provided for the 20% most disadvantaged two-year-olds, extending to around 40% of two-year-olds in September 2014, and reflects Government interest in early intervention to compensate for disadvantage and to identify and intervene to address possible special educational needs. The places are offered by a mixed economy of providers across the non-maintained and maintained sector.

There were four elements to the research:

1. **Review of the literature:** what does the literature tell us about the dimensions of quality for early childhood provision that are important for two-year-old children's development, and how do current policy frameworks support provision for two-year-olds?

Three recent publications have focused on quality for children under the age of three, summarising current literature in relation to practice in the UK, USA and Australia, and considering both structural and pedagogical aspects of practice (Dalli, 2011, 2014; Mathers et al., 2014). In our short review we aimed to build these two reviews by focusing in literature relating to knowledge, pedagogy and interaction, and by linking the literature to recent policy developments in England.

2. **Interviews with key informants:** what do key stakeholders within the early years sector consider to be the essential components of quality for two-year-olds, and what successes and challenges do they report in providing these as part of the two-year-old programme?

Key informants represented national and local government, charitable organisations from across the sector and those involved in supporting and/or training the sector. Thirteen interviews were conducted, focusing on the key characteristics of quality provision for two-year-olds and the skills needed to work with two-year-olds.

3. **National survey of practitioners:** who is currently working with two-year olds in England, what are their views on quality and how prepared do they feel to meet the needs of two-year-olds and their families?

The online survey was conducted between June and July 2014. The final sample comprised 509 leaders, managers and practitioners, of whom 95% worked in settings with two-year-olds on register, 69% worked in settings catering for funded two-year-olds and 44% worked directly with funded two-year-olds. Just under two thirds (65%) of respondents worked in the PVI sector, 27% were childminders and 6% worked in local authority maintained provision. Respondents tended to be better qualified and more experienced than we might expect from a representative sample. This should be taken into account when interpreting the findings; it is likely that our sample represents the most proactive, confident and motivated of practitioners.

4. **Regional case studies:** what are the practices among settings providing funded early education places for two-year-olds?

Interviews were conducted in 11 settings drawn from four regions in which we had already interviewed key informants. Ten settings were providing funded places as part of the two-year-old programme, and were selected to represent good practice across a variety of setting types, geographical contexts and models of two-year-old provision. Observations of practice were carried out in six of these settings.

The research was conducted in two phases. In Phase 1 we carried out the review of the literature and the key informant interviews and in Phase 2 we conducted the online survey and regional case studies.

Key Findings from Phase 1 (literature review and key informant interviews)

The literature review confirmed the importance of a play-based relational pedagogy but also highlighted the fact that understandings of what constitutes quality for two-year-olds are complex and still emerging.

Key informants also identified the importance of a pedagogical approach that was play-based, child-led and looked to combine elements of care and education. In terms of the preparation needed to work with two-year olds, key informants supported the current drive by Government to up-skill the workforce but felt that further steps were needed, specifically a minimum Level 3 qualification for all practitioners and continued work towards ensuring qualifications are robust in their content and assessment processes. Many key informants also acknowledged the role of study at degree-level in deepening practitioners' understanding, helping to develop their skills in reflection and to foster the skills, knowledge and characteristics regarded as necessary for working with two-year-olds. Across all levels of qualification, they stressed the critical need for practitioners to have a sound understanding of child development. Finally, in addition to delivering high quality support for children, key informants emphasised the importance of relationships with parents and carers, and the need for practitioners to be sufficiently skilled in working with families.

Key findings from Phase 2 (survey and case studies) and overall conclusions

Perspectives on quality

- Support for communication and language and for personal, social and emotional development (two of three 'prime' areas of the EYFS), as well as the pedagogical principles of child-led practice and playful learning, were identified as the most critical dimensions of good quality provision for two-year-old children by survey and case study participants.
- Despite widespread recognition of the importance of outdoor play in the early years literature and in the key informant interviews and case study settings, fewer online survey respondents selected movement and physical development – the third prime area of the EYFS – as one of their three key dimensions of quality. This may indicate a need for further efforts to raise awareness of the importance of movement and physical development.
- Partnership with parents was recognised by participants throughout the study as a key component of good quality for two-year-old children, and particularly so for children who might be experiencing disadvantage or who have additional needs.

The drivers of quality

- The early years workforce was recognised as the cornerstone of quality for young children. Staff experience in working with two-year-olds, and having an overall well qualified staff team (i.e. a high proportion at Level 3), were identified as two of the most important factors in workforce quality by online survey respondents.
- However our findings suggest that a more nuanced solution is required than simply recommending that all practitioners are qualified to Level 3. Rather, it is important to recognise the complexity of the journey towards a skilled, confident and experienced workforce (see 'in-depth' sections below).
- In terms of the qualifications and training needed to prepare practitioners to work with two-year-olds, training in child development, good quality practical placements and training in how to support and engage families were the most highly valued by survey respondents.
- Staff-child ratios were also identified as a key factor in ensuring good quality for two-year-olds, with the majority of respondents to the online survey considering a ratio of one adult to three children to be ideal for this age group.

In-depth: initial qualifications

- There was a general consensus among our respondents that a ‘good level 3 practitioner’ was needed for day-to-day work with two-year-olds. Leaders and managers of group settings responding to the survey reported that that 82% of their staff working with two-year-olds were qualified to Level 3.
- Graduate-led provision was not considered a priority for this age group, particularly by survey respondents. However, within the case studies and key informant interviews there was a clear recognition of the value of degree-level study to deepen understanding, increase confidence, to develop reflective practice and build up knowledge (specifically related to child development) necessary for working with two-year-olds.
- Many respondents felt that less experienced staff working directly with two-year-olds needed access to expert support, for example from a graduate, a SENCo, or an experienced level 3 practitioner.
- Many participants gave a strong message about the critical importance of ensuring that qualifications and assessment procedures are robust and fit for purpose, with particular concerns over the adequacy of existing Level 3 qualifications.
- Just over three quarters (76%) of survey respondents reported that their initial qualifications had prepared them very well for working with children from birth to five, but there were some shortcomings in terms of more specialist knowledge and skills. Less than half felt very well prepared by their initial training for working with two-year-olds specifically, for working with children with additional needs, for engaging and supporting families and for multi-agency working. Our findings suggest that more could be done to provide the foundations of knowledge and understanding within these essential areas.

In-depth: the ongoing journey - experience, support and training after initial qualification

- Our findings remind us that effective CPD and learning through experience (i.e. opportunities to link theory to practice) are essential to develop deeper and more specialised skills and knowledge following initial training. Respondents to the online survey identified ‘staff with experience in working with two-year-olds’ as the most important factor in ensuring that children’s needs can be met (more important than qualifications) and on setting visits participants spoke of ‘developing a range of specialisms over the years’ and were enthusiastic about taking up opportunities for training.
- Among online survey respondents, recent attendance at continuing professional development (CPD) relevant to meeting the needs of two-year-olds was high, with the majority (89%) having experienced some relevant training within the last five years.
- However a sizeable minority had accessed either no, or minimal, recent CPD in key areas, including developing language and communication, supporting and engaging families, supporting specific needs (e.g. autism) and the two-year progress check. This is significant when we remember that our respondents are likely to be the most pro-active and motivated of practitioners, working within the highest quality settings. CPD participation rates were often much lower among the (relatively small) sample of settings graded as ‘inadequate’ or ‘requires improvement’. Although the number of such settings within the survey sample was relatively small, this nonetheless indicates a need to ensure that settings with low Ofsted grades have access to – and are accessing – CPD opportunities.
- Case study respondents and key informants emphasised that the importance of high quality and relevant opportunities for CPD and on-the-job learning to develop the workforce. This highlights the need for continued efforts to provide:
 - high quality placement and supervised practice during initial training;

- effective on-the-job supervision and mentoring;
- targeted CPD and financial support for practitioners to access it.
- Observations in case studies showed showing experienced staff supporting children through skilled and sensitive anticipation and response, maintaining a balance between offering two-year-olds support and independence. This skilled work needs to be explored in CPD, along with some of tensions, e.g. between child-led pedagogy, school readiness and early-education-as-intervention, which are emerging in relation to the two-year-olds offer.
- Successful workforce development will require top-down input from central and local government, including effective policy and funding to develop supportive frameworks, and strategies to ensure the availability and affordability of good quality CPD in the areas identified here. However it will also require a firm commitment from the sector to an ethos of professional development.

In-depth: working with families and other professionals

- Case study settings highlighted the successes, challenges and demands on time, skill, commitment and experience inherent in engaging and supporting families and children with specific needs; and practitioners responding to the online survey reported feeling least confident in this area. Adequate and appropriate training specifically designed for early years practitioners working with families with complex needs is essential. Managers felt their settings should be doing this work, but that they needed more resources to do so.
- Interagency working was not yet fully embedded and case study settings had met with a number of practical difficulties. Among respondents to the online survey, interagency working was not as highly valued as other dimensions of practice. Further support is needed in this area to build on the creative beginnings being trialled in a number of local authority areas, and ensure that inter-professional working becomes an everyday reality rather than an ideal.

Our research has highlighted the complexity, the challenge and the rewards of working with two-year-olds. The two-year-old offer is asking a lot of from early years practitioners, but settings and practitioners are working hard to provide for them, including those taking two-year-olds for the first time, who are often working very quickly and effectively to adapt their practice and provision to meet this new challenge.

Glossary of terms

The early years sector in England is a complex terrain; names used by settings do not map exactly on to precise definitions of 'type of provision', which includes both education and care. The following glossary is offered as a guide to help interpret our use of these terms.

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) This term is used commonly in international literature as an all-encompassing term for early years provision. In this report we use it in particular to refer to the work of practitioners who are involved in both educating and caring for two-year-olds.

Day-care (nursery) Provision of ECEC for children from three months to five years, including offering funded early years education places, within the private or voluntary sectors. Full day-care refers to provision for a continuous period of four hours or more in any day in premises which are not domestic premises.

Playgroups and pre-schools: Provide short sessions of care and education for two- to five-year-olds. Usually provided by the voluntary sector; sometimes run by parents and paid staff together.

Maintained provision: This provision is directly maintained by the local authority and operates throughout the school year. Early education places are offered either by a stand-alone nursery school or by a nursery class or Foundation Stage Unit within a primary school.

Childminder - Self-employed providers offering care for children from birth upwards, in their home, for a fee. Childminders mentioned in this report will have completed additional training to provide the free early years education entitlement.

Sessional provision: Facilities where children under five attend day-care for no more than five sessions a week, each session being less than a continuous period of four hours in any day. Where two sessions are offered in any one day, there is a break between sessions with no children in the care of the provider.

Children's Centre - provide a variety of advice and support for parents and carers. Services vary depending on the nature of the centre, but those in this study provide ECEC for children under the age of five, including offering funded early years education places. Services may be provided at one site or via several sites. Can be part of the private and voluntary sectors.

Manager: in this report we use 'Manager' to refer to any person who has specific responsibility for managing the two year olds offer in a setting.

NNEB: National Nursery Examination Board. The Nursery Nurse Diploma, which used to be provided by the NNEB was a highly respected level 3 qualification originally overseen by the Nursery Nurse Examination Board. In 1994 the NNEB and the Council for Early Years Awards (CEYA) merged to form CACHE - The Council for Awards in Children's Care and Education, with their CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Child Care and Education.

Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), a requirement for anyone who wants to teach in a maintained school in England and Wales. An undergraduate degree and some form of teacher training is compulsory for new QTS recipients.

Two-year-olds offer: from September 2013 free early education (15 hours per week for 38 weeks a year) has been provided to the 20% most disadvantaged two-year-olds, extended to around 40% of two-year-olds in September 2014. See Appendix 1 for details.

1. Introduction

Early education plays a crucial role in the Government's vision for the foundation years (DfE/DH, 2011) and from September 2013 free early education has been provided to the 20% most disadvantaged two-year-olds, extended to around 40% of two-year-olds in September 2014. The places are offered by a mixed economy of providers, including an expansion in the number of places available in the maintained sector (i.e. nursery and primary schools), helped by the removal of requirements that schools register separately with Ofsted when offering provision to two-year-olds.

This unprecedented expansion of funding for two-year-olds has implications across the sector, including childminders, nurseries, preschools and schools. As a targeted intervention, it is more than just the downward extension of the universal free places for three- and four-year-olds; it reflects Government interest in early intervention to compensate for disadvantage (DfE/DH, 2011; HM Government, 2010) and to identify and intervene to address possible special educational needs (DfE, 2011).

The funding of early years provision is supported by research evidence suggesting that entry to preschool before the age of three is associated with greater cognitive gains (Hopkins et al., 2010; Sammons et al., 2004; Sylva et al., 2008), with a clear emphasis on the need for high quality provision. Using current Government guidance, local authorities should where possible place children in settings graded as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted, but otherwise in settings graded as 'requires improvement'. However, within the context of funded places for two-year-olds, there are a number of issues that need further exploration. These include questions about whether there are enough places, the quality of the provision and the methods for assessing that quality (i.e. using Ofsted grades); the use of home-based care (which does not have to meet the same Ofsted quality criteria), and the appropriateness of qualifications and the skills needed to work with two-year-olds. There are also growing concerns from some stakeholders (e.g. PACEY, 2013) that, with the current 'schoolification' agenda, the initiative may be promoting a narrowly defined interpretation of future school readiness.

The policy intervention for two-year-olds asks much of practitioners, both in schools facing the challenge of taking two-year-olds for the first time and in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector where staff working with the youngest children tend to have fewer opportunities for professional development (Goouch and Powell, 2013). There is a new consensus that pedagogy for children under three is specialised, and different from teaching and learning in the three-to-five age range (see Dalli et al., 2011). Very young children need sensitive, responsive caregiving that relies on practitioners tuning in to children's worlds, for example by using respectful and responsive language, warm sensitive touch and daily routines that create a sense of safety and security (Dalli, 2014:2). The physical environment must accommodate, for example, sleeping and nappy changing facilities, whilst also providing suitable play spaces and equipment. Staff working in settings offering places for two-year-olds need appropriate qualifications that cover work with this age group, but will also need to be particularly skilled and knowledgeable in order to support disadvantaged children at greater risk of having additional needs and/or developmental delay. As shown by previous evaluations of the two-year-olds offer (Gibb et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2009), these extra needs require extra resources. In addition, the two-year-old check will require many practitioners to contribute information on children's (dis)abilities. However the research evidence to date suggests that the qualifications of staff working with children under three tend to be lower than those of practitioners working with older children (Mathers et al., 2011; Norris et al., 2010). Given that the provision of places for two-year-olds is relatively new and still emerging, there is a need to create an evidence base to help inform the development of provision and to begin to provide answers to some of the questions and issues raised above.

1.1 Aims and scope of the research

Our study investigates the provision of funded places for two-year-olds in England by addressing the following research questions:

1. What does the research literature tell us about the dimensions of quality for early childhood provision that are important for two-year-old children's development?
2. What are the current central and local government policy frameworks and practices for supporting the two-year-old programme?
3. What do key stakeholders consider to be the essential components of good quality provision for two-year-olds, and what successes and difficulties do they report in providing these?
4. What are the practices among settings providing funded early education places for two-year-olds? And who are the staff?
5. What are the implications of 1, 2, 3 and 4 above for policy, practice, resourcing and provision in relation to the two-year-old early education programme?

In Phase 1 we considered questions 1, 2 and 3 via a literature review and analysis of key informant interviews and identified themes and issues concerning the characteristics of quality, staff qualifications, understandings of child development, working with families, and leadership and management. This work was carried out by Verity Campbell-Barr, Gill Boag-Munroe and Jan Georgeson with support from Sandra Mathers and Rod Parker-Rees.

In Phase 2 we focused on the experiences of providers offering funded places for two-year-olds to address the issues in questions 4 and 5. Using both quantitative and qualitative data gathered from practitioners we built on the findings of the literature review and key informant interviews and continued to develop the themes and issues identified there. This part of the project was carried out by Jan Georgeson, Verity Campbell-Barr and Sandra Mathers, with support from Gill Boag-Munroe and Federica Caruso.

In this report we will first present the literature review and the key informant interviews from Phase 1 and consider the ways in which recent policy documents relating to the two-year-olds initiative reflect and align with these findings. Then we provide details of the Phase 2 data collection, before reporting our quantitative and qualitative findings on the experiences of those who work with two-year-olds.

2. Perspectives on provision for two-year-olds

2.1 A review of the literature

2.1.1 Scope and context of the review

In comparison with the literature on over-threes, there is limited evidence on what quality looks like for under-threes, and little research at present focusing directly on what might count as quality for two-year-olds in England. Two recent pieces of work – Dalli (2014) which explored the current literature in the field in relation to practice in the UK, USA and Australia, summarising and extending Dalli et al. (2011), and Mathers et al. (2014) which focuses on the structural and pedagogical aspects of practice across the 0-3 age range – are exceptions to this and offer useful insights.

Dalli's (2014) brief review of the literature on aspects of quality in provision for babies and toddlers highlights the shift in debates about infant care since the 1960s, from questions about whether out-of-home care benefits or harms children, to analysis of the features which differentiate beneficial, high quality care from practice which could cause lasting damage. Dalli points out that more recent research has highlighted the complexity of interactions between knowledge, attitudes and structural dimensions, such as ratios, qualifications and career structures, each of which can influence how other factors contribute to quality. At the heart of high quality provision, however, lies the quality of interactions between children and caregivers and Dalli (2014, p.2) identifies the key features of relational pedagogy which have been shown to be associated with high quality provision:

'... the use of language that is respectful and responsive; maintaining a steady stream of positive and warm communication; appropriate use of warm sensitive touch; responding to children as individuals; comforting and supporting children's emotions; inviting participation in activities rather than requiring it; offering choices; engagement in shared activities; daily routines that create a sense of safety and security; and minimising changes of staff'

The Sound Foundations study (Mathers et al., 2014) reviewed research into the dimensions of quality in early years education and care that facilitate the learning and development of children under three, drawing mainly on the psychological and educational literature from England, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. While its aim was to gather evidence from rigorously conducted empirical research, the relative scarcity of robust studies in relation to under-threes resulted in a broader approach, supplementing the quantitative literature with qualitative and exploratory studies and the expertise of practitioners in the field.

The review identified four key dimensions of good quality pedagogy for all children under three:

- Stable relationships and interactions with sensitive and responsive adults.
- A focus on play-based activities and routines which allow children to take the lead in their own learning.
- Support for communication and language.
- Opportunities to move and be physically active.

It also identified a number of 'key conditions' for achieving good quality pedagogy, recognising structural factors such as the qualifications of the early years workforce and the environments that support or hinder practice, notably:

- knowledgeable and capable practitioners, supported by strong leaders;
- a stable staff team with a low staff turnover;

- effective staff deployment (e.g. favourable ratios, staff continuity);
- secure yet stimulating physical environments;
- engaged and involved families.

The final report also made a number of recommendations for policy and practice, focused specifically on the early education programme for two-year-old children. These recommendations related to staff qualifications, issues of pay, access to ongoing professional development and the creation of a workforce development fund to facilitate these recommendations.

In this short review, we aim to build on the work of Dalli and Mathers et al. by attending to knowledge, pedagogy and interaction. This will help us outline the debates around working with two-year-olds and providing them with quality environments. Our strategy involved first conducting a search using the term 'two-year-old' within a time frame of the last ten years, and then following references cited in relevant papers which this search produced. Through this process we identified two broad sets of literature, one concerning what it means to be two and the second around working with two-year-olds. We have organised our findings around three interconnected aspects of work with young children: knowledge (**what** we understand by 'two-year-olds' and 'quality', and how we come to know what we know about this); pedagogy, which refers to **how** practitioners work with two-year-olds and is shaped by knowledge, and interaction and related issues concerned with **who** is working with two-year-olds, including the caring aspects of their work and the kinds of relationship that develop within and around early years settings. Through these three lenses, we have teased out strands of thinking to support an understanding of quality for two-year-olds in early years settings.

2.1.2 Knowledge

The ways that stakeholders come to know about their practice are shaped by their personal epistemologies, perspectival lenses through which they view the world and their places in it. This will inform how practitioners perceive their work, what they are trying to achieve, what is available to help them do this and the various affordances and constraints that make things easier or harder. When different stakeholders adopt different epistemologies, this can lead to tensions, which can make it more difficult for them to work together to achieve shared aims. Here we consider the ways in which two-year-olds are understood before going on to consider how this interplays with policy objectives and the drive for quality within these objectives. This will help us to construct a complex picture of what it might mean to provide high quality environments for two-year-olds.

The 'Twoness Of Twos'

Eraut (2000) suggests that personal knowledge available for use in any workplace is made up of different kinds of knowledge acquired in different ways, and we have used Eraut's typology to consider how practitioners come to know about work with two-year-olds. As well as drawing on personal experience, practitioners' knowledge about what two-year-olds are like is informed by what Eraut would describe as codified scientific knowledge, derived from the academic literature on child development, or recontextualisations of that literature, (e.g. Lindon, 2012), as well as national curriculum guidance and policy objectives. In England, the learning and development needs of children aged from birth-to-three have been incorporated into statutory frameworks over the course of the last 12 years. The well-received Birth to Three Matters guidance (DfES, 2002) became incorporated into the first Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in 2008 (DCSF, 2008a, 2008b) uniting guidance and regulation for children from birth to the end of the reception year into one Foundation Stage. The revised version of EYFS (DfE, 2012) reintroduces the idea that there is something different about working with the youngest children by directing practitioners to focus primarily on just three of

the seven areas of learning: Personal, Social and Emotional development; Physical development and Communication and Language. Practitioners also draw on Development Matters (Early Education, 2012), the non-statutory guidance material that supports practitioners in thinking about what children of different ages might be expected to do and the kinds of activity that might be appropriate to help children to make progress.

Eraut highlights the importance of other kinds of cultural knowledge, some of which might be written down or otherwise captured and, in the context of knowledge about two-year-olds, this includes popular texts such as 'Toddler Taming' (Green, 1999) or programmes like 'Supernanny' (Channel 4, 2004). Eraut also refers to other knowledge acquired through acculturation into a workplace setting: this would include the ways in which practitioners, parents and families talk about two-year-olds. Both in the academic literature and within popular discourse, two-year-olds are often portrayed as a distinctive sub-group, as the popular terms 'Terrible Twos' and 'toddler tantrums' imply.

Many practitioners will have acquired an understanding of the 'twoness of two' from textbooks setting out developmental milestones updating the work of Sheridan (1960), such as Meggitt and Sunderland (2000). These sources present an image of 'the two-year-old child' derived from psychological literature: developmentally, a child's third year is generally marked by a rapid expansion of expressive language, great strides (often literally) with mobility and oscillating shifts between the pursuit of more independence - an 'explosion of self-awareness': Goldschmied and Jackson, 2004:142) - and continuing need for help with meeting basic needs (eating, drinking, sleeping and toileting). However, using information about developmental milestones can restrict and constrain practitioners' view of the development of an individual child (Burman 2007) and care needs to be exercised when applying knowledge of the broad developmental sequences by considering the context in which that development is taking place. Increasing mobility and dexterity mean that two-year-olds can access a much wider range of places to explore. Although this will depend on their opportunities in their first two years, many will still need help with personal hygiene and feeding; they will generally need more sleep than their older peers; and require the guidance of adults to help them develop appropriate boundaries for interactions and emotional responses as they move into more complex social environments. This range of development unfolding on so many fronts tends to amplify the variability both between children and within individuals, meaning that all two-year-olds will have their own particular combinations of care and educational needs. It is against this backdrop of general variability in the third year that a range of developmental delays and disorders may become apparent, such as speech and language difficulties, autism, developmental dyspraxia and complex learning difficulties and disabilities (CLDD) (Carpenter et al., 2011).

Working with two-year-olds can therefore be physically and emotionally demanding, labour intensive and unpredictable (O'Sullivan and Chambers, 2014). Furthermore tensions between different ways of thinking about this age group mean that practitioners can find the work mentally taxing as well, because they are trying to negotiate a narrative through the competing voices which shape their understanding of their work. This will include their understanding of policy objectives, notably how they understand the thinking behind investment in the two-year-old provision. We have already outlined in the introduction the initiative's focus on supporting disadvantaged families; when this is combined with a curriculum that has evolved through Birth to Three Matters to the current EYFS this amounts to a policy investment in providing a developmental support structure to promote equal life chances for two-year-olds. Key to providing this developmental support is ensuring that two-year-olds are able to access a high quality early years education place. Quality is therefore understood as central to the successful provision of places for two-year-olds, but this then

raises questions about what constitutes 'quality' and leads us to consideration of the contested nature of quality.

Thinking about Quality

Debates on the nature of quality in early years provision are well rehearsed (see for example; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Rosenthal, 2007; Penn, 2011; Cottle and Alexander, 2012). The debates are not only about the features that can be used to *describe* quality (both in relation to structural and process characteristics), they are also concerned with the *role* of quality (as a system of accountability or a mechanism for informing and developing practice). Layered upon these debates are contested positions: whether quality is an enlightenment project (with an end goal to be strived for and reached) or a dynamic post-modern concept that is culturally and historically determined. A positivistic and rationalist epistemology frames quality as an evaluative concept (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Moss, 2014), focused on cognitive and economic outcomes, goals, and quality assurance procedures.

'Conditions for learning in pre-school are influenced by ideologies and theories that are developed in global ecosystems and that inextricably link together time, culture and society. Thus, the meaning of pre-school quality and teacher competence is tied to the influence of culture, context and societal intentions relating to the child and childhood (Moss, 2004) as well as to the political and educational intentions for preschool (Sylva et al., 2006)' (Sheridan et al, 2011, p. 416).

The cultural contexts of early years settings are complex and can be part of positivist systems of accountability as the result of policy frameworks (such as Ofsted), as well as reflecting the perspectives of a range of other stakeholders: practitioners, parents and children. Here we consider these multiple perspectives and the consequences for practitioners who need to take into account this multitude of views.

The position of a monitoring body such as Ofsted means that it can be open to criticism for operating as a panoptic gaze that monitors, regulates and (according to some) controls early years practitioners (Osgood, 2006). Where the dominant discourse is that of the funding and regulating authority, practitioners may feel pressured into framing their work so that it matches what the funder appears to require, which can raise questions about the authenticity of work and therefore its quality (Löfdahl & Pérez Prieto, 2009). Cottle (2011) talks of practitioners 'doing quality' work and finds that practitioners feel that they are learning from accounts of 'what works' elsewhere rather than from internally formulated understandings of what might constitute quality, an approach which Biesta (2007) argues 'won't work'. The notion of an oppressive system of accountability (Ball, 2003) that moulds the character of provision through various policy objectives (Osgood, 2006) is perhaps inevitable given political structures and their influence on early years practice. However, the degree of variation in the form and activity of early years providers points to the importance of negotiating what quality frameworks mean for individual early years settings and of working out how practitioners understand and respond to different versions of quality.

Ofsted gradings are frequently used as markers of quality (Butler et al., 2014) but Butler et al. also note that Ofsted gradings were poorly correlated with other markers of quality such as ECERS (Harms et al. 1998), a finding which Mathers and Smees (2014) have confirmed. Whilst Ofsted serves the function of monitoring the quality of provision in a mixed market model, such a model also means that, even where places are funded by the state, as with the two-year-old provision, parental choice also plays a role in formulating a view of quality. Whilst there have been criticisms that parents do not always know how to assess the quality of provision, this assumes that there is an agreed definition of quality to which they should subscribe. Increasingly there is evidence that parents turn to Ofsted grades in their assessments of quality, but questions have been raised over parents' capacity to digest the

information provided in the reports (Mathers et al., 2012). Parents also use other ways to come to a judgement about quality; they talk to each other and respond to how they are met within the setting, using their personal experiences and interactions to construct their own judgements of quality (Brooker, 2010). Grammatikopoulos et al. (2014) in Greece and Hu et al. (2014) in Australia note that parents and practitioners may have different priorities in considering what constitutes quality. The market model, however, positions practitioners in a role that requires them to respond to multiple perspectives – including those of parents and Ofsted – to remain viable.

Taguma et al. (2012), working within the epistemological stance underpinning New Zealand's early childhood education (ECE) curriculum, acknowledge that families and communities need to be involved in developing 'quality' provision for two-year-olds, but they recognise that adapting to local needs can pose challenges. Where communities and families are involved in developing provision, they will focus on what works for them and even in local contexts the priorities of families and communities may be complex and conflicted.

The ideas and practices of those working in the early years sector are also shaped by practitioners' own histories and learning (Cottle, 2011). Their professional experience is rooted in the emotional aspects of their work, aspects that are far less reducible to scales and numbers for measurement. Success is understood as being highly contextualised to the individual setting (Tobin, 2005). Practitioners use more qualitative terms to talk about what early years provision is all about, using the language of subjective experience (feel, care, experience, see, observe), drawing on their own experiences of childhood and of caring for their own and others' children outside the work context (Wickett and Georgeson, 2012).

2.1.3 Pedagogy

Given the multiple influences on understandings of quality, it is perhaps unsurprising that there are numerous ways in which to approach how to work with children. Pedagogy is here understood as the implementation of epistemology; thinking in practice about how early years teaching and learning happen. It relates to how practitioners combine caring and educating: how they believe they can help children learn what they believe children should be learning. It covers structural issues such as staffing ratios, staff qualifications and resources as well as curriculum matters: how children should be learning different aspects of the curriculum; and what the role of the practitioner might be. In addition, it extends to how the environment might be arranged to support learning and how the setting invites or deters potential users through the use of what Georgeson and Boag-Munroe (2012) call 'architecture': the particular combinations of shapes, materials, textures and colours used to construct and decorate settings.

How adults should go about promoting children's learning in the early years continues to be subject to debate; while play is widely placed at the centre of children's learning and development, there is less agreement about how much adults should intervene to guide play. Wood (2009) outlines the development of a pedagogy of play which includes planning and resourcing a challenging learning environment - the more behind-the-scenes aspects of pedagogy - as well as supporting children's learning through both planned and spontaneous activities. This includes extending and developing language and communication through play as well as observing and assessing through play, to ensure continuity and progression. Siraj-Blatchford (2009) goes further to place the pedagogical role of 'teaching' at the centre of efforts to improve quality, but from both perspectives, effective pedagogy is about co-construction of learning between adults and children through the medium of play, in activities which afford opportunities for learning. In the context of the two-year-olds offer, this raises the issue of whether such co-construction, which depends on a level of familiarity, may be

more difficult to achieve between practitioner and child than between parent/primary caregiver and child.

In the Swedish view of pedagogy, for example, it is an explicit aim to educate teachers for a professional role and to make preschool more pedagogical, that is, more learning-oriented and of higher quality (Sheridan et al., 2011). In a study based on interviews with teachers from 15 preschools in the cities of Stockholm and Gothenburg and 15 preschools in a rural area in Sweden, Sheridan et al. (2011) suggest that Swedish preschool practitioners need to have the skills of knowing the how and why of teaching, and of understanding that it is relational and situational. Co-construction of a curriculum in contexts where teachers are expected to exercise pedagogical responsibility does not always, however, leave space for child perspectives. Teachers, through their decisions about what questions to ask, are effectively the ones making decisions about what curriculum content to develop, in order to stimulate children's development through their choice of questions, with the danger that 'little time is afforded to the children's own questions, their responses and expressed ideas' (Jonsson and Williams, 2013).

Structural issues

Staffing ratios, qualifications, resources and collaborative ways of working are identified as important structural aspects of quality (Campbell-Barr, 2009) and high value is frequently placed on cleanliness, and the promotion of children's health (e.g. Sheridan, 2007). Two-year-old children are at a stage of development when they still need nappy changing and sleep routines in the nursery, and approaches to how the intimate needs of these children are met can offer valuable indicators of quality in two-year-old provision. The change required to move from a 'no-nappies' policy (as noted in Brooker, 2010) to high quality provision for two-year-olds highlights the extent of the difference between models of pedagogy associated with work with three- and four-year-olds and those required for work with two-year-olds.

In Nordic countries, preschool attendance by children under three is high; in Norway and Sweden, preschool places are offered to children from the age of one year at the parents' request and in Iceland 93% of two-year-olds attend preschools. Staff in all three countries are well qualified but, in a study using data collected from preschool teachers in Iceland, Sweden and Norway, Alvestad et al. (2014) investigated what practitioners found to be most important and most challenging in their work with toddlers and found that it did not match up to the pedagogical ideals outlined above. The teachers reported challenges in working with young children arising from structural factors (number of children and new physical environments to accommodate these larger groups) as well as issues concerning professional development. These included:

- *lack of specific focus on the youngest children in the revised preschool curriculum.*
- *in-service courses not focused on pedagogical work with young children: instead staff were often instructed just to make adjustments 'for the smallest ones'.*
- *insufficient coverage of work with youngest children in the education of preschool teachers*

The experiences of teachers reported in this study offer valuable insights for the expansion of provision for under threes:

"The youngest children are marginalized in many ways both in the public debate and in preschool [...]. In reality, the preschool was responsible for children's upbringing and learning, and the teachers felt like substitute parents. They required clear policy formulation about the ideology and expectations regarding very young children in preschools today. There was lack of understanding from policymakers regarding issues, such as group sizes, and economic profit was valued more than children's well-being." (Alvestad et al. 2014:682).

It is perhaps not surprising that the teachers in Alvestad et al.'s study expressed frustration, given the history of the arguments about pedagogical quality in Nordic countries. In Sweden, for

example, quality is understood to be 'based on security, joyfulness and learning from a sociocultural perspective' (Alvestad et al., 2014: 674). These teachers felt that structural factors (such as large numbers of children and inappropriate buildings) made it difficult for them to provide what they thought of as high quality pedagogy.

2.1.4 Interaction

In the UK, *Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children* (HM Treasury, 2004) argues that good quality is about the nature of interactions and relationships within a setting more than staffing ratios. Relationships might be between practitioner and child, child and child, practitioner and practitioner, parent and practitioner, or with other stakeholders who are tangentially linked to the setting. It is generally agreed across the literature relating to early years provision that relationships lie at the heart of practitioners' work. Relationships with children and parents are frequently discussed and understood to be at the core of early years work, but relationships also need to be built with other practitioners both within and outside the setting. This can generate additional professional development; draw in extra expertise and assist with making visible the work which is done in the setting.

For Edwards (2007, 2011) relational agency, rooted in the relationships which constitute a network of expertise, is a key factor of work in caring environments'. She defines relational agency as:

'a capacity to align one's thoughts and actions with those of others to interpret aspects of one's world and to act on and respond to those interpretations. [...] it is a capacity to work with others to expand the object that one is working on by bringing to bear the sense-making of others and to draw on the resources they offer when responding to sense-making'. (p. 3)

From this perspective, practitioners exercising relational agency might be able to put themselves in the position of a two-year-old and attempt to understand how the child is making sense of her world, and then step outside again to use the understandings of how the child's mind is working to assist the child to work on the activity in which she is engaged.

Papatheodorou (2009) offers a similar line of thinking in her definition of relational pedagogy, which is 'understood as the empowering force for knowing ourselves [...] and others; for making sense of others and making sense of ourselves because of others. [It] is about individuality and the collective consciousness that is shaped and transformed in time and place.' (p.14). For Papatheodorou, relational pedagogy has the promise of bridging 'the false dichotomy' of standards-focused practice and process-oriented work and offers an alternative to the 'school-readiness' agenda.

Dispositions

Enacting Relational Pedagogy presupposes certain other dispositions, including Noddings' concept of receptive attention (Brooker, 2010) and Tronto's (1993) concept of the ethic of care which maintains, continues and repairs our world, and Levinas' (1989) ethic of the encounter (in which he understands the role of the professional to be to offer a respectful welcome but to take care not to try to make the Other 'someone like us', (p.184). What is important is the ability of the practitioner to feel, understand and relate to what is experienced and needed by each, individual two-year-old. The sort of emotional skills needed by practitioners working with young children would therefore include seeing from the perspective of others; empathy; and collaboration, while the care element is about meeting children's needs; helping, supporting, discerning, identifying, confirming, and offering possibilities. This includes the ability to value, plan, and act to promote a child's wellbeing, learning and development (Sheridan et al., 2011).

Harwood et al. (2012) consider the role of 'presence' in their study of professionalism in the early years in Ontario, Nigeria and South Africa. They offer Rodgers and Raider-Roth's (2006, p. 265) definition of presence as 'the state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of the learning environment, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step'. The mental demands of working with children who are 'still struggling to express themselves' are described by practitioners in Wickett and Georgeson's (2012) study,

'I think it's a different type of tiredness I would say because you are thinking for them and you are trying to work out what their needs are ... The older ones can talk back, but the younger ones, it's not so easy.' (Wickett and Georgeson, 2012).

Cottle (2011) points to DfES (2007) and the assertion that the personal qualities of the practitioners are essential to quality, quality here being defined in terms of professional qualifications, intuition and empathy. Other writers (e.g. Berthelsen and Brownlee, 2007; Alexander, 2010) also point to the importance of personal traits and dispositions that make a successful practitioner: the ability to maintain positive relationships; being attentive and responsive; and the ability to build trust. It is how those qualities are attuned to the particularities of being two that will determine the quality of provision in work with that age group.

2.1.5 Conclusion

As the literature reviewed here shows, quality is a highly complex concept. The quality of provision for two-year-olds can be understood as a product of knowledge (what), pedagogy (how) and interactions (who). From one perspective quality may be a measurable and countable thing, objectively described; whilst from another viewpoint it is more ephemeral, contextual or abstract. Practitioners need to make moment-to-moment decisions about which perspective is foregrounded.

There are some specific behaviours and patterns of organisation highlighted in the literature that can be associated with provision of high quality care and education for two-year-olds. As this review has shown, work with two-year-olds is a complex blend of care, development and learning. The needs of the children can be addressed through structural aspects of a setting (staff ratios, resources, organisation of space and so on) and through the kinds of learning activity that are available to the two-year-olds. These are items that can lend themselves well to measurement and checklists. Less easily definable aspects of the setting, particularly the quality of interactions between adult and child, are more difficult to measure but need to be captured in an adequate description of the quality of settings.

2.2. Expert Perspectives on the Provision of Funded Two-year-old Places

2.2.1 Introduction

As we have seen in the literature review, understandings of quality and perspectives on best practice for two-year-olds are complex and shaped by a range of factors: concepts of children, childhood and childcare, views on the role of early years services, political objectives, parental demands. In turn we have seen how these factors shape the what, how and who of early years provision for two-year-olds. In this section we consider a series of key informant interviews in order to ascertain what are the perspectives of principal stakeholders on quality in early years provision for two-year-olds and revisit the what, how and who identified in the literature review with regard to the interview data. We concentrate on what knowledge is needed to work with two-year-olds and the role that qualifications play in this, how the services are being provided (the pedagogy) and who is providing the two-year-old places and the relationships needed to support this. We begin this section by providing an overview of how the key informants were identified, the questions they were asked and how their responses were analysed. We then set out our findings about the characteristics of quality for two-year-olds identified by our key informants, linking these to the issues of knowledge, pedagogy and interaction that were raised in the literature review.

2.2.2 Methods

Thirteen key informant interviews were conducted in order to generate an understanding of how the early years sector views quality in early years services for two-year-olds and the challenges and opportunities that have been encountered in delivering the funded two-year-old offer. Key informants were selected to represent the breadth of the early years sector and included because: they were involved in working for charitable organisations representing the views of early years practitioners from across the sectors (private, voluntary, independent and maintained); they were employed by local or national government to support the needs of early years providers and/or were involved in the delivery of the two-year-old offer, or they offered training to those delivering two-year-old places. In some instances the key informants fell into more than one of these categories. Details of the identity of the key informants have been limited in the reporting of the data in order to preserve the anonymity of those who participated. They are all however experts in the field of early years provision because of their roles which provide them with an overview of the perspectives of service providers, and because many of them have been involved in early years services for over 30 years.

Key informants were invited to participate in either a face-to-face or telephone interview. The interviews were focussed around two questions:

1. Quality is regarded as central to the provision of places for two-year-olds. What do you think are the key characteristics of good quality provision?
2. One aspect of the quality of provision is the workforce; how do you feel the workforce has coped with offering two-year-old places?

Prompted by these two core questions we asked respondents to consider what had shaped and informed their responses and whether they felt there were any variables that informed their understandings of quality and the role of the workforce. In addition we asked about their role and background, what they saw as being the next steps for the two-year-old offer and any other comments they would like to make (see Appendix 2).

Notes were made from each interview and sent to the participants to check for accuracy. They were then analysed in relation to the questions, with a second layer of analysis to identify the themes emerging from the responses (see Appendix 3 for further details). The themes identified were:

- characteristics of good quality;
- child development and an understanding of being two;
- sector variables (including details of variations in quality, funding and sustainability);
- skills needed to work with two-year-olds;
- working with families;
- training;
- communication;
- next steps.

Within the discussion Key Informants are referred to KI followed by a number and description. The number is to indicate the different respondents and the description gives a brief overview of the research participant. The discussion that follows is based on the themes that have been identified, but also relates back to the literature discussed in the previous section as well as to policy agendas around the two-year-old offer.

2.2.3 Characteristics of Quality

As we have seen in the literature review there are multiple perspectives on what constitutes quality early years provision for two-year-olds. Whilst the key informant interviews reaffirm that quality is a complex and layered construct, and that perspectives on quality for two-year-olds are multiple and varied, a number of clear themes emerge.

Within the interviews it was evident that all respondents were committed to ensuring that the provision for two-year-olds was of high quality. When asked what constituted quality, respondents offered a range of descriptors. The descriptors echo many of the areas discussed in the literature review. The commonality in the descriptors used suggests that there are shared understandings and principles as to what constitutes quality for two-year-olds and that the terms extend beyond subjective standpoints. We have grouped the descriptors into three broad areas: pedagogical practice, the environment and dispositions.

Table 1 presents an overview of all of the descriptors that key informants used to describe what they felt constituted aspects of 'quality' in provision for two-year-olds. In many instances respondents suggested that the quality of provision for two-year-olds was not something that could be seen as distinct and different to that of provision for other age groups, as respondents felt that there was a relationship between what settings offered two-year-olds and what they offered other aged children. As one key informant stated:

'The process of developing our two-year-old offer involved much the same thought process as when we developed our three- and four-year-old offer.'

KI:4 Current Practitioner and National Charity Representative

Table 1: Descriptions of Quality Provision for Two-year-olds

<i>Pedagogical Practice</i>	<i>Environment</i>	<i>Dispositions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ educare (bringing together care and education) ~ child-led, children in control of the space ~ strong relationships ~ play-based approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ stimulating ~ free flow with the outdoors ~ smooth transitions ~ appropriate materials ~ home like 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ love ~ reflection ~ people who want to make a difference ~ Sensitivity ~ empathy, ~ passion, ~ warmth ~ being emotionally accessible ~ emotional intelligence

The overlap with the other age groups means that key informants often talked about adjusting the elements identified in Table 1 to respond to the children they were working with. In many instances these informants reported that it was less about the age of the child and more about focussing on the needs of the child as advocated by the notion of ‘child led’ practice in the pedagogy descriptors.

Pedagogical Practice

As discussed in the literature review, pedagogy refers to ways of working with children and whilst the review identified that there are variations in how pedagogy is interpreted, there were common principles evident within the key informant interviews as detailed in Table 1. The pedagogical descriptors identified are representative of those upheld by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The relationship to the EYFS is evidence of the effect of historical policy and curriculum developments that focus on a play-based curriculum where children lead their learning – or alternatively that policy and curriculum have finally caught up with practice.

Environment

The play-based, child-led approach that we have identified in relation to pedagogical practice does overlap with environmental factors. For example, a number of key informants spoke about the importance of having outdoor spaces for children and ensuring that this was ‘free-flow’ (accessible at all times) so that children could access the outdoors as they wished. The availability of outdoor space was seen as particularly important for those children accessing funded places as it was identified by some key informants that, given the link between the two-year-olds offer and socio-economic deprivation, there were some children who would not have access to the outdoors in their home environment. Here it is important to clarify that the reference to the early years environment being ‘home-like’ was in relation to the indoor environment, with the outdoors offering an additional space. Within both the indoor and outdoor environment key informants identified a need to ensure that there were resources of interest and appropriate for the two-year-olds to play with. Key informants were concerned that toys offered sufficient challenge but considered that some were better suited to older children. However, again there is overlap with pedagogical practice as it was felt that practitioners needed to be able to respond to the needs and interests of the child. As one local authority officer said *‘there is no typical two-year-old’*.

There were evidently different patterns of provision with respect to whether two-year-olds were in the same rooms as three- and four-year-olds or in separate rooms, with no conclusive

evidence that one approach was considered better than the other. However, in viewing quality as a concept that stretched across the age groups, many of the key informants offered examples of where they felt that the three- and four-year-old provision had improved as a result of the focus on quality for two-year-olds.

Relational Skills

In all interviews, when asked about features of quality, key informants began to talk about the role of the workforce and it was clear that quality and the workforce were inextricably linked. From these discussions it was apparent that the key informants felt that the skills set needed to work with two-year-olds extended beyond measurable indicators of quality (as often featured in quality assessments) towards something less tangible.

...it's beyond qualifications, a personal feel and the ability to deal with difficult situations and questions. I suppose in a way it's about the emotional intelligence of being able to deal with families and children and their challenges.

KI:11 Policy Officer, National Charity Representative

The idea that working with young children requires a set of relational skills has been written about extensively (see the literature review), but when working with two-year-olds who are being allocated free early education places due to a wide range of complex needs, it was felt that these skills were even more crucial as practitioners needed to be able to deal with the emotional needs of both the children that they worked with and their families. In turn, some key informants raised a concern that this would also place a pressure on the emotional well-being of the workforce and that this should not be underestimated (see the section below on working with families).

It is difficult to evaluate relational skills when looking to judge the quality of early years provision, as they are not easily defined in a way that can be assessed. This problem also extends to qualifications, as it is not clear whether such skills can be taught/learned. Previous work has reported that the skills to work with young children are often regarded as innate (e.g. McGillivray, 2008; Penn, 2011), so that individuals either possess the skills or they don't. Some key informants considered that whilst an individual might be well suited to work with three- and four-year-olds, they might not possess the dispositions needed to work with two-year-olds. Despite this, respondents did feel that qualifications played an important role in ensuring that practitioners were equipped with a range of necessary skills.

Qualifications

Nearly all respondents were committed to the recommendation that a Level Three qualification should be a minimum requirement for those working with children (as recommended in the Nutbrown Review, 2012). Key informants praised the progress that had been made in up-skilling and investing in the continual improvement and development of the workforce. However, respondents were also clear that more progress was needed and many had concerns about the qualifications that were available for practitioners, or about the recent reforms that were underway (see Mathers et al., 2014).

Five of the key informants suggested in their interview that the government should have acted on the recommendations of the Nutbrown Review (2012) and introduced a minimum qualification of Level Three for those working with children. However, some key informants raised the need to ensure that the Level Three qualifications were fit for purpose. Concerns raised were in relation to how robust the assessments were and the skills sets of those conducting the assessments. Three of the key informants gave examples of where they felt people undertaking Level Three qualifications had not been assessed regularly enough and where they felt the assessments were 'light touch'. One key informant (who had been an

assessor and was involved in recruiting apprentices) mentioned that it was important to acknowledge that there were different pathways within the Level Three qualifications: college- or employment-based. This key informant felt that there were significant differences between the two pathways, with the college-based route providing more theoretical input that offered greater depth to the qualification, which was not evident in the employment-based route. With regard to the skills of those conducting the assessment, three key informants reported that often those assessing students doing a Level Three qualification only had a Level Three qualification themselves. Their feeling was that assessors needed to hold qualifications higher than those they were assessing (see Nutbrown, 2012: 3.18, 3.19).

It is significant to note that not all key informants were critical of Level Three qualifications and one emphasised that it was important not to undermine the hard work of those who had undertaken and achieved new qualifications. Many of the key informants also noted that the introduction of the Early Years Educator means that the situation could be in the process of changing for the better, although this would need to be revisited. Overall, the interviews suggest a need for continual review of content and assessment of the courses that are on offer, including monitoring the adequacy of Level Three qualifications (including those who assess them) as the Early Years Educator pathway matures. The interviews also suggest revisiting the Nutbrown recommendation of having a Level Three baseline for the workforce.

The introduction of GCSE entry requirements led to conflicting responses from the key informants. Some felt that the notion of minimum entry requirements was a good thing as it would help raise the standards of those working with children, particularly in recognition of the role that these people have in educating children. However, a few key informants questioned whether having good GCSEs would make a difference to the way in which the future practitioners would work with children. One key informant also raised concerns that the minimum entry requirement could potentially deter people from entering the childcare workforce. There are some people who have much to give in terms of working with children, even though they may be academically less able and/or qualified. As one of the key informants commented, excluding these people from the workforce may lead to a shortage of staff in the short term. Overall the key informants were in favour of the focus on up-skilling the workforce, but not all respondents felt that GCSEs in Maths, Science and English were necessary to achieve this. The key informant data also suggest a need to monitor the impact of a tightening of entry requirements on the take-up of qualification pathways as well as on quality of provision, so that any decline in recruitment is detected and acted upon.

Whilst there was considerable discussion about the Level Three qualifications in the key informant interviews, six of those we spoke to felt that there should be a commitment to increase the proportion of staff qualified to degree level (level 6). They observed that people with degrees demonstrate significantly greater depth of knowledge and understanding. Key informants acknowledged that being able to reflect on practice is one way in which to develop the dispositions discussed earlier in the chapter. It was felt that degrees require practitioners to reflect on their practice in a way that would support the dispositions mentioned, but also that reflecting on practice was an important condition for developing the quality of provision. Those who argued for the importance of degree level qualifications felt that degrees helped practitioners to be better able to understand children, and ways of working with children, including how to extend children's learning.

Whilst there was general support for degree level qualifications, two respondents emphasised that it was important that the degrees should be appropriate for working with two-year-olds. BEd and PGCE qualifications do not usually cover the needs of two-year-olds and they argued that those working in graduate roles with two-year-olds should have a degree level qualification which adequately addressed the developmental needs of these children.

In summary, the key informant interviews indicate that the sector welcomes the focus on up-skilling the workforce and believes that qualifications underpin the quality of early years provision. Many highlighted the importance of both Level Three and degree level qualifications, but they were clear that qualifications need to be fit for purpose, both in how they are assessed and their content.

Local Authority Training

Ten of the key informants discussed the training that was provided by local authorities. In some instances it was clear that local authorities had either been proactive in offering training around working with two-year-olds or had been asked by providers to offer training. It was acknowledged that local authorities and charitable organisations offered a range of training opportunities and that during the lead up to the introduction of the two-year-olds places there had been training that was focussed on the needs of two-year-olds, with such training ongoing and extended where needed. Such training sometimes focused on developing an understanding of two-year-olds (see the following section on child development) or in meeting the additional needs that two-year-olds might experience (see the section on working with families).

However, many of the key informants raised concerns that the training offered by local authorities was decreasing and that, in many instances, providers now had to pay to access courses that were once free, as a result of policy changes. In addition, some key informants were conscious that many local authorities had seen a decrease in the number of people they employed to support early years practitioners and this was having a knock-on effect on the amount of support that was available. As a consequence, there were fears that the declining role of local authorities would result in a negative impact on the quality of early years provision.

Child Development

As stated, many local authorities have been involved in offering training that focussed on the needs of two-year-olds. The focus on the importance of qualifications and/or additional training that considered the needs of two-year-olds was upheld by all key informants stressing that those working with two-year-olds must have a sound understanding of child development.

They need to understand how two-year-olds learn, how they like to learn, the sorts of character of their learning, their desire for learning.

KI:3 Trainer, Consultant and National Charity Representative

It's the skills and the way staff work and engage with children, so then having that good understanding of child development and the particular needs of two-year-olds.

KI:11 Policy Officer, National Charity Representative

The justification for knowing about child development was that this was necessary to enable practitioners to respond to the needs of the child without underestimating the abilities of two-year-olds. This emphasis on the importance of focussing on the needs of the child echoes the pedagogical descriptors outlined in Table 1. Key informants felt that those working with two-year-olds needed to be able to respond to the individual child and that a secure understanding of child development was central to this. This was expanded upon by many of the key informants as they noted that the needs of two-year-olds were very complex due to the rapid development that a child goes through at this age. Many of the key informants observed that children who are only just two and those who are nearly three require very different understandings of what it is to be two.

When discussing the need to understand early child development, key informants also drew attention to the fact that the two-year-old funded places are targeted at children with additional needs and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds. As such, the two-year-olds accessing the funded places could often come with additional complex needs that would require a greater understanding of the variation inherent in child development. Key informants felt that it was important that practitioners had a sound and rich understanding of what it meant to be two to enable them to cater for the needs of all two-year-olds and to provide appropriate environments for them.

Despite the complex range of needs that practitioners were encountering when working with two-year-olds respondents spoke about how important it was that practitioners did not underestimate the abilities of these children. They felt that the focus on child development was also about understanding children's language development and their abilities and interests so that practitioners would feel able to extend their learning. It was apparent within the discussions that key informants recognised child development as complex and more than a series of milestones at particular ages and stages.

Working with Families

It was acknowledged by the key informants that working with and understanding the needs of two-year-old children also required a range of other skills.

It's not just about working with the child, it is about having aspirations for the child and having aspirations for the family and supporting the family to move from where they are... these practitioners need skills in working with parents.

KI1, Consultant, Training and National Charity Representative

Key informants also recognised the importance of engaging with the home learning environment to extend the learning of two-year-olds. Just as two-year-olds came with a range of complex needs, so did their families and all key informants emphasised that working with children was also about building relationships with their families and that this was a key feature of quality provision for two-year-olds.

'There is a large amount of work there with families and being able to engage with the family... the child can be settled, but the family has difficulties that impact on the child being able to take up the place.'

KI:10 Trainer, National Charity Representative

Key informants from with the local authorities (N=5) particularly acknowledged that the complex needs of two-year-olds and their families often meant that there was a need for additional support within the setting. This support could involve drawing on the expertise of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), getting advice from the local authority or attending additional training. Key informants identified that early years practitioners were having to extend their skills set to meet not only the needs of the children they were working with on a day to day basis, but also to enable them to engage in additional responsibilities such as participating in Common Assessment Framework (CAF) meetings. In some instances key informants identified that they were aware that some practitioners needed to develop their skills set to be able to make assessments of children and to attend the CAF meetings, and this made additional demands on time and resources.

Even where two-year-old children were not identified as having an additional need or area of support, key informants still stressed that working with families took time and resources. This could be exacerbated for those accessing the funding as the funded children were often from vulnerable backgrounds (for a range of reasons) and it could therefore take time to build

relationships with them and their families. Despite the additional time and resources that it requires, key informants still stressed that working with families was an essential feature of quality provision for the two-year-olds funded places.

In a small number of instances key informants acknowledged that in taking children who had been allocated a funded two-year-old place it was important to be aware of existing users of the setting. Just one of the key informants reported that in one setting which took funded two-year-olds, some parents had moved their children to another nursery. This was because parents of unfunded children were concerned that the additional needs of the disadvantaged children and their families would mean that practitioners would be less able to give attention to their children. This was a sole example and in contrast many of the key informants spoke positively about the advantages of having a mix of children from different social backgrounds together in the same setting.

Leadership and Management

Both working with families and supporting the workforce in their professional development highlights the importance of leadership and management. Whilst the management of a setting can often involve dealing with logistical issues, such as ensuring staff cover for someone attending a CAF meeting and managing resources (see the next section for more details), key informants also spoke about the need for a clear vision on quality with an effective leader to take this forward. Many of the key informants thought that leadership was a feature of high quality provision. Leadership was seen as being key for articulating a vision of quality and then supporting a team to enact this vision. Leadership was also seen as being important for developing the relationships within the setting, to ensure good team working, but also for working with families.

Some key informants discussed the role of leaders and/or managers in supporting the social and emotional needs of the workforce. One of them observed that, for some settings taking on disadvantaged two-year-olds, this is the first time that they have encountered the complexities that socio-economic disadvantage can bring with it. As a result, this key informant was aware of practitioners who were struggling to cope with the emotional pressure of supporting vulnerable families. Other key informants could also think of examples of where practitioners were struggling to deal with the emotional complexities of working with disadvantaged families.

2.2.4 Sector Variables

Some of the key informants felt that particular early years providers were better able to offer the additional support that both the children and their families needed and often this was related to resources. It was felt that small independent early years providers would be most likely to struggle with providing additional support for two-year-olds as they did not have additional resources on which to draw. Conversely, schools and settings that were either part of a chain or connected to a children's centre were able to draw upon the additional resources available to support them in addressing the needs of the children and their families. Sometimes the resources were financial, such as being able to pay for staff cover for attendance at meetings or one-to-one support for a child. On other occasions, it was about being able to draw down resources in the form of expertise from a wider team of people other than those present in a small independent nursery.

Being able to access additional resources clearly raises the issue of the level of funding that providers were allocated to provide the two-year-old offer. One key informant reported that the funding allocated was only enough to cover staffing costs, whereas another suggested that the funding was sufficient so long as the child did not need any additional resources or one-to-one support. A small number of the key informants also argued that providers needed to be aware of the number of funded two-year-olds that they were taking so as not to become

overly reliant on funded places as they would then be vulnerable if there was a change in the rate of funding. It was also felt that over-reliance on funded places would limit the potential to be able to cross-subsidise the rate of funding by charging for other services.

The Role of Schools

Whilst some key informants thought that schools were well positioned to support the additional resources needed for working with two-year-olds, we have also discussed in relation to the workforce the need to have knowledge and understanding of two-year-olds and qualified teachers are unlikely to be trained to work with under-threes. These two contrasting views extend throughout the key informant interviews with diverging opinion as to whether schools are appropriate environments for such young children. Whilst some key informants clearly felt uncomfortable with the idea that two-year-old children were in schools, others felt that schools could offer appropriate environments and opportunities if there was appropriate capacity (in relation to the physical environment) and appropriate knowledge and expertise for meeting the needs of two-year-olds. One key informant also felt that schools might be better placed to build relationships with families as they have a history of being embedded in communities and have already developed trust within those communities.

The key informant interviews do not provide an indication of a consensus over the suitability of any one sector in the provision of early years places. There were clearly differing views on the suitability of schools as environments for two-year-olds. However there was unanimous agreement that those working with two-year-olds need to have knowledge and understanding of child development and capacity to foster positive relationships with families. Key informants also recognised that adequate resources were needed both to develop the skills set of the workforce and to work with families.

Quality Assessment Tools

Many of the key informants talked about the use of Ofsted grades as the sole indicator of quality in determining the allocation of funding for the two-year-old places. Recognising that quality in early years settings is complex, some of the key informants felt that Ofsted inspections do not provide sufficient indications of quality. In other instances, key informants referred to recent research that had called into question the accuracy of the Ofsted grades when they were compared with other quality indicators, especially when considering provision for two-year-olds (Mathers et al., 2012). As a result many of the key informants discussed quality assurance schemes that were recommended and/or used by the practitioners they worked with to help guide settings with both their development and the articulation of quality.

Both ECERS and ITERS (Harms et al. 1998; 1990) were mentioned in key informant interviews as were sector and local authority endorsed tools such as the Bristol Standards, the National Day Nurseries Association and Pre-school Learning Alliance's quality assurance schemes. Such tools were seen to be helpful in guiding practitioners in their self-evaluations and quality improvement. Whilst there was no specific focus on the needs of two-year-olds (with ITERS being the only tool to have an age specific focus that included two-year-olds) it was felt that settings actually needed to be thinking about the quality of their service as a whole. Quality for two-year-olds was therefore part of quality for the whole of the setting and so focussing on developing the quality of provision for two-year-olds was about developing the quality of the whole setting.

2.2.5 Next Steps according to Key Informants

Many of the key informants called for policy makers to listen to the expert opinion and advice that was available in the sector before making policy changes. Many of the key informants felt that policy makers were not listening to the sector or recognising their concerns about the roll out of two-year-old places (as in the discussion above). Some key informants felt uneasy about the pace of change that had taken place in order to secure sufficient places for the two-

year-old offer. Consequently some key informants were in favour of recent recommendations to slow down the expansion of the two-year-old offer until there was a clearer picture of how settings were coping with the current level of provision and of how new qualifications were operating.

Two of the key informants were concerned that school readiness debates and assessments of children in the foundation stage were diverting attention away from focussing on the quality of two-year-old provision. Whilst all key informants supported the core principles of supporting disadvantaged children and their families and investing in early years services, there were concerns that the motives were more about being able to assess impacts on children, than about identifying what is a good quality environment for a two-year-old. In some instances, key informants stressed that having a child who felt safe and secure in their early years environment, with parents who trusted the setting, amounted to success, but there was a feeling that such views of success were not valued within current policy frameworks.

Among the local authority respondents it was clear that local authorities were at different stages of development in regard to their two-year-olds offer. This meant that some local authorities identified their need to promote the two-year-olds offer more widely in order to expand the take up of free places, whereas other local authorities felt they were at a point where they needed to expand their provision. The picture that came through from the key informant interviews was that the level of provision (sufficiency), quality of provision and the support to develop the quality of provision was variable between different local authority areas.

2.2.6 Summary of Key Informant Interviews

The key informant interviews were designed to provide an overview of the two-year-old offer and to shape subsequent stages of the research. Key informants were selected for their knowledge and understanding of the sector from varying perspectives, representing national and local government, charitable organisations from across the sector and those involved in supporting and/or training the sector. Thirteen interviews were conducted focussing on the key characteristics of quality provision for two-year-olds and the skills needed to work with two-year-olds. Many of the findings could be related back to the literature review and recent policy debates.

Key informants identified the importance of a pedagogical approach that was play-based, child-led and sought to combine elements of care and education. Many of them spoke of the importance of having outdoor space for the children to access freely. Practitioners needed also to provide resources that would offer interest and appropriate levels of challenge to the two-year-olds in their care.

Key informants also identified the skills and qualifications of those who work in ECEC settings that were important to create an environment and approach to work with two-year-olds. Many of the key informants talked about a set of skills extending beyond a formal qualification, and that those working with children require particular dispositions (often more emotionally based) to undertake their work. Qualifications were nonetheless regarded as important and nearly all key informants felt that a Level 3 qualification should be a minimum requirement for working with children. However, some key informants stressed that there was a need to ensure that this was a robust Level 3 qualification in which the sector could have confidence, as some of the key informants raised questions about assessment practices and different training pathways (work-based or taught) of the existing qualification. Overall it was clear that the key informants were in support of up-skilling the workforce.

It was evident that local authorities were being proactive in providing additional training to providers who felt their staff had a knowledge gap. All key informants believed that those working with two-year-olds needed a good understanding of child development; this was important to

ensure that practitioners did not underestimate the abilities of two-year-olds and could support and extend their learning.

With the funded two-year-old places being targeted at children with additional needs and/or from disadvantaged backgrounds, many of the key informants felt that an understanding of the variations in child development and children's needs was important. In addition, key informants noted that often it was not just the children that practitioners were supporting, but the family as well. Building relationships with families was crucial and practitioners needed to develop a skills base that enabled them to work with a wide range of families. Working with and supporting families could include attending meetings about the needs of the child and/or providing additional support to the child and family. Attendance at meetings could mean that staff would be out of the setting for periods of time and so additional resources would be required to pay for cover staff. Consequently some of the key informants believed that the rate of funding received to provide the two-year-old offer was insufficient.

2.3 Linking Back To Policy

Provision for early years education and care has received considerable policy attention since the 1990s. Initial policy interventions in the provision of early years services could be described as tentative (Campbell-Barr, 2010); however, the introduction of the National Childcare Strategy in 1998 via the Green Paper *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* led to an explosion in policy interest and intervention. The development of early years education and childcare policies through the following decade embraced a mixture of different approaches from family tax credits and employer support to a free nursery entitlement, with significant changes to regulation (inspection and quality assessment) and training of the workforce. However, three key objectives have remained fundamentally consistent since the early 1990s (Paull 2014) – despite the succession of different governments; the aims are to make good quality childcare more affordable as well as more accessible to those who need it.

The focus on the quality, affordability and accessibility of early years education and childcare provision reflects policy agendas concerned with parental employment and early intervention. The welfare agenda promoted by the New Labour government highlighted the connection between supporting mothers in low-income families to get back to work and reducing child poverty. In particular, the ten-year childcare strategy *Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children* (HM Government, 2004), the *Childcare Act* (DfES, 2006) and *Building Brighter Futures: The Next Steps* (DCSF, 2008c) all strengthened the vision of a positive start in life for children. The Coalition government has put forward two main reports, *More Great Childcare* (DfE 2013) and *More Affordable Childcare* (HM Government 2013), with proposals to enhance the use of early years education and childcare as the basis of the UK's economic productivity both through developing the skills of the future workforce and increasing social mobility for the parental workforce. Through these two documents the coalition has continued the focus on quality, affordability and accessibility.

As we have seen in the literature review (section 2.1) quality is a much contested term and policy interventions around setting of minimum standards and up-skilling of the early years workforce are examples of the policy drive to get things 'right'. In particular the up-skilling of the workforce has received considerable attention with moves to consolidate the range of qualifications on offer and to professionalise the sector. In September 2008, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was introduced and gradually implemented in early years settings across England (revised later in 2012). This was a statutory framework that defined both the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) and the Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Previously, the Early Years and Playwork Qualifications Database (EYPQD) was the tool used to support Local Authorities, professionals and employers to identify qualifications and training paths for specific roles as well as for registration and regulation purposes.

In September 2009, after a year of transition, a Qualification list for early years workers replaced the EYPQD and a new inspection framework was established, which outlined an ambition that all practitioners should hold full and relevant qualifications. These are divided into mandatory criteria (1 to 3) and non-mandatory criteria (4 to 7). The first set of criteria refers to the level of study required and how it is assessed. Level 2 requires working knowledge of 'widely understood principles and implications within the field of practice'. Level 3 entails an in-depth understanding of 'the theoretical underpinning of an area of practice including conflicting theories and constructs'. Level 4 expects the practitioner to have the 'ability to evaluate and devise approaches to situations that depend on the critical application of theories and conceptual constructs'. These levels need to be demonstrated through a valid assessment and contain an element of performance evidence (criteria 2 and 3). The second set relates to recommendations to undertake further professional development in a specific age range or on a particular area of knowledge.

There are two main routes to gain a recognised qualification in early years: a Vocationally Related Qualification (VRQ) and a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ). The first can be achieved through courses to be attended at a further education college, sixth-form college and specific learning centres. The second one includes work-related qualifications.

The foundation level is indicated for those with little or no experience of working with children; level 2 is appropriate for those who are working under supervision as nursery or playgroup assistants; level 3 is for practitioners who plan and organise their work as well as supervising the work of others, while level 4 prepares experienced practitioners, such as a nursery manager or development officer for a local authority, to carry out complex and non-routine tasks.

Although key informants emphasised the role of the workforce in the quality of provision, their comments highlighted concerns in the sector about the qualifications on offer. These concerns are echoed in recent debates. In her review of early childhood education and qualifications, Nutbrown (2012) voices her concern that the qualification system in place 'is not systematically equipping practitioners with the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to give babies and young children high quality experiences' (ibidem: 5). She strongly advocates a new long-term vision for the early years workforce with the current system of qualification being abandoned in favour of more clear and rigorous requirements. The level 2 qualification is regarded by Nutbrown as insufficient to enable a professional to be counted in the staffing ratios in an early years setting, while 'level 3 qualifications should become the minimum standard' (ibidem: 6), something also called for by the nearly all of the key informants. Nutbrown then goes on to advocate a specialist route for Early Years Professionals to achieve a qualified teacher status (QTS), explaining that 'having qualified teachers leading early years practice will raise the status of the sector, increase professionalism and improve quality' (ibidem: 8). The importance of training and continuing professional development is also stressed with specific attention to enhance the aspiration of all early years practitioners to become pedagogical leaders. This becomes even more critical when considering the qualifications and qualities that an early years practitioner should have to be able to work with disadvantaged two-year-olds. In a recent interview, the coordinator of the three year national programme A2YO 'Achieving 2 year olds', James Hemsall, described leadership as the most important factor to ensure quality, suggesting that qualification and quality do not always coincide (McCardle, 2014). While early childhood leadership is widely recognised as a key factor in achieving organisational change (Moyles, 2006; Aubrey et al., 2014), definitions of leadership vary and more research is needed to establish its implications in terms of management, organisation and administration.

The *Condition of Britain report* (Lawton 2013), published by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), also highlights that the route to higher quality in childcare is a well-qualified workforce, maintaining that 'good quality early education also reinforces positive early learning experiences,

as well as helping to compensate for parents who lack the time, money or skills to invest in their young children's early development' (ibidem: 13).

The research literature, key informants and recent policy appear to be in agreement that quality is central to the provision of ECEC and that those who work in ECEC are key to the quality of provision. However, the skills needed to work in ECEC and the role of qualifications in enabling people to obtain/enhance these skills is still contested. We recognise that there have been recent developments in the qualification structures for those employed in ECEC with the introduction of the Early Years Educator and the Early Years Teacher. While we await the outcomes of these changes to the qualifications, it is clear that the sector is still asking questions of the qualification frameworks.

3. Methods in Phase 2: Workforce Survey and Regional Case Studies

The aim of the second phase of the research was to build on the findings from the key informant interviews by conducting research with practitioners working with two-year-old children in England. There were two main elements to this phase of the research:

- An national online survey of managers and practitioners in early years settings catering for two-year-olds (conducted by the University of Oxford).
- In-depth case studies to generate qualitative data and detailed examples of practice (conducted by the University of Plymouth)

Here we provide an overview of our approach, with further details available in Appendices 2-6.

3.1 The online workforce survey

The second phase of the research involved an online survey of practitioners working with two-year-olds in England, and the leaders and managers of settings catering for two-year-olds. The aim was to build up a picture of the workforce, for example:

- their qualifications and experience;
- how well prepared they feel to meet the needs of two-year-olds and their families, and what additional support is needed;
- the characteristics of their settings and how provision for two-year-olds is organised;
- their views of the key components of quality for two-year-olds and how this can best be achieved.

The questionnaire is shown in Appendix 4, and was developed to build on the themes emerging from the Phase 1 key informant interviews, such as minimum qualification requirements and working with parents.

The survey was conducted online and administered with the support of a number of national bodies, including sector organisations sending out details to their members, local authorities emailing the link to providers, articles in the sector press and the use of social media.

In total, 666¹ responses were received by the closing date. A significant minority of these (156) were excluded due to missing data², resulting in a final achieved sample of 509 respondents. Findings from the survey are presented in chapter 4.

3.2 The case studies

To find out about what was happening in practice, we contacted settings involved in providing places to disadvantaged two-year-olds in the four geographical regions in which we had already interviewed key informants, in order to compile case studies of practice in different contexts. In chapter 5 we report on what we found out from these settings. We interviewed the person responsible for managing the two-year-old places and, where possible, asked them to give us a tour of the setting. We asked the managers about the purpose of the funded places, their views on characteristics of high quality provision for two-year-olds, the skills needed to work with two-year-olds and how they have planned their provision for two-year-olds (see Appendix 5). We spent time observing what two-year-olds were doing in just over half of the settings, making judgments about their level of involvement (Laevers, 2005) and how the practitioners interacted with, and supported, them (see Table 3 and Appendix 6). We then spoke to the practitioners about our observations, asking them about their practice and how they felt they had developed the skills and knowledge to work with two-year-olds (see Appendix 7). In some instances it was only possible to speak to the person responsible for managing the provision due to the practicalities of setting up observations and times to speak with the staff following them (see Table 2 for a summary of the setting visits).

We visited 10 settings in four local authorities, and conducted a telephone interview with an eleventh setting. We limited the number of local authorities involved in the study to control for the level of support that practitioners were offered (such as training and advice) and to control for the levels of funding for the two-year-old offer and other sources of funding (such as capital investments). At least one key informant from each local authority was interviewed, who was interviewed in the first phase and provided information about how the settings were supported at a local level. The settings we visited were selected in consultation with the local authority and represent settings that the key informants thought offered examples of good practice. We aimed for representation from all sectors for the setting visits and for variation in histories of whether settings had previously admitted two-year-old children. The local authorities had also been selected because of the variation in sampling of the settings (e.g. inner city, urban, rural, level of deprivation) that they were able to offer. The examples of practice are not designed to be representative, but to offer illustrative examples of how providers are approaching their work with two-year-olds.

The timing of the research entailed visits to the settings in the summer term (following the Easter break). This means that many of the children had been attending the settings for two terms and that the practitioners had been able to spend this time getting to know the children (and vice versa). Whilst we cannot be sure, we believe that the children displayed a level of confidence related to the length of time they had already spent in the settings. Furthermore, the timing of the visits also meant that many of the observations were conducted on days when there was good weather and many of the children were outside.

3.3. The sample

It is important to note that, in both the survey and the qualitative work, our sample represents practitioners who are at the higher end of the quality continuum. A greater proportion of settings were graded as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted, and respondents to the survey were better

¹ A further 22 respondents did not provide consent to use their data so were omitted from the sample

² Responses with more than 50% of responses missing from the main questionnaire (i.e. questions 1 to 38) were excluded. In the majority of cases, these were respondents who had provided some details about themselves and their settings but had not completed the questions on recent training attended, on their confidence to provide for two-year-olds and their families, or on their views about quality and how to achieve it. One further response from a local authority adviser was excluded on the grounds that the survey was intended for practitioners and leaders of settings.

qualified and more experienced, than one might expect from a nationally representative sample. This reflects both the nature of respondents likely to volunteer to take part in research studies, and the policy focus on good and outstanding settings as the preferred option for the two-year-old places. It should be taken into account when interpreting our findings, as they are likely to reflect the characteristics, views and experiences of the most proactive and confident of settings and practitioners. In particular, any issues and challenges identified by our sample (e.g. lack of confidence in a specific area of practice) may represent an even more significant challenge for the workforce as a whole.

In the next chapter we present an overview of the quantitative data from the survey and, in the following chapter, qualitative data from the case studies. When discussing settings we will refer to them using numbers to protect the identity of the participants. As the starting point for discussing the data, we have used themes that emerged from the literature review and key informant interviews and have built on and extended these as needed; the following chapters therefore continue our focus on the what, how and who of provision for two-year-olds.

4. The workforce survey

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the online survey of practitioners, which ran between 13th June and 11th July 2014. The survey was advertised nationally and generated a final sample of 509 respondents, nearly all of whom (95%) worked in early years settings catering for two-year-old children. Sections 4.2 and 4.3 set out the characteristics of the respondents and their settings as well as their views on quality for two-year-olds and how to achieve it.

In Section 4.4, we focus on the 321 respondents whose settings catered for funded two-year-olds at the time of the survey, and on the 195 respondents who reported working directly with funded two-year-olds. We explore:

- The characteristics of settings, and how provision is organised (section 4.4.1)
- The characteristics of respondents working with two-year olds, including qualifications and experience (section 4.4.3)
- The preparedness of respondents working with two-year-olds, including initial qualifications, continuing professional development and levels of confidence in the various aspects of practice aimed at meeting the needs of two-year-olds and their families (section 4.4.4).

4.2 Characteristics of respondents and their settings³

The survey achieved a good spread of respondents from different types of provision. Just over one quarter (27%) were childminders, six per cent worked in local authority maintained provision and the remainder (apart from a small percentage describing themselves as 'other') worked in full day-care or sessional group settings within the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector (Figure 1). The low number of respondents from schools reflects the fact that providing for two-year-olds is a relatively new venture for the maintained sector⁴.

Involvement with children's centres was relatively high, with one quarter of respondents (25%) working in a setting with some kind of link: either offering on-site early years provision for a children's centre (8%), off-site early years provision (5%) or linked in some other way, for example taking referrals, attending or organising childminder drop-ins, or engaging in close working relationships (13%)⁵.

In general, respondents' settings tended to receive higher Ofsted grades than the national average, with 90% graded as good or outstanding⁶ as compared with, for example, 78% nationally for PVI early years providers⁷. This may reflect the fact that settings graded good or higher are given priority in terms of being able to offer funded places to two-year-olds.

³ Note that some settings may be represented within the sample more than once (e.g. if more than one member of staff completed the survey from a particular setting).

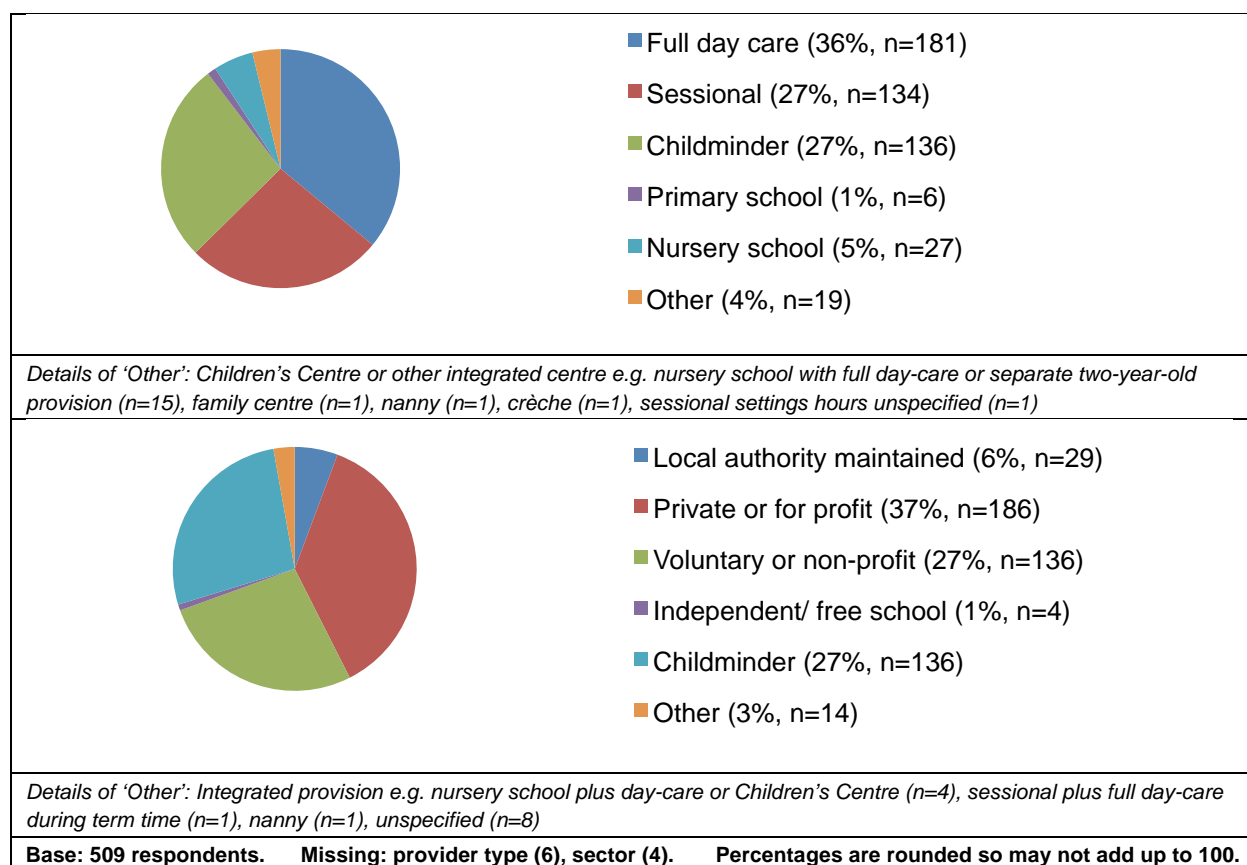
⁴ It is likely that some of the settings defined as 'other' were at least partially local authority maintained, as these tended to be integrated centres combining different types of provision.

⁵ Base 509 respondents (n=508, missing=1)

⁶ Base 509 respondents (n=504, missing =5)

⁷ Ofsted dataview tool (<http://dataview.ofsted.gov.uk>) - figures for all non-maintained early years providers as at 31/03/2014

Figure 1: Characteristics of respondents' settings: provider type and sector



The respondents themselves tended to be more senior, more experienced and better qualified than we might expect from a representative sample (Figure 2). Over half (55%) described themselves as the manager/owner or head teacher of a group setting. If we look only at respondents from PVI group settings, the percentage describing themselves as manager or owner rises to more than three quarters (78%) as compared with the percentages seen nationally for full day-care settings (8%) and sessional providers (12%) (Brind et al., 2012).

Similarly with qualifications (Figure 2), 38% held a relevant graduate qualification at Level 6 or higher, as compared with the percentages seen nationally for PVI group settings (10%) and childminders (4%) (Brind et al., 2012)⁸. Just under a quarter (22%) held Early Years Professional Status and 7% held Qualified Teacher Status⁹. Respondents also tended to be highly experienced, with just under three quarters (73%) reporting more than ten years experience in working with children aged five and under (Figure 2).

The nature of the sample is not unexpected, given that these are the groups most likely to be motivated to take part in a survey. However when interpreting the findings we should remember that, rather than a fully representative sample of providers, we have a sample largely comprising well-qualified and experienced leaders of practice, and a relatively high proportion of childminders.

Almost all of respondents' settings (95%) had two-year-olds on register at the time of the survey¹⁰. On average, settings catered for 16 two-year-olds, but the range was relatively wide ranging from 1

⁸ The percentage is higher (425) for early years staff in maintained schools (Brind et al., 2012) but since only 6% of our sample worked in maintained settings, the figures for PVI group settings and childminders provide a more useful comparison.

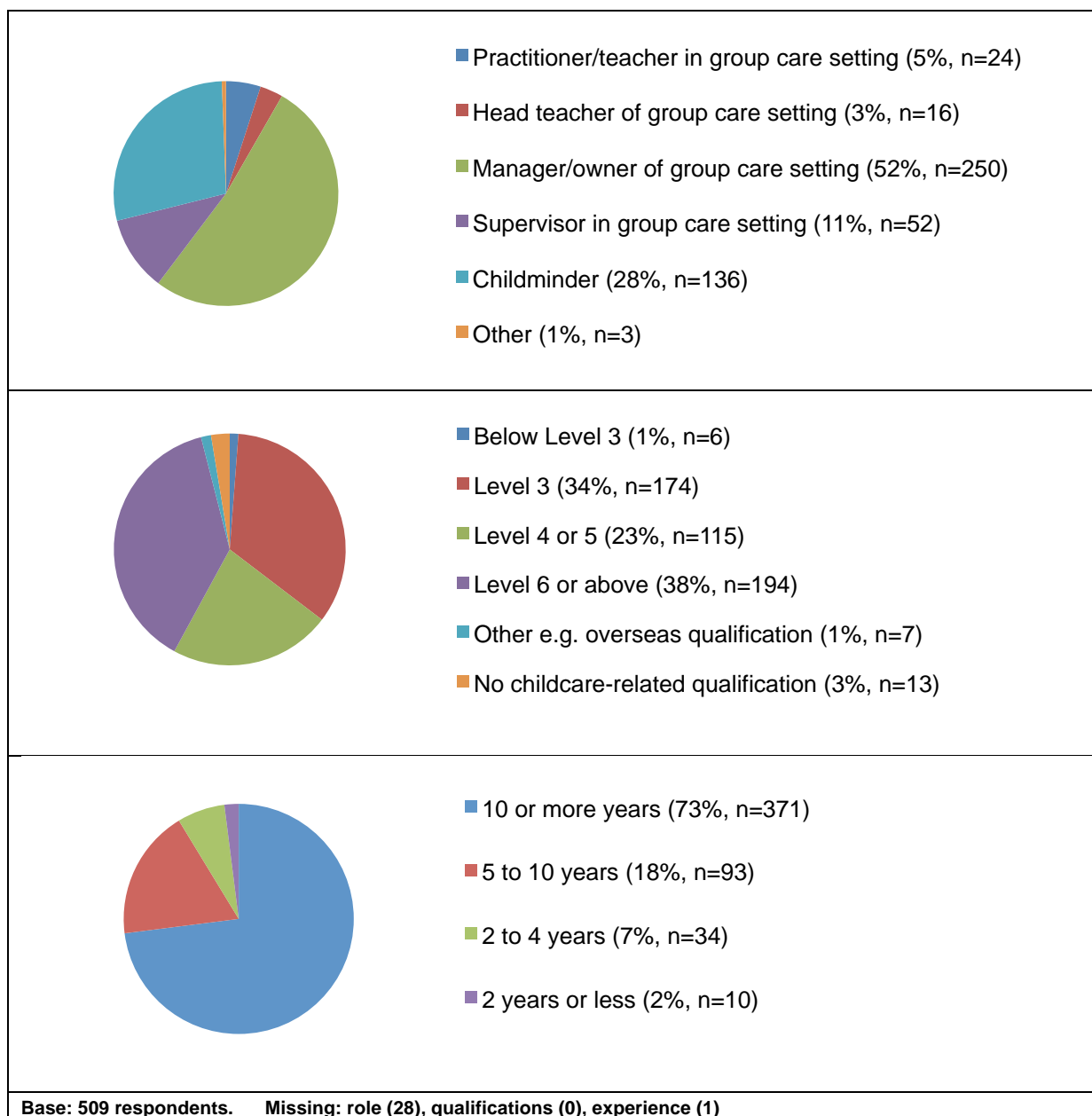
⁹ EYPS (n=111), QTS (n=35). Some of the respondents reporting either EYPS or QTS had recorded other responses (e.g. Level of qualification) inconsistent with this. For respondents stating that they were qualified to Level 4 or below, their EYPS or QTS entry was deleted. For respondents stating that they were qualified to Level 5, or that they had an 'other' qualification type or no childcare-related qualification, it was more difficult to assess which response was most likely to be correct. For these respondents, the data were not amended.

¹⁰ Base 509 (n=494, missing = 15)

child to 80 children. Just under two thirds of respondents (64%¹¹) worked directly with two-year-olds for at least one hour per week, with the majority (89%) of those not working hands-on with two-year-olds describing themselves as managers, head teachers or supervisors in group settings.

Just over two thirds (69%) of respondents' settings had funded two-year-olds on register at the time of the survey¹², with the mean number of funded children reported as 8 per setting (ranging from 1 child to 60 children). Just under half (44%) of respondents were working directly with funded two-year-olds at the time of the survey¹³.

Figure 2: Characteristics of respondents: role, highest relevant qualification level and years of experience working with children aged five and under



¹¹ Base 509 (n=487, missing=22)

¹² Base 509 (n=468, missing= 41)

¹³ Base 509 (n=447, missing=62)

4.3. Views on quality for two-year-olds and how to achieve it

Respondents were asked three questions relating to quality for two-year-old children:

- What are the most important dimensions of quality for two-year-olds?
- What are the most important features of a setting or school in helping to ensure that the needs of two-year-olds can be met effectively?
- What are the most important aspects of qualifications and training needed to prepare practitioners to work with two-year-olds?

The responses are shown in Figures 3 to 5. In each case, respondents were given a number of options from which to select their 'top three'. The bar graphs show the number of respondents selecting each option. An open response category was also provided to enable respondents to add any dimension they felt would rank in their top three, but which had not been provided as an option.

4.3.1 Key dimensions of quality for two-year-olds (Figure 3)

Support for 'personal, social and emotional development' was the dimension valued most highly in relation to provision for two-year-old children, selected by 53% of respondents. This echoes the messages from the key informant interviews and case studies, which highlighted the importance of strong relationships, as well as the personal characteristics needed by staff to provide effectively for two-year-olds (e.g. sensitivity, warmth, empathy).

The other two prime areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage were also cited, with support for communication and language emerging as the third most important dimension for two-year-olds, selected by 46% of respondents. Interestingly, 'opportunities for movement and physical development' – the third of the prime areas – was selected by only 19% of respondents, despite a clear recognition of the need for young children to access outdoor space within the key informant interviews and the setting visits. The comparatively lower ranking given to the importance of physical development mirrors the research literature, where evidence on the importance of movement for under-threes is sparser than the evidence-base relating to emotional and language support (Mathers et al., 2014). However awareness is growing, both of the importance of movement for young children and of the need for further research in this area. Further exploration is required to identify whether the findings of this survey reflect a genuine understanding by practitioners of the fact that PSED and communication and language are more critical for two-year-olds, or imply a need for further efforts to raise awareness of the importance of movement and physical development.

The second most cited dimension of quality for two-year-olds was working in partnership with parents, selected by 50% of the survey respondents, and again echoing the findings of the key informant interviews and setting visits, as shown in the quote below:

It's not just about working with the child, it is about having aspirations for the child and having aspirations for the family and supporting the family to move from where they are... these practitioners need skills in working with parents.

KI1, Consultant, Training and National Charity Representative

A final interesting point lies in the relative under-valuing of interprofessional working in comparison to the other areas, with only 14% of respondents citing it as one of their top three dimensions.

Figure 3. Key dimensions of quality for two-year-olds

Number of respondents selecting each option as one of their 'three most critical components' (n=509)

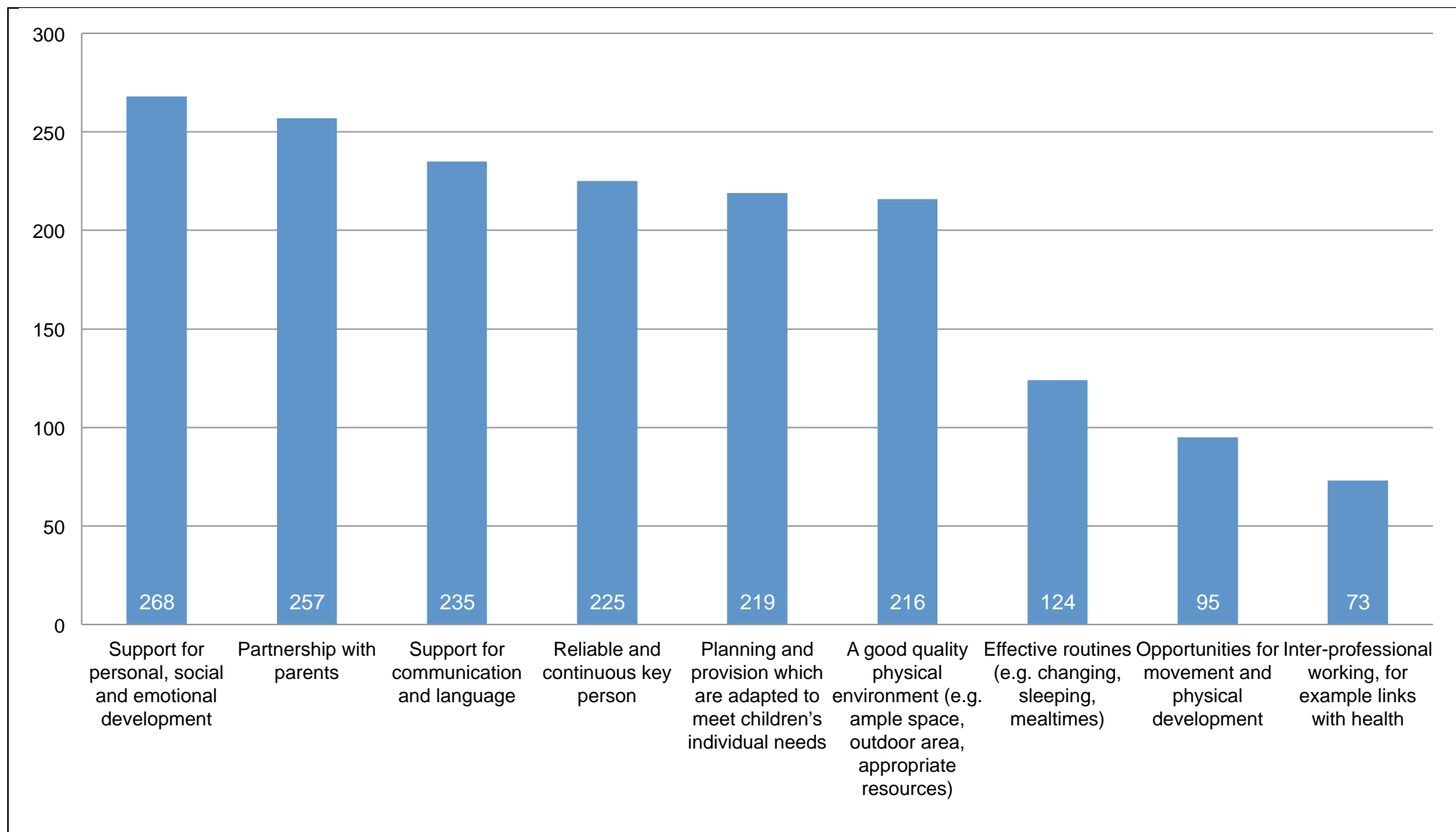


Figure 4. Features of a setting or school which most help to ensure that the needs of two-year-olds can be met effectively
Number of respondents selecting each option as one of their 'three most critical components' (n=509)

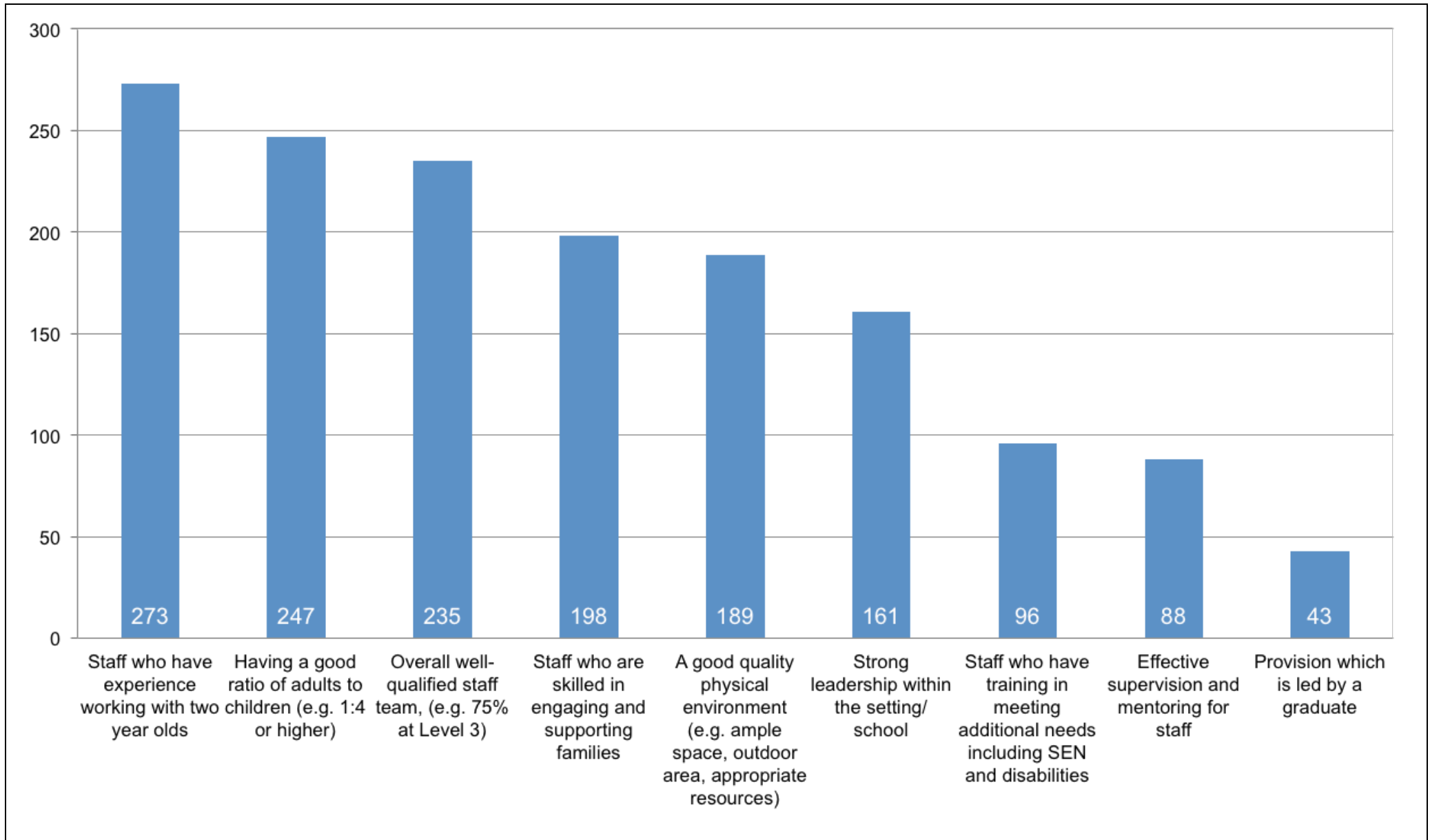
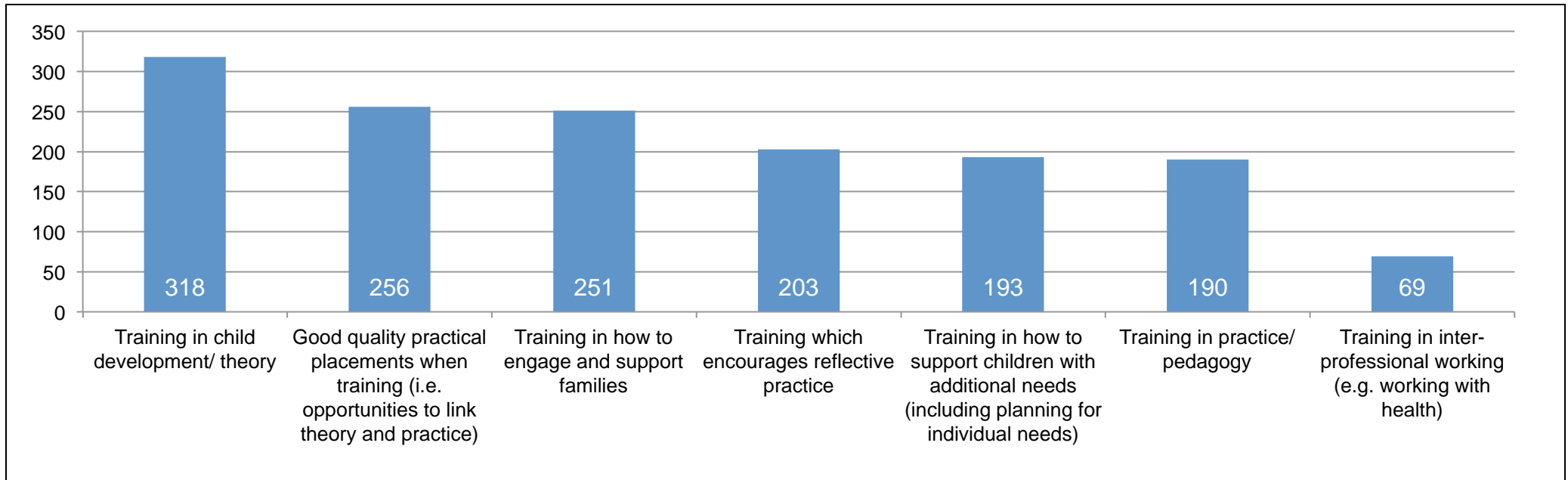


Figure 5. Qualifications and training needed to prepare practitioners to work with two-year-olds
Number of respondents selecting each option as one of their 'three most critical components' (n=509)



4.3.2 Key features which help to ensure good quality (Figures 4 and 5)

Workforce

The early years workforce was recognised as a cornerstone of good quality provision for two-year-old children. When respondents were asked to identify the features they believed to be most important in ensuring good quality for this age group (Figure 4), three of the four features most often selected related to workforce characteristics:

- staff experience in working with two-year-olds (54%)
- an overall well-qualified staff team e.g. 75% at Level 3 (46%)
- staff who are skilled in supporting and engaging families (39%).

In terms of qualifications, respondents clearly valued having an overall well-qualified staff team above provision that is graduate-led (selected by only 8% of respondents). The current research evidence supports this view, with stronger evidence that general qualification levels – particularly specialised early years training – are associated with quality for under threes than graduate qualifications (Mathers et al., 2014). However, the fact that evidence is currently lacking may point to a need for further research rather than indicating that graduate-led provision is not beneficial for young children, particularly given strong evidence on the benefits for three and four-year-olds (e.g. Mathers et al., 2011).

It is interesting to note that staff experience achieved a higher rating than staff qualifications (54% vs. 46%). The available research evidence tends to suggest that qualifications are more strongly associated with quality than experience (Mathers et al., 2014). However, even the evidence linking qualifications to quality of provision for under-threes is somewhat sparse in comparison to the evidence-base for older children. Some studies have found a relationship between higher qualifications and quality, while others find no effect (Early et al., 2006). One possible reason for this is variability in the quality of qualifications and experience, meaning that studies may not be comparing like with like. For both experience and qualifications to be effective in raising quality, they must themselves be of high quality. This is summed up succinctly by the following comment from a survey respondent:

Experience of working positively with two-year-olds is important – not just working with two-year-olds – as you could be awful at it!

Manager/owner of a group setting

This sentiment is also reflected in respondents' identification of training in child development/theory and of high quality practical placements when training as the two most essential characteristics of workforce preparation, selected by 62% and 50% of respondents respectively (Figure 5). As Whitebook and colleagues (2009) note, practitioners need both theoretical training and effective experience that helps them to understand how theory is implemented in practice.

The theme of family engagement also continues, with staff who are skilled in engaging and supporting families cited as a key to ensuring quality (selected by 39% of respondents), and training in how to engage and support families cited as an essential feature of staff preparation (selected by 49% of respondents). In addition to the need for effective staff training to work with families, one respondent noted the need for the literature on funded places to highlight the role of parental involvement in supporting children:

Parent engagement is vital but it's not sold that way... it's sold as free childcare and there is a culture of "we'll just drop off for respite care". In all the two year funding literature it says

*nothing about getting involved with your child's education, or help(ing) support your child!
It's mis-sold and our battle starts at the school gate.....*

Manager/owner of a group setting

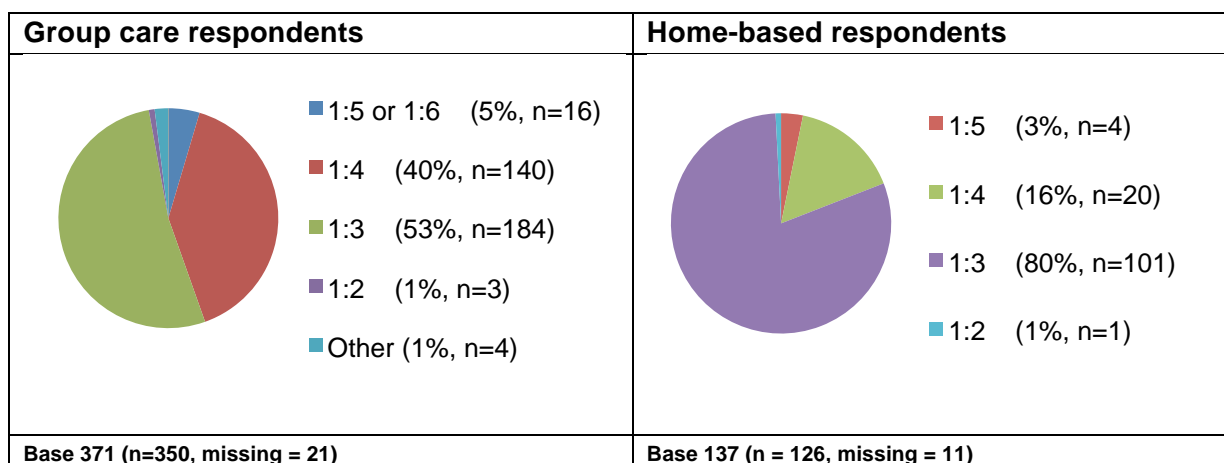
Finally, we look to the workforce characteristics identified by respondents but which were not listed as options in the questionnaire. The key informants interviewed as part of this study highlighted a number of characteristics, which could be described as personal rather than relating to qualifications or experience (e.g. empathy). A small number of survey respondents listed similar features in their free-text responses, including characteristics such as humour, adaptability, reflective practice, a progressive and proactive approach, calmness, kindness, imagination, passion and a sense of fun. Others noted the importance of children feeling safe and secure; of really knowing, listening to and engaging with young children; of taking the time to talk and play with them; of play-based learning more broadly and of understanding the needs of two-year-olds and providing for them in a way which reflects their particular needs.

Ratios

Just under half of respondents (49%) cited ratios as being a key factor in ensuring the needs of two-year-olds can be effectively met, making this the second most highly rated feature (Figure 4).

Respondents were also asked what they considered to be the ideal ratio for two-year-olds (Figure 6). The current legal ratio is one adult to every four children for group settings, and one adult to every three children under five for childminders. Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority (80%) of home-based providers said that they thought 1:3 was the ideal ratio, with 16% suggesting a ratio of 1:4, and a further 3% suggesting a ratio of 1:5. Among respondents from group settings, while a large proportion (40%) were happy with the current 1:4 ratio, over half (53%) proposed 1:3 as the ideal, with a further 1% suggesting ratios of 1:2. A number of respondents also noted that the ideal ratio would (and should) depend on the children and their particular needs, with some children needing 1:1 support and others able to cope with less individual support. The setting visits offer some creative ideas for using students or other extra pairs of hands to provide additional support where required.

Figure 6: Ideal ratios for two-year-olds reported by survey respondents



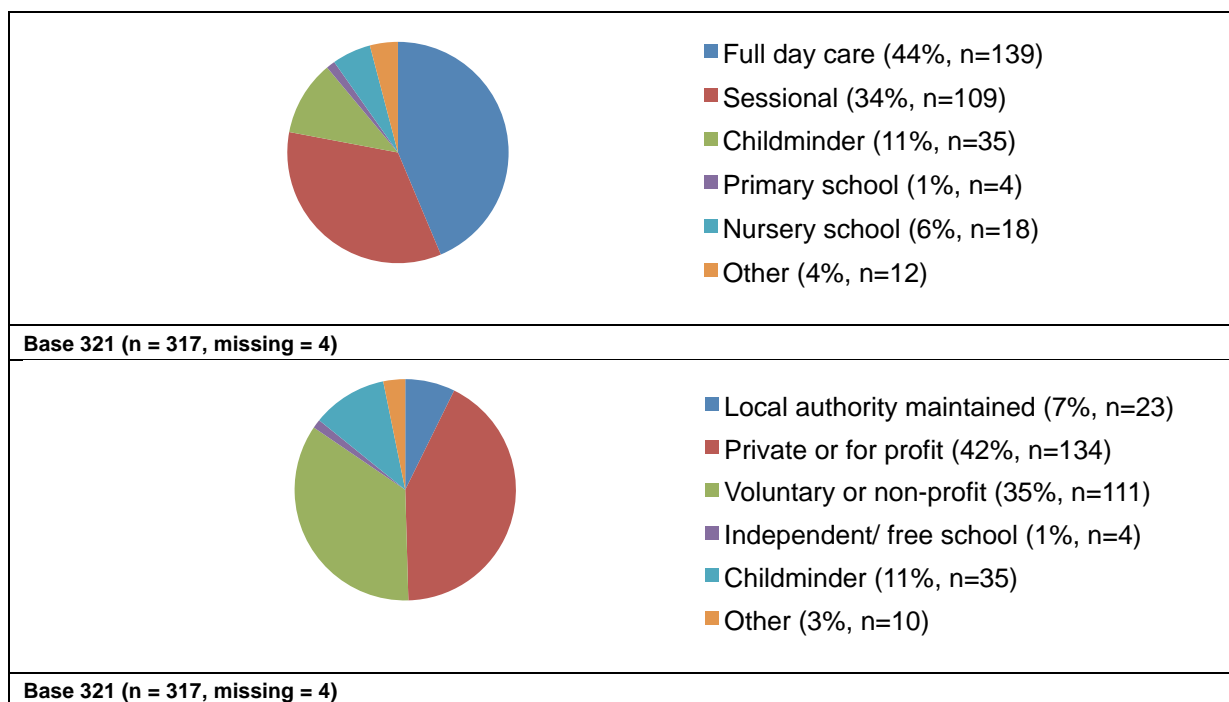
4.4. Characteristics of respondents and settings catering for funded two-year-olds

In this section, we look in greater detail at the settings of the 321 respondents whose settings currently cater for funded two-year-olds¹⁴, and the 195 respondents who work directly with funded two-year-olds.

4.4.1 Characteristics of settings catering for funded two-year-olds

In comparison with the overall sample (section 4.2), the settings catering for funded two-year-old children were more likely to be private or voluntary full day-care or sessional providers, and less likely to be childminders (11% were childminders, as compared with 27% in the full sample). This may reflect the fact that some childminders who are willing to take funded two-year-olds have not yet been able to, due to capacity restrictions. Settings currently providing for funded two-year-olds were also more likely to be children's centres, with 31% having some kind of link as compared with 25% in the overall sample. This reflects the nature of the two-year-old offer and the fact that providers catering for funded children are more likely to be located in disadvantaged areas.

Figure 7: Characteristics of settings with funded two-year-olds on register



The proportion of settings graded as good or outstanding by Ofsted was similar to that seen within the wider sample, at 92%¹⁵.

Eighty nine per cent of respondents from settings currently catering for two-year-olds said that their setting had already catered for this age group before the offer began, with only 11% of respondents (34) reporting that their setting was new to providing for twos. Of respondents working in settings taking two-year-olds for the first time, the majority (42%) worked in voluntary not-for-profit settings, while 24% were based in primary or nursery schools.

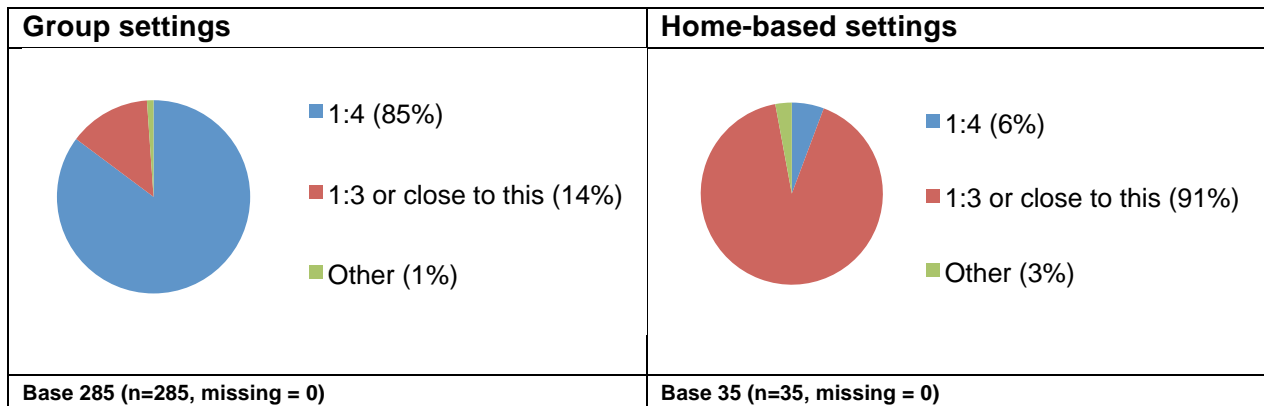
¹⁴ Note that settings may be represented more than once in the sample if multiple respondents from one setting completed the survey

¹⁵ Base 321 (n=320, missing=1)

4.4.2 Ratios for funded two-year-olds

Figure 8 shows that although the vast majority of both home (91%) and group (85%) settings operate the legal ratios for funded two-year-olds, a sizeable minority of group settings (14%) operate above the legal ratio. Comparing this with ratios in group settings catering for two-year-olds more generally (i.e. both funded and unfunded), the percentages were very similar. This suggests that – at least among this sample – settings catering for funded two-year-olds are not operating substantially different ratios for this age group than settings not participating in the programme.

Figure 8: Ratios in settings with funded two-year-olds on register

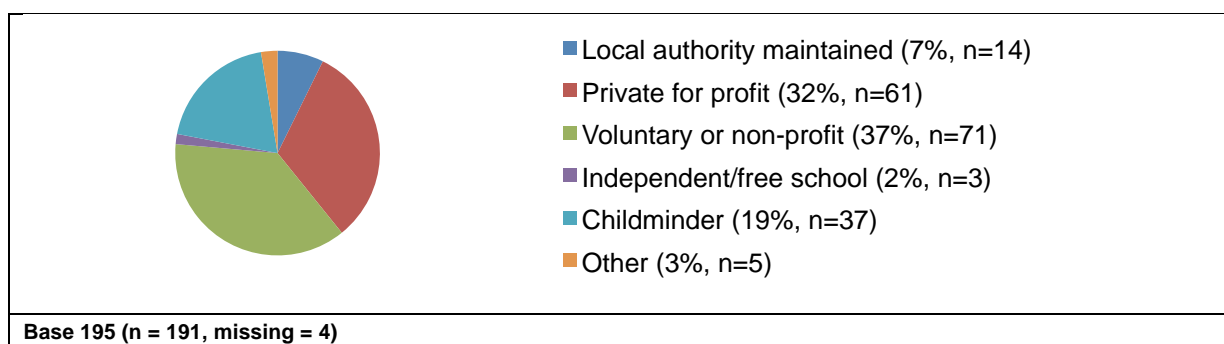


Managers, heads and supervisors in group care settings were also asked whether their funded two-year-olds were catered for in the same group or room as other children (e.g. unfunded two-year-olds, or children of other age group). Only 3% said no, which supports the evidence from the study settings that segregation of funded two-year-olds is not common practice.

4.4.3 Characteristics of respondents working directly with funded two-year-olds

We now turn to the 195 respondents who reported working directly with funded two-year-olds for at least one hour each week. The profile of provider type (Figure 9) was slightly different from the profile for respondents' settings recorded as having two-year olds on register (Figure 7). Percentages for the maintained sector, the voluntary sector, independent schools and 'other' settings were similar but there were proportionally more childminders (19%) and fewer respondents from private settings (32%) actually working with funded two-year-olds than respondents working in childminding/ private settings with funded two-year-olds on register. This is likely to be because we had responses from practitioners in private settings catering for funded children, but who did not work with them directly (e.g. setting managers).

Figure 9: Characteristics of respondents working with funded two-year-olds: provider type¹⁶



As with the wider sample, respondents tended to be more senior, more experienced and better qualified than might be expected from a representative sample; and in fact this tendency was even more evident for respondents working directly with funded two-year-olds (Figure 10):

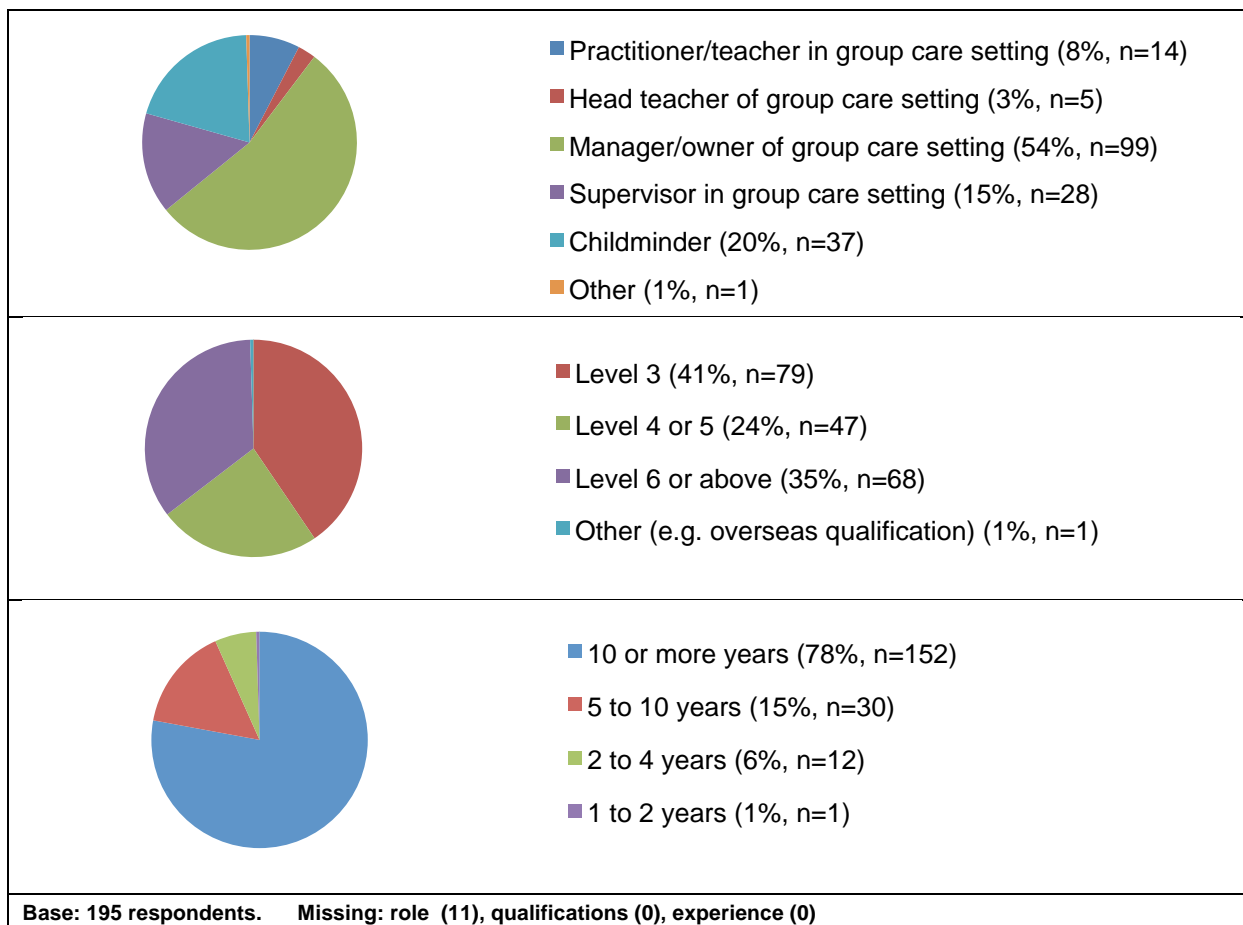
- 57% described themselves as a manager/owner or head teacher (55% in full sample)
- 78% had more than ten years of experience (73% in the full sample)
- all were qualified to at least Level 3
- 35% held a graduate qualification at Level 6 or higher (27% in the full sample), with respondents from group settings more likely to be qualified to Level 6 or higher than childminders (40% vs.16%)
- 23% held Early Years Professional Status and 5% held Qualified Teacher Status (22% and 7% in the full sample)
- 50% were the setting SENCo or INCo or both.

In order to gain a more representative picture of the proportion of staff working with funded two-year-olds who are qualified to Level 3 and Level 6, managers, supervisors and head teachers were asked about the characteristics of their staff. Responses suggest that 82% of staff working with funded two-year-olds are qualified to Level 3, and 15% to Level 6 or higher; although again we should remember that the leaders taking part in the survey are likely to be the most pro-active and may therefore have better qualified staff than average.

Comparing respondents from settings graded as good or higher by Ofsted and those from settings graded as 'requires improvement' or inadequate shows that respondents from settings with lower grades were actually more likely to be graduates (53% vs. 33%). This could be because in settings of higher quality, practitioners at all levels are more likely to respond to a survey of this kind, and is unlikely to be representative of the national picture.

¹⁶ A small number of childminders responded inconsistently to the questions asking whether their setting had two-year-olds on register and whether they worked directly with funded two-year-olds. The data were left unamended, thus the number of childminding settings catering for two-year-olds is smaller (by 2) than the number of childminder respondents listed as working with two-year-olds.

Figure 10: Characteristics of respondents: role, highest relevant qualification level and years of experience working with children aged five and under



4.4.4 Preparedness to meet the needs of two-year-olds and their families

In this final section, we consider how effectively practitioners working with funded two-year-olds have been prepared for their role, and how confident they feel to meet the needs of two-year-olds and their families.

Initial qualifications

Firstly, we consider workforce qualifications and the extent to which they are providing practitioners with the skills and knowledge they need to support two-year-olds and their families.

Figure 11 shows that their initial training prepared the majority (76%) of respondents very well for working with children from birth to five. However, the evidence suggests that workforce qualifications are less effective at providing the specific knowledge and skills needed to meet the needs of two year-olds and their families. Less than half of respondents reported that their initial qualifications had prepared them very well for working specifically with two-year-olds, for working with children with additional needs, for engaging and supporting families and for multi-agency working. Respondents felt least well prepared by their initial training to support children with additional needs, with more than half (52%) reporting feeling only 'to some extent' prepared and 12% feeling 'not at all' prepared.

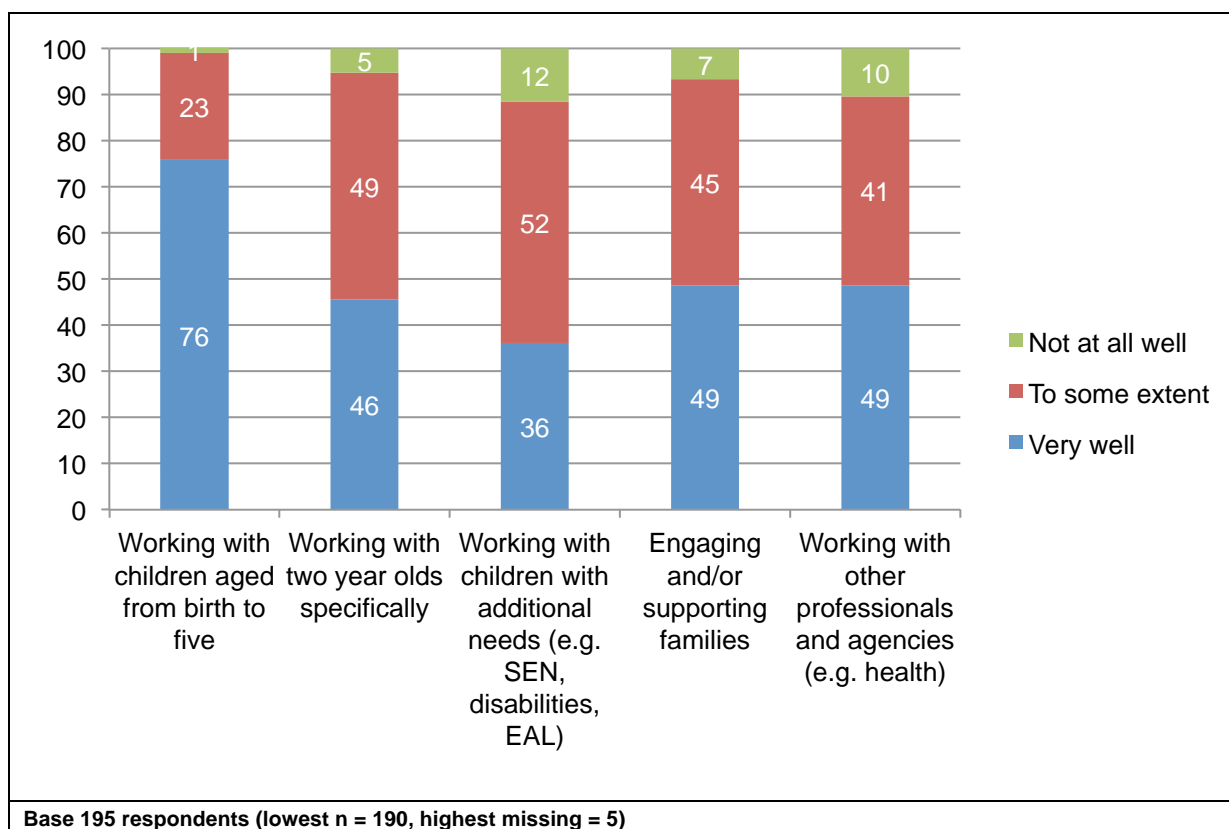
There was a wide variation in qualifications amongst our respondents, and one might expect that graduate qualifications would prepare practitioners more effectively than lower level qualifications. Figure 12 shows that this is indeed the case, with more Level 6 than Level 3 respondents feeling 'very well' prepared in all of the categories, suggesting that degrees do add value over and above lower-level qualifications. However, a relatively large proportion of graduate-level respondents still reported feeling less than fully prepared by their training for the various skills needed to work with

two-year olds and their families. Of particular note is the fact that 60% of Level 6 respondents did not feel their degree prepared them 'very well' to support children with additional needs. A significant proportion of graduate respondents reported the same in relation to working with two-year-olds (47%), engaging and supporting families (44%) and multi-agency working (46%).

These findings have two implications. Firstly, they remind us that qualifications are only the beginning of a practitioner's journey towards becoming a knowledgeable, skilled and experienced professional. Simply having a Level 3 (or even a Level 6) qualification is not enough. It will improve the knowledge, skills and confidence of the workforce, particularly in the more general areas of early years practice; but we must give equal weight to the experiences and development of professionals after their initial qualifications. Particularly in relation to specific areas of practice such as working with families or supporting children with additional needs, continuing professional development, experience and ongoing on-the-job supervision are necessary to build on and extend initial training. This is reflected in respondents' identification of staff experience in working with two-year-olds as the most essential criterion for ensuring quality for this age group (Figure 4).

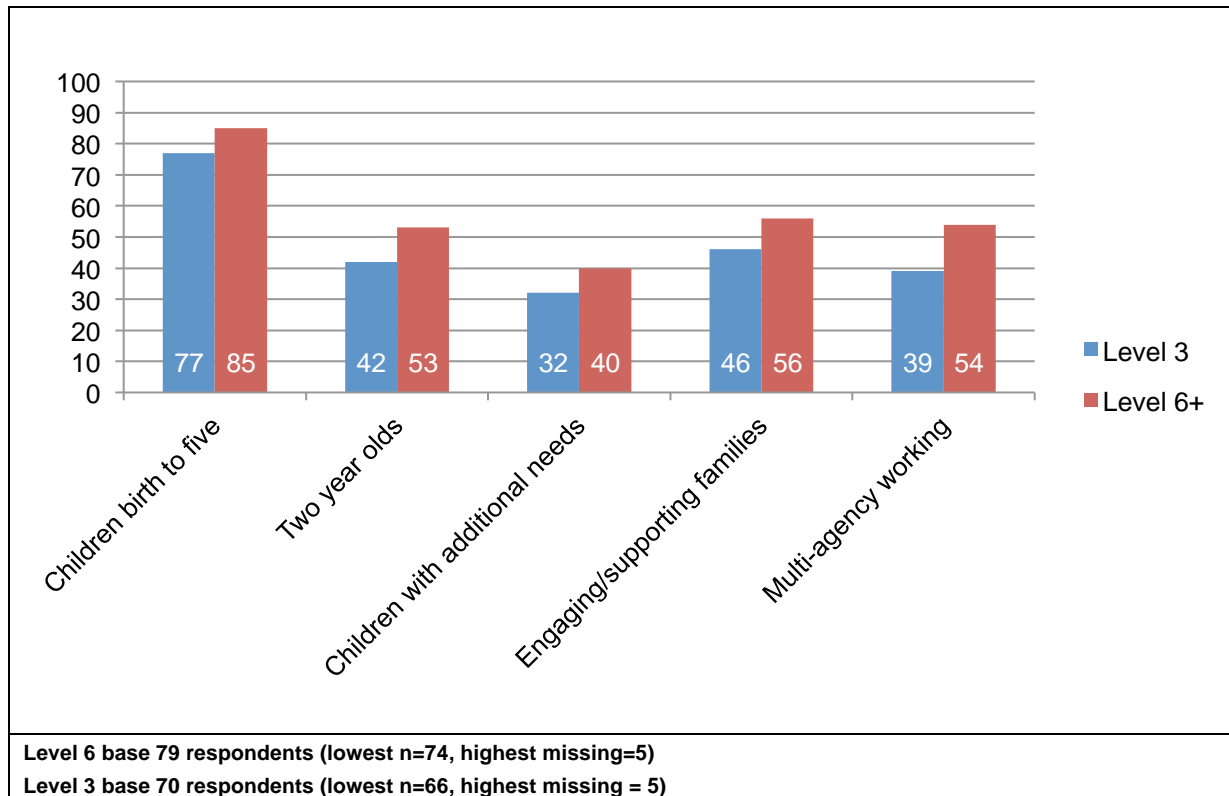
However, it does also raise the question of 'fitness for purpose'; can we do more to ensure that initial workforce qualifications are preparing practitioners for their roles? Our findings would suggest that more can and should be done to ensure that qualification programmes at all levels include appropriate content to prepare practitioners to provide for children of different ages (particularly under threes), support additional needs, work with families and engage in multi-agency working. In support of this, only 18% of group setting leaders (managers, supervisors and head teachers) felt that current Level 3 qualifications were entirely fit for purpose in preparing early years practitioners to offer good quality for two-year-old children, with a further 60 % selecting 'somewhat fit for purpose' and a 18% selecting 'not at all'¹⁷.

Figure 11. Extent to which initial qualifications prepared respondents for....



¹⁷ Base 321 respondents, n=311, missing=10. Fit for purpose (n=55), somewhat fit for purpose (n=186), not at all fit for purpose (n=56), not sure/don't know (n=14)

Figure 12. Extent to which Level 3 and Level 6 respondents felt their initial qualifications prepared them very well for working with....

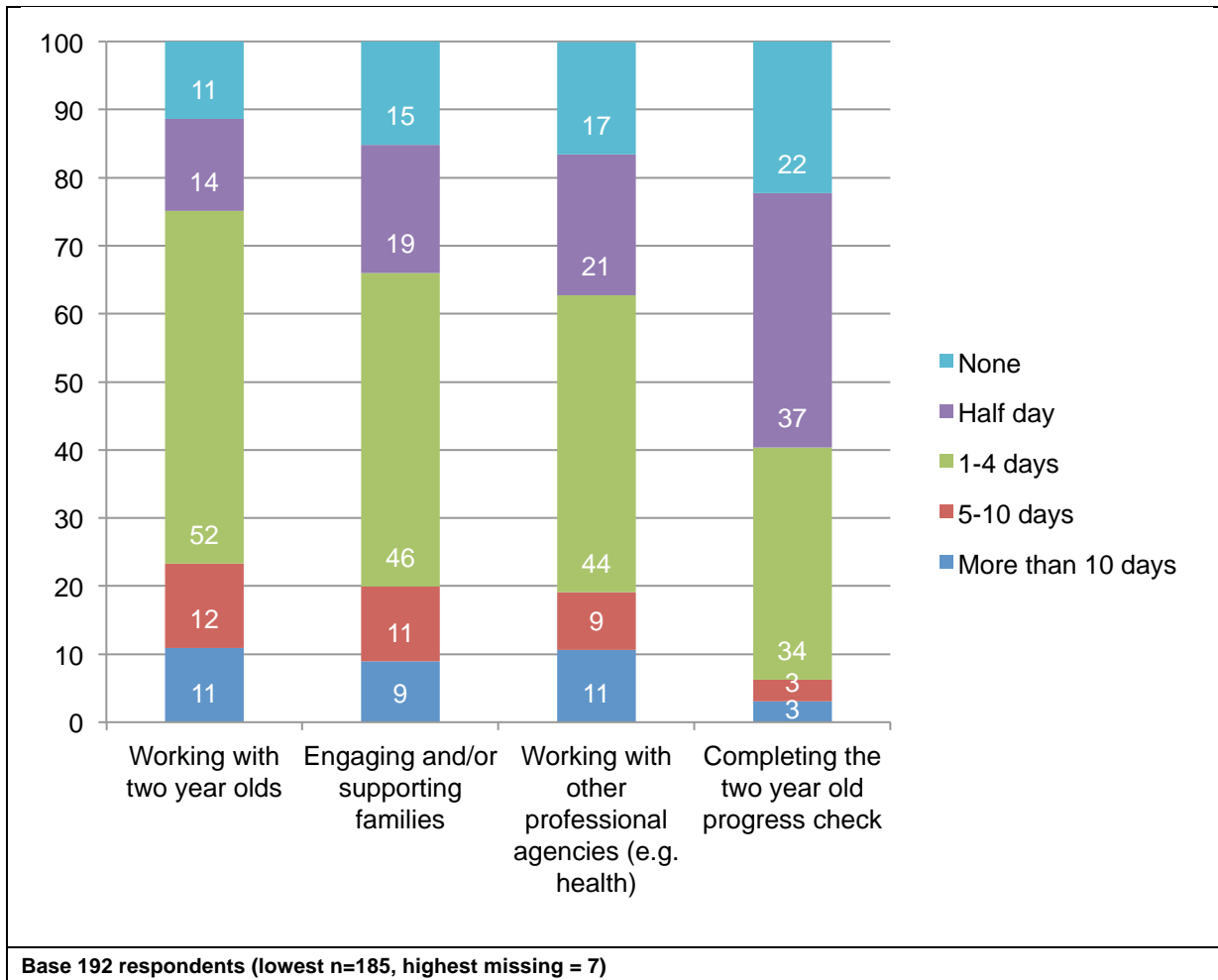


Continuing professional development (CPD)

We now move on to consider the CPD experienced by practitioners working with funded two-year-old children within the last five years, that is, during the period in which most local authorities have been offering training designed to prepare the workforce for delivering the two-year-old entitlement.

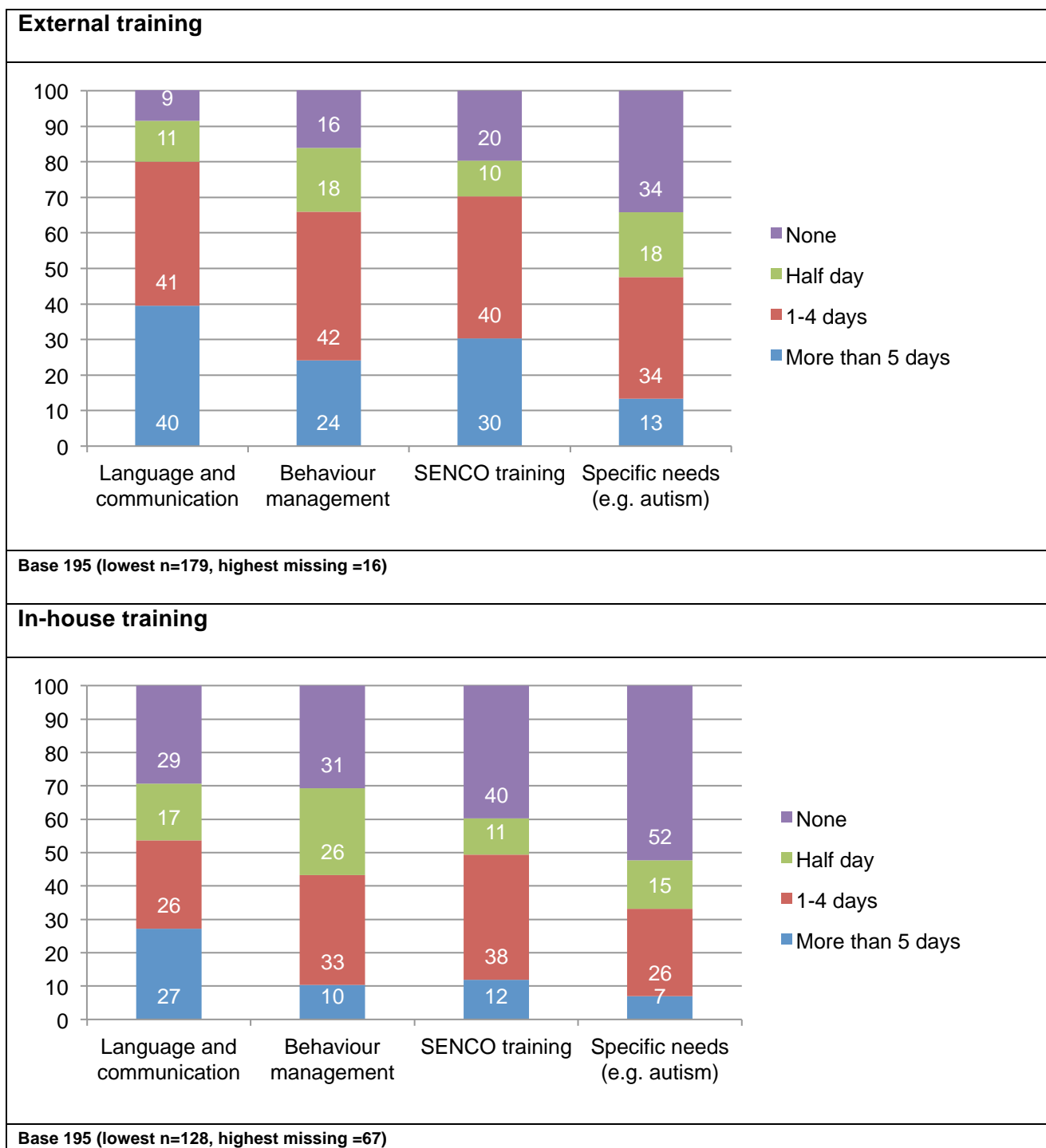
Figure 13 shows the proportion of respondents who have attended the training most commonly offered by local authorities in relation to the two-year-old programme. A large majority of respondents (89%) had attended some form of training to help prepare them for working with two-year-olds, and more than three quarters of respondents had also attended specific training to prepare them for engaging and supporting families (85%), multi-agency working (83%) and completing the two-year progress check (78%). However, given the national focus on two-year-olds, and anecdotal reports from local authorities that *all* practitioners have attended relevant training, it is somewhat worrying that between 11 and 22% of respondents reported attending no training at all in the various categories; and that a further 14 to 37% of respondents reported attending only a half day of training. While half a day may be adequate for introducing practitioners to the two-year-old progress check, it is less than adequate to prepare them for effectively engaging and supporting families, for example. Also worth noting is the fact that our respondents are likely to be the most engaged, pro-active and motivated practitioners, and thus arguably those most likely to attend training offered within their local area: actual national attendance rates are therefore likely to be considerably lower.

Figure 13. CPD attended within the last 5 years to prepare for.....



A similar picture emerges in relation to training designed to prepare practitioners to support children with additional needs, and in those areas most likely to be relevant for young children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Figure 14). For example, while the majority of respondents have attended some form of training relating to language and communication, 9% had not attended any recent external training and 29% had not experienced recent in-house training in this area. Training on specific needs (e.g. autism) was even less common, with 34% of respondents reporting no recent external training and 52% reporting no recent in-house training. Again, given the proportion of respondents in leadership and/or SENCo positions, who are arguably the most likely to attend external training to cascade back to their staff teams, these figures are somewhat concerning. They show a solid base of practitioners attending relevant training, but also a significant minority who have not experienced recent CPD to support them in meeting the needs of two-year-olds, and of disadvantaged two-year-olds in particular.

Figure 14. CPD attended within the last 5 years to prepare for meeting additional needs.....



Comparing the profiles of different respondents, the proportions of childminders and group setting respondents reporting no attendance at external training in the last 5 years were relatively similar. Fewer childminders reported attending no training on language and communication (3% vs. 10%), behaviour management (11% vs. 18%) and the two-year-progress check (11% vs. 25%), while greater proportions of childminders reported attending no external training on specific needs (38% vs. 33%) and engaging and supporting families (19% vs. 14%).

Differences were more obvious when comparing settings graded as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted with those graded as ‘inadequate’ or ‘requires improvement’. Respondents from settings with inadequate or requires improvement grades were less likely to have attended recent external training in all categories, and differences were particularly evident in relation to supporting specific needs such as autism (50% vs. 3%), engaging and supporting families (33% vs. 13%) and

completing the two-year-progress check (44% vs. 20%). The number of respondents working with funded two-year-olds within a setting graded as inadequate or requires improvement was relatively small (19), so caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings. However the findings do indicate a need to encourage settings with low Ofsted grades to attend training, particularly given that respondents in this category were on the whole better qualified than those from settings graded good or higher, and therefore potentially more motivated to attend training.

Overall confidence and skills of respondents working with funded two-year-olds

We now move on to consider the overall confidence of respondents in meeting the needs of two-year-olds and their families. On the whole, respondents working with funded two-year-olds were confident in their abilities to meet the general needs of two-year-olds and their families, to complete the two-year-progress check and to work with other professionals such as health, with 90% or more reporting that they felt confident or very confident (Figure 15). Confidence was lower in relation to supporting the learning needs of two-year-olds with additional needs (83%) and supporting families who may be challenging or have particular needs (80%)¹⁸.

Confidence levels were very similar in home and group settings, with childminders very slightly more confident to support the learning needs of children with additional needs (87% vs. 82%) and less confident to support families who may be challenging or have particular needs (73% vs. 82%). As with attendance at CPD, differences were more evident in relation to settings with varying Ofsted grades. In comparison to respondents from settings graded as good or outstanding by Ofsted, the 19 respondents from settings graded as inadequate or requires improvement were less likely to feel confident to support the learning needs of two-year-olds with additional needs (56% vs. 85%), to support families who may be challenging or have particular needs (56% vs. 82%) and to work with other professionals and agencies (78% vs. 91%).

Respondents were also asked to what extent they felt they had opportunities available to them in areas where they felt less confident. Just over half (53%) said that they had access to external training opportunities, 17% had access to support or supervision from others within their setting and 28% had access to in-house training or staff meetings. One quarter (25%) said that they did not feel they had any opportunities available to them. Of these 48 respondents, 15 (33%) were childminders which, given that childminders represent only 20% of respondents working with funded two-year-olds, suggests that they are somewhat less likely to feel they have support opportunities available to them.

In order to consider the journey from initial qualifications, through CPD to current confidence levels, we will track a group of respondents through one key area of practice (in this case, engaging and supporting families). Of the 195 respondents who reported working with funded two-year-olds, just over a fifth (21%) felt their initial qualification had only prepared them 'somewhat' or 'not at all' to engage and support families, and had either attended no training on this topic within the last five years, or only half a day. Of this group, just over half (55%) felt that they were either not confident or developing confidence to support families who may be challenging or have particular needs, as compared with 20% of all respondents working with funded two-year-olds. This tells us two things. Firstly, it highlights the role of confidence gained from sources other than initial qualifications and recent CPD, since just under half (45%) of these practitioners felt confident or very confident to support challenging families, despite the lack of recent CPD and poor initial preparation via their qualifications. It is likely that this confidence was developed through experience, through on-the-job supervision, or through CPD experienced less recently than the last five years. But for the 55% who remained less than confident, it also highlights the importance of ensuring that initial qualifications and CPD are available to support practitioners working with disadvantaged children to meet the needs of families as well as children.

¹⁸ The picture was very similar for the sample as whole.

Finally, leaders of settings were asked about the skills of their staff team in working with two-year-olds (Figure 16). The areas on which staff teams were rated most highly by managers included their levels of experience working with two-year-olds (69% highly skilled), in engaging and supporting families (63% highly skilled) and in understanding of child development (57% highly skilled). The lowest-rated areas were skills in interprofessional working (37% highly skilled) and understanding how to plan and provide for children with additional needs (45% highly skilled). Few rated the skills of their team as low in any of the areas.

Figure 15. Confidence of respondents working with funded two-year-olds in....

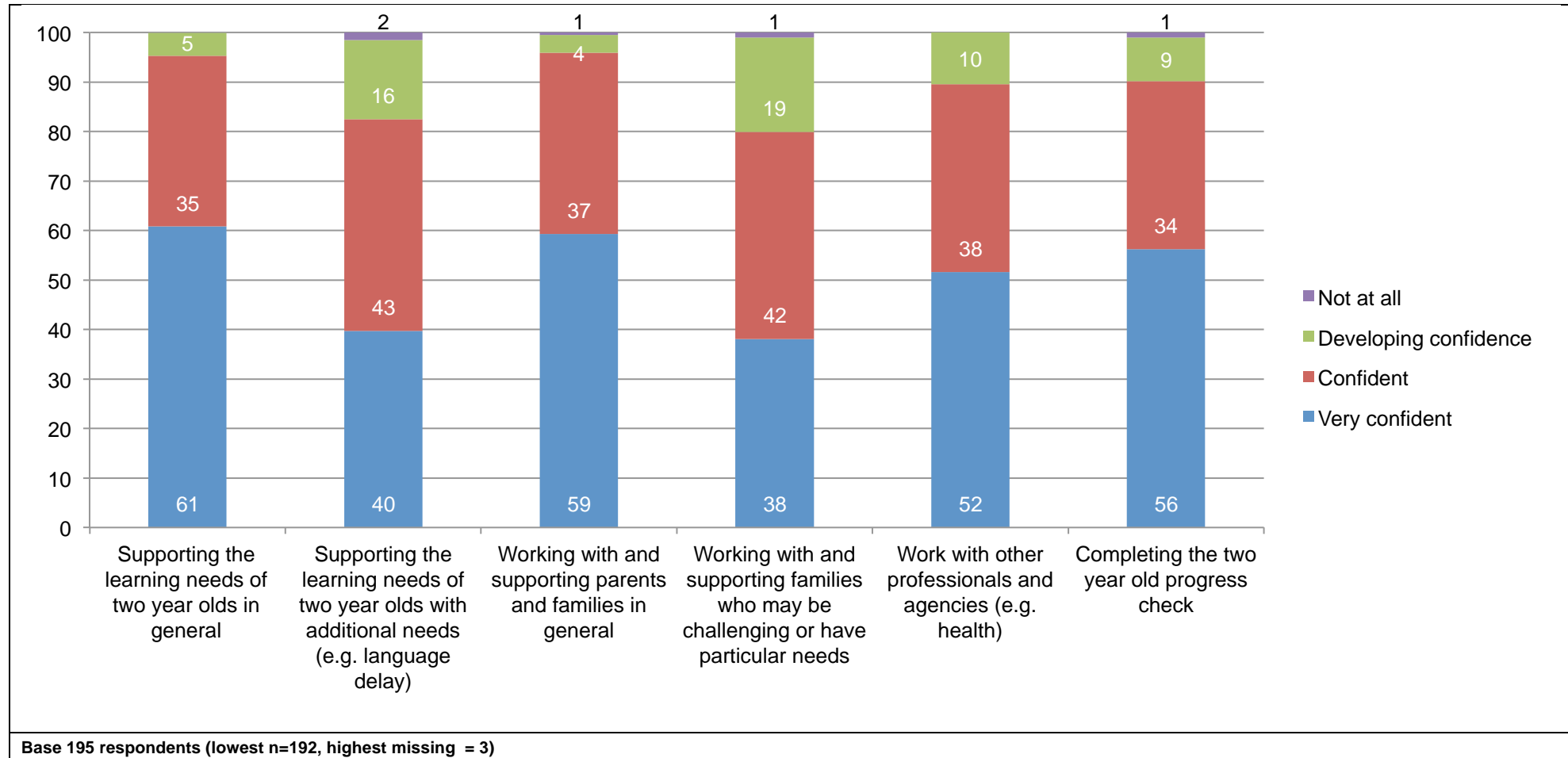
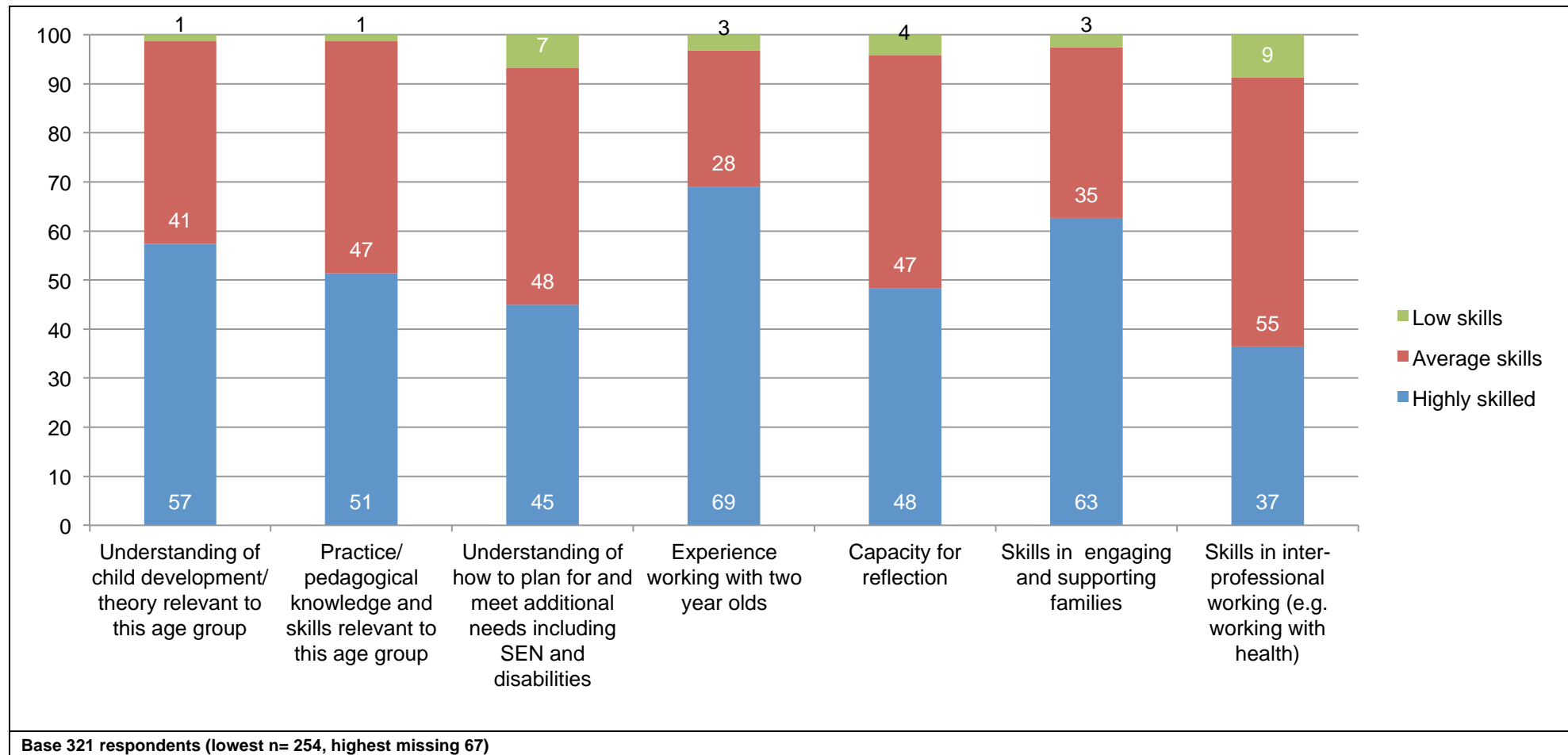


Figure 16. Responses of the managers, heads and supervisors in group care settings regarding the skills of their staff teams in working with two-year-olds



4.5 Summary of findings from survey

Respondents and their settings

- This chapter has analysed responses to the online survey from 509 practitioners and managers of settings catering for two-year-olds. Just under two thirds (65%) of respondents worked in the PVI sector, just over a quarter (27%) were childminders, a small percentage (6%) worked in local authority maintained provision.
- The vast majority of respondents' settings (95%) had two-year-olds on register at the time of the survey, with just over two thirds (69%) catering for funded two-year-olds. Just under half (44%) of respondents worked directly with funded two-year-olds.
- Respondents tended to be better qualified and more experienced than we might expect from a representative sample. Many were in leadership positions, more than one third had a graduate qualification and the majority (90%) were from settings with good or outstanding Ofsted grades. This should be taken into account when interpreting the findings, as it is likely that our sample represent the most proactive, confident and motivated of settings and practitioners.

Perspectives on quality

- Support for personal, social and emotional development and support for communication and language (two of three 'prime' areas of the EYFS) were identified as key dimensions of quality for two-year-old children, selected by 53% and 46% of respondents respectively as one of their 'three most critical components'. Despite widespread recognition of the importance of outdoor play in the qualitative interviews and case studies, fewer survey respondents (19%) selected the third prime area - movement and physical development – as a key dimension of quality.
- Partnership with parents was highly valued, selected by 50% of respondents as representing one of the most essential aspects of quality for two-year-olds.
- In terms of the characteristics necessary to *ensure* good quality for two-year olds, respondents recognised the key role of the workforce. Staff experience in working with two-year-olds, and having an overall well qualified staff team, were identified as two of the three most important factors (selected by 54% and 46% of respondents respectively). Graduate-led provision was selected by only 8% of respondents.
- Just under half (49%) of respondents cited ratios as being a key factor in ensuring good quality for two-year-olds. The majority of home-based respondents (80%) and a significant proportion of group-based respondents (53%) considered a ratio of one adult to three children to be the ideal ratio for this age group.
- In terms of the qualifications and training needed to prepare practitioners to work with two-year-olds, training in child development and good quality practical placements were the most valued (selected by 62% and 50% of respondents respectively). Confirming the importance of partnerships with parents, training in how to support and engage families was selected by just under half (49%) of respondents.
- Interprofessional working was comparatively undervalued by respondents in comparison to other dimensions.

The 195 respondents and 321 settings catering for funded two-year-olds

- As with the wider sample, respondents tended to be more experienced and qualified than one might expect from a representative sample. All were qualified to at least Level 3, and 40% of group practitioners and 16% of childminders were graduates.
- Leaders and managers of group settings reported that that 82% of their staff working with two-year-olds are qualified to Level 3 and 15% to Level 6 or higher.
- Although the majority of home- and group settings catering for funded two-year-olds operated the legal ratios for this age, a sizeable minority (14%) of group settings operated a ratio of one adult to every three children rather than the legal 1:4 ratio.
- The vast majority (97%) of group settings catered for funded two-year-olds in the same group or room as unfunded two-year-olds or children of other age groups, suggesting that segregation of funded two-year-olds is not common practice.
- Just over three quarters (76%) of respondents reported that their initial qualifications had prepared them very well for working with children from birth to five. However, less than half felt very well prepared by their initial training for working with two-year-olds specifically, for working with children with additional needs, for engaging and supporting families and for multi-agency working.
- Recent attendance at continuing professional development (CPD) relevant to meeting the needs of two-year-olds was high, with the majority of respondents (89%) experiencing some relevant training within the last five years. However a significant minority had accessed either no, or minimal, recent CPD in key areas. For example:
 - 22% had attended no training on the two-year progress check
 - 34% had attended half a day or less on how to engage and support families
 - 20% had attended half a day or less of external training on developing language and communication (rising to 46% for in-house training)
 - 52% had attended half a day or less of external training on supporting specific needs such as autism (rising to 67% for in-house training)

This is significant when we remember that our respondents are likely to be the most pro-active of practitioners, working within the highest quality settings. Support for this is provided by the fact that CPD participation rates were often much lower among the (relatively small) sample of settings graded as 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement'.

- 90% or more of respondents were confident in their abilities to meet the general needs of two-year-olds and their families, to complete the two-year-progress check and to work with other professionals such as health. Confidence was lower in relation to supporting the learning needs of two-year-olds with additional needs (83%), supporting families who may be challenging or have particular needs (80%) and among respondents from settings graded as 'inadequate' or 'requires' improvement.
- 75% of respondents reported that they had access to external training, support or supervision from others within their setting, in-house training or staff meetings to support them in areas where they felt less confident. One quarter did not feel they had any opportunities available to them.

5. The Case Studies: Providers' Experiences of the Two-Year-Old Offer

The English early years and childcare system has a history of relying on a market model (see Penn, 2011) and the range of providers in our case studies reflects the complexity that has developed within this model. This includes variations within the main categories of private, voluntary, independent and maintained providers, such as being part of a chain or being part of a chain on a children's centre site. The settings also had different histories of provision for different age groups. These histories and the type of the settings are important as they influence the level of experience that the settings had in working with two-year-olds, the support structures they were able to access, the structure of the settings and the thinking behind the provision (both in relation to approach and ideology). Whilst many settings were registered to admit children up to the age of five, they also acknowledged that most children start attending school before the age of five.

We visited 10 settings and contacted an eleventh by telephone to find out more about how providers were offering funded places for two-year-olds. Table 2 below provides a summary of the early years providers contacted and/or visited, the nature of their provision in general, their response to the two-year-olds offer, as well as providing an overview of the data collected in each setting. The area column of the table refers to our selected local authorities (further details of which can be found in Appendix 8). As can be seen in the table, settings represent the full range of providers that can be involved in the two-year-old offer (see Appendix 1 for more details).

Table 2. Summary of Settings

Setting	Setting Details	2 Year Old Offer	Overall Offer	Area	Data Collection
1	Community pre-school	19 funded 2 year olds (21 on total). Historically only had a couple of 2 year olds.	2yrs to 5yrs. Registered for 30 a session, 75 on roll.	City, South England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager interview • Tour • Observations • Practitioner discussions
2	Children's centre	25 funded places History of taking 2 year olds	3months to 5yrs. 36 registered places. 57 on roll	City, South England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager Interview
3	Small private day-care chain, attached to a children's centre	10 funded places. Could easily take more because of demand, but no capacity. History of taking 2 year olds	3months to 5yrs	City, South England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager interview • Tour • Observations • Practitioner discussions
4	Primary school with a Foundation Stage unit	8 funded places. Encouraged by LA to take 2 year olds as had started to take rising 3s.	55 on roll. Currently offer 3 & 4 year old early education places.	City, South England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager, headteacher & governor group interview • Tour • Observations • Practitioner discussions
5	Rural day-care	Five funded places. Can take up to 13. Children on waiting list for September	Registered for 29 per session, 81 on roll. 0 months to 11yrs	Large county, with rural areas, South England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager interview • Tour • Observations • Practitioner discussions
6	Primary school planning provision for Sept 2014	20 two-year-olds, 18 places taken.	Currently offer 3 & 4 year old early education places.	Large county, with rural areas South England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager interview • Tour
7	Childminder	Currently has twin 2yr olds who were told not entitled to place, but now have vouchers.	Up to 6 children (depending on ages)	Large county, with rural areas, South England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager interview • Tour • Observations
8	Not for profit playgroup on a school site with children's centre	Offer 12 places, morning only. Moving to 16 mornings and 16 afternoons in Sept 2014.	116 registered places	Small county, North England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager interview
9	Private nursery (limited company status)	9 taking up offer, feels some parents are not using it	0 months to 11 years (Playgroup up to 3 years. 3+ in school)	Small county, North England	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager interview
10	Small private day-care chain	Established to meet shortfall in places. As a chain have a history of taking 2 year olds. 52 funded children on roll	3months to five years full day-care. 66 registered places.	London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager interview • Tour • Observations • Practitioner discussions
11	Independent day-care provider	22 places for 2 year olds (approx. 15 funded). History of taking 2 year olds	3 months to 5 years 68 places for under 3s	London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager interview

5.1 Providing Funded Places for Two-year-olds

Among the settings we visited, providers can be divided into those who had an established history of taking two-year-olds and those who had been approached to increase the level of two-year-old provision available in the local area, in order to meet the sufficiency requirements of the local authority. Broadly speaking, those settings that had a history of providing full day-care (e.g. the childminder, children's centre and day-care providers) also had a history of taking two-year-olds. Given this history, providing places under the two-year-old offer was not seen as something new or divergent from their normal day-to-day practice.

You know, we've always taken babies, and toddlers. So having two-year-olds on site is nothing new to here. We've always catered for two-year-olds.

Setting 11: Independent day-care provider, London

Some providers had been approached by the local authority asking them either to expand the number of two-year-old places or to establish new settings in areas where there was insufficient provision. For example, Setting 10 was established to increase the number of two-year-old places in their area, but as the setting was a part of a chain they were in a position to draw on the experience of other settings in structuring their provision. Setting 3 was already providing places for two-year-olds, but the high level of demand for the funded places had resulted in them working with the children's centre to take on an additional room specifically for working with two-year-olds. It is important to note that the room was not just for funded two-year-olds and the separation was the result of the physical structure of the building and a local need for places (discussed further below).

Of the providers we visited, setting 1 had only taken a few two-year-olds historically and for both of the school-based provisions, having two-year-olds on roll was a new addition to their existing early years provision. Where providers were new to taking two-year-olds they had been proactive in accessing support, such as visiting and speaking to other settings in the area about their approach and attending training. Setting 6 was still in the process of setting up their provision ready for September 2014, reflecting the fact that many areas are still in the process of securing sufficient places. Other providers reported that they were frequently approached to see if they had places available. For example, setting 3 estimated they had between 10 and 12 enquiries a week.

5.1.1 Structure of Provision

Given that many of the settings already were taking two-year-olds they utilised their existing structures in planning their provision. Providers tended to group children according to their age. Setting 5 offering rural day-care had two rooms and had allocated one for three- and four-year-olds and one for all the younger children, partitioned to accommodate non-mobile babies. Setting 4 converted a meeting room for use with the two-year-olds, but found this worked better as a base/quiet room and the two-year-olds accessed the main playroom. Setting 6 had cleared a classroom to accommodate the two-year-olds next to the three-to-fours' room, with access to a separate outside area. The two London based settings used a system of Babies/Toddlers/Pre-schoolers (representing birth-2yrs / 2-3yrs / 3yrs+) with a room for each age group. One of the settings in the north had the same structure, but referred to the middle age group as 'tweenies'. The children's centre varied the age grouping having rooms for birth-to-18 months, 18 months to 2½ years, 2½ years upwards. This was how they had historically structured their provision, but they noted that it gave them more

flexibility in the number of places they were able to make available for funded two-year-olds. Practitioners emphasised that these age categories were guidelines and that if possible children would change room sooner or later depending on their needs.

In the settings that had separate rooms this appeared to be because of the structure of the building. The community preschool only had one room (a community hall) so all children were in together, although they had converted an office area to act as a quiet room. Setting 3 had a separate room for their two-year-olds three mornings a week. This room was intentionally being used in association with the attached children's centre to increase the overall supply of two-year-old places in the area. For the rest of the week the setting included two-year-olds within their overall day-care provision, where there was a separate room for babies, but zonal areas for two-year-olds and those three upwards. Settings 8 and 9 had separate 'play groups' for those two-year-olds that only attended for three-hour sessions, with those who attended for longer sessions being placed with other children in 'day-care'. In setting 9 all children had access to the same outdoor area. The decisions on where children were placed were often shaped by practicalities, physical capacity and structure of buildings.

Access to the Outdoors

In the key informant interviews, access to outdoor provision was raised as an important issue. All of the settings visited also emphasised the importance of children being able to access the outdoors and all settings operated a system of free-flow between indoor and outdoor areas for at least part of the day. Some of the settings (e.g. 1, 5 and 10) discussed how they were looking to develop their outdoor areas further.

Some settings (e.g. 5 and 10) had created zones in their outdoor area for different age groups. Setting 3 and 6 had outdoor zones within their overall provision, but also had a separate outdoor area attached to the additional room they had acquired. Staff in setting 3 explained that the advantage of this separate area was that the two-year-olds did not have to worry about being knocked down, by accident, by the larger children as they played.

Physical Needs of the Children

Access to the outdoors was seen as important for the children so that they had space to run around. This was particularly pertinent for some providers where they recognised that the children's family homes did not always have a garden. In addition to this, provision was needed to meet the physiological needs of the two-year-olds for sleeping and toileting. Where children were attending for more than just a short session, the settings explained how they provided the children with spaces to sleep. Often these spaces were areas that were sectioned off at points in the day where bedding was laid out for the children. Setting 5 had a small separate sleep room that was regularly monitored. Two-year-olds attended (or would attend) the school-based settings for half-day sessions only but for children who might need to sleep during that time, beanbags were provided in a quiet room (this was the two-year-olds' base room in Setting 4). Providers also discussed toileting; two of the settings were seeking additional funding to improve their toileting areas as their buildings were old and in need of some improvements. However, in the settings where there were separate rooms it was observed that rooms used by the two-year-olds were closest to the toilet areas. Practitioners noted the importance of keep a watchful eye on toilet areas as child-height taps offered two-year-olds exciting opportunities for water play, while staff in Setting 4 also

explained how they managed to keep the changing areas visible at all times for children's security.

5.1.2 Working with Families

Providers discussed how they had put systems in place to get to know and to liaise with families. Settings would ask parents to provide information about their child(ren), such as likes and dislikes, as well as health-related issues, such as allergies. Parents would also be encouraged to attend settling in sessions with their children so that both the child and the parent(s) could get to know the setting and the staff who worked there. Some settings also offered home visits to help develop relationships with families. To support the development of relationships with families, settings adopted a keyperson approach (see also sections 5.3.5, 5.4.3 and 5.4.2: Skills for working with families).

As one practitioner said:

You've got to get that real big bit of trust before [parents] are opening up and once you lose that trust they think - that's it ... You know, we'll have a laugh and a joke ... but they know that they can call on us and they know that we would help them. And they do rely on us a lot, it's a very family orientated school.

Setting 4: School with a nursery unit, city, south

However, some settings did acknowledge that it could be hard to develop relationships with families where parents were working. One setting mentioned how they had been advised to invite parents into the setting for a pizza-making session during the day, but parents were not able to attend due to work commitments. Settings also communicate with parents via notice boards displaying children's work and photographs and by sending examples of activities home with the children.

Unsurprisingly, given how funding for two-year-old children has been targeted, many of the practitioners acknowledged that the children they were working with often had additional needs of some kind (e.g. personal, social, emotional, or speech and language delay). This was also raised in the key informant interviews. A practitioner in Setting 8 commented that the children who were attending needed additional personal and emotional support, something that was echoed in the London settings. The manager of Setting 2 also stated:

When you think about the community we are working in, we now get calls [to let us know that] the police have been at the house and there has been some domestic violence thing. That's only the top of the scale but I'd say on low levels you've got children dealing with things at home that are troubling or difficult or also with their additional needs.

Setting 2: Children's Centre, city, south

One of the London settings also commented:

Within this borough there is a lot deprivation in [name of local area]. And we have had families who have come here who are not in permanent accommodation. They're living in hostels or they are staying with a relative for a time and then moving on. So trying to encourage them to bring their children in consistently can sometimes be a challenge, but we have seen the real big differences made in the children's lives.

The experiences of these providers highlight the complex needs of families with whom early years practitioners are working through the funded two-year-old places. Regarding additional needs, settings reported their concerns about children attending who had speech and language delays that had not been formally identified as well as undiagnosed autistic spectrum disorders.

Some providers commented that in meeting the needs of the child and their family this could mean attending additional meetings with relevant professionals from outside of the setting (as also identified in the key informant interviews), something that was indeed evident during observations. The comment above from the London-based practitioner echoed the recognition by many practitioners of the importance of the work they are doing with disadvantaged two-year-olds, and this is reinforced in the next section on understandings of the role of the two-year-old offer. However, even though this recognition suggests that practitioners might find the work rewarding, we reiterate the findings from the key informant interviews that the two-year-old offer is asking a lot of practitioners.

5.1.3 Strategies for Identifying Settings and Children

The relative newness of the funded two-year-old offer meant in some instances practitioners identified difficulties in the current system. We have already noted above that some of those difficulties arise because of a shortfall in places, but there were other concerns, such as notions of fairness, contradictions in how families were being identified, how funding was being allocated and the quality criteria were being used.

The quality criteria used to identify settings are Ofsted grades (as mentioned in the introduction to this report; see also Appendix 1). The decision to focus provision of places on settings that received a 'good' or 'outstanding' judgement in their last inspection can create difficulties because of the delay between inspections. Settings, which have responded fully to the points which brought their judgement down to 'satisfactory' and which could therefore offer good quality provision for two-year-olds, might be taken out of systems administering the two-year-olds offer until their next inspection. This can limit capacity to secure sufficient provision, which was true in one of the local authority areas where we conducted our research. Procedures that the authority had put in place to ensure that placements were of sufficient quality were potentially deterring the very parents who might particularly benefit from a funded place. One of the settings we visited had received a 'satisfactory' grade at their last Ofsted but had responded to all action points and had several funded two-year-olds on roll. However, the setting had to ask each parent who applied for a place to write a letter to the local authority and the local authority then had to approve the provider before offering a place. As the provider commented, "It's very uncomfortable, having to speak to parents and say, oh could you please write a letter?" and she was concerned that this might deter some parents from taking up the offer of a place.

Some practitioners also reported finding themselves in awkward situations with parents as a result of additional benefits made available to children accessing funded places. Two settings reported that those who had been able to access the funded entitlement were also offered additional benefits, one of which was a book bag. The bag contained resources and the family could collect it from a local children's centre and take home. Settings were asked to pass out information regarding the book bags to families receiving funded places. This put

the practitioners in a difficult position when parents who were not receiving funding enquired about the letters that were being handed out. We have already discussed how hard practitioners work to form relationships with all families and small local inequalities such as restrictions on distribution of 'goody bags' can jeopardise these relationships.

Issues of equity were also raised concerning how the children were being identified. In one setting, a parent had been told her children were not eligible for funding, but she subsequently received a voucher for funding after her children had been attending (and she had been paying) for several months and she was left unsure about whether there had been a mistake or a change in the funding criteria. Another practitioner explained that children were being identified using the Free School Meals (FSM) measure. Whilst she appreciated the need to have a mechanism for identifying the children, she noted the contradiction in using this measure when two-year-old children were not entitled to a FSM and, in fact, all children had to pay for their meals at this particular setting. Again the practitioners were put in an uncomfortable situation as they sought to justify their position to families.

One setting in London also identified that there were some difficulties in how the funding was being administered. The manager reported that the setting would be allocated funding and told that it was for ten children, but would not be told which ten, when the setting had funding applications in for more than ten children. The manager suggested that this was something particular to the local authority she was in as she was aware that other settings were not encountering this problem.

5.2 Understandings of the Two-Year-Old Offer

5.2.1 Early Intervention

Managers and (where possible) staff were asked what they understood to be the reasons for the two-year-old offer. It was clear from their responses that practitioners identified with concepts of early intervention, support for families and enabling parental employment. There were two elements to the ideas of early intervention: i) early education as a strong foundation for children's future learning; ii) early identification and support for specific learning needs. Considering the role of early years provision as a form of early intervention one practitioner from a school stated:

There is just evidence that supporting child development in the early years is a more cost effective way of improving individual economic and social outcomes, and that's from the EPPE project.

Setting 4: School with a nursery unit, city, south

Whilst other practitioners and managers did not cite research evidence, it was clear that many were aware that early years education provision acts as a foundation for later learning.

Well, from what I know, I think it's to enable two-year-olds to have access to learning from a very young age. Which we all know is very good. It gives them a good foundation for future learning, for future schooling I would say. And of course they have a good forum to actually interact with their peers, and just learn social skills and routine, and everything. I think for a few of these children, they haven't got any

routine whatsoever from home. And when they come to nursery that actually helps them to behave better, to relate better, and it tends to help with their cognitive as well. They are learning a lot.

Setting 11: Independent day-care provider, London

As can be seen from the comments from the manager of Setting 11, understandings of early intervention and foundations for learning included both social skills and preparation for school. In some instances ideas about school readiness were evident; in Setting 3 the practitioners talked of the two-year-old offer being like a 'pre-preschool' as it helped enable children to prepare and be ready for the preschool provision. This idea of preparing the children for preschool was also present in other settings, including the childminder. For example, practitioners in Setting 4 discussed how provision for two-year-olds could help settle children before they reached three years of age, although they expressed some concerns about how this would extend children's eventual stay in preschool. Setting 2 had conducted their own research to identify the positive benefits for providing places for two-year-olds in preparing the children for preschool. Only one provider explicitly talked about school readiness, but many referred to the role of the two-year-old places as enabling children to have access to learning from an early age in order to help prepare them for later learning.

Other practitioners talked about how early intervention provided opportunities to identify possible learning difficulties; admitting younger children into settings offered the potential for earlier identification as well as earlier support. Practitioners in setting 9 discussed how early intervention could mitigate the need for support for the child in later life. Both ideas - supporting specific learning needs sooner and providing early exposure to education as a foundation for later learning - reflect policy agendas underpinning the funded two-year-old offer and wider research debates about the benefits of early intervention.

5.2.2 Support for Families

As we have seen in the earlier section and in the key informant interviews, providing funded two-year-old places is not just about supporting the children, but their families as well. In some instances practitioners talked about how attending early years provision could provide routines for the families, whilst in other instances there was recognition that this could lead to identifying families in need of additional support. The childminder who was interviewed also linked together early intervention and family support by acknowledging that the early identification of developmental difficulties in the child could help to inform families about how they could support their child sooner as well.

The idea that there is a link between the early intervention work that practitioners do, and supporting the family with the child's learning, was also evident in Settings 2 and 8. Both of the managers in these settings explained that while the children were attending early years provision, there were opportunities for working with families including how they might support their child's learning. As a children's centre, Setting 2 had a history of doing this, but for Setting 8 there was a feeling of a missed opportunity with the two-year-olds offer for early intervention *with parents*: settings could be enabled to offer additional support to parents during the time their two-year-olds were in early education provision. Setting 4 also had a history of supporting families but felt that more could be done if the two-year-olds offer included additional advice to the parents:

Get them to enjoy [their children]; get them to take them through all their routines for their day to help them with their bedtime routine, what's appropriate, having lovely stories at bedtime, having a lovely bath time. I would just like to be able to give that to all the parents out there so that they can enjoy those times really

Researcher: How could you see that happening then?

I think it would have to be a group running alongside the time that the children were in.

The manager of Setting 8 also commented that offering advice and support to families could assist the work of health visitors. As seen in section 5.1.2 earlier and in the key informant interviews, early years practitioners already do a lot to work with and offer support for families, particularly those that have complex lives. Here we see that some practitioners feel that this role should be built into the two-year-olds offer.

Some practitioners considered that the two-year-olds offer was also about freeing parental time to enable them to access employment or engage in study. Two of the day nurseries reported that they had a high volume of working parents and the children's centre commented that the political agendas on child poverty were about parental employment as a route out of poverty. The children's centre was a little critical of the parental employment agenda and the community pre-school was very critical, believing that parents needed to have more choice about whether to go back to work or not. In part, this reflected the importance that the manager of the community pre-school placed on families being able to form attachments and she questioned whether preschool was the right place for these children. The issue that children might be better at home was also raised by staff in the school setting, but only if parents had better support so that this time at home would be beneficial.

The question of whether the children would be better placed at home reflects historical debates about where children's needs are best met. What is interesting is that practitioners could recognise the benefits of early education in providing the foundations for later learning and offering a mechanism for early intervention and, in some instances, even relating this back to recognition that the home environment might be a challenging one, but they still emphasised the importance of the family unit and were experiencing the tension between these ideological stances.

5.3 How are settings working with two-year-olds?

The findings in the following two sections are derived from interviews, observations and focus groups in the 11 settings from the four regions. These findings should be regarded as a composite picture – a collage of snapshots of best practice - and are not intended as comparisons between different regions or setting types. As described in chapter 3 and in the earlier sections of this chapter, each setting has its own history that underpins its provision, its own motivation for taking funded two-year-olds, and its own set of constraints and affordances, which shape practice and inform decision-making. It would be inappropriate to generalise from these findings to all settings of that type or in that location. The examples of

practice described here are offered in the spirit of sharing 'what works' with the proviso that readers understand that it worked in that context for those practitioners working with those families at that time. We should also emphasise that we are reporting on what we saw or heard about on the day of our visit or telephone conversation; other settings might also do the things we describe here but were not doing them, or didn't remember to tell us about them, on the day we talked to them. In Table 3 below we have summarised our observations in the six settings where we were able to carry out observations during our visit.

Table 3. Summary of Observations

Setting	Setting Details	Observations: Overview	Level of involvement (two-year-olds)
1	<p>Community pre-school: City, South England</p> <p>19 funded 2 year olds (21 on total).</p>	<p>TIME of observation: 1-2 pm</p> <p>Hot day. All children together (inc. 7 two-year-olds). Self-chosen activities in large playroom: Doors opened to outdoor area on different levels half-way through the hour; children then have complete free flow. All but two children run outside; observer follows them until last 5 minutes when children return to playroom as parents arrive.</p> <p>Activities: inside: playdough; writing table; small world; jigsaws; book area; 'Minigym' (visiting PE teacher) on mat in back half of room.</p> <p>Outside: bikes, various sized slides and climbing frames, rocker, ring, sand tray, plants, canopy.</p>	<p>4/5 (girls + practitioner: playdough table) 3/4 (boys: gym; girl at 2 briefly lying on mat). 3/ 4 (boys + practitioner: small world into narrative; briefly at 2 after dispute) 3-5 (all children: outside; 5 during self-chosen slide sequence and talking to practitioners; briefly at 2 between active bursts: very hot)</p>
3	<p>Small private day-care chain, attached to a children's centre: City, South England</p> <p>10 funded places.</p>	<p>TIME of observation: 9-10:30 am. Observations not continuous as children interact with observer (showing books and babies and other toys), so observer reads to them at times.</p> <p>Warm day; doors opened to outdoor area; all but two children run outside; children have complete free flow. Fire alarm test (weekly event); children all run around shouting 'fire, fire'. Staff join in a little and then when the alarm stops one staff members says 'the fire is over now'.</p> <p>Activities: inside: small world; shakers; book blanket</p> <p>Outside, 2/3 covered area: bikes, playhouse, trampoline; sand tray, shaving foam.</p>	<p>4 (group climbing in/out of playhouse) 3 (group + practitioner: making shapes in shaving foam) 5 (boy; solitary play with small world) 4 (girl + practitioner: construction play into narrative)</p>
4	<p>Primary school with a Foundation Stage Unit:</p>	<p>TIME of observation: 10:00 to 11:00 am.</p> <p>Hot day: All children together (inc. 6 two-year-olds). Self-chosen activities in large playroom: doors are open to outside area (only patio in use - too hot up on the hill).</p>	<p>4 (girl + practitioner; small world) 5 (groups at water tray) 4 (girl sharing book with practitioner:)</p>

	City, South England 8 funded places.	Children move freely between areas throughout session Activities; inside: home corner, writing table, book area, small world, gloop, Outside: small world, books on blankets; water tray, bikes	4/5 (boy + practitioner: girls at writing table) Some children briefly at level 2 when upset, or tired towards end of hour.
5	Rural day-care : Large county, with rural areas, South England 5 funded places	TIME of observation: 11:10 to 12:10 am. Very hot; All two-year-olds in separate room, with 3 babies. Area divided off for non-mobile babies. Patio door open to own small outside area – closed towards noon as too hot outside. Activities, cause and effect toys, home corner toys, water and sand trays inside. Singing rhymes. Preparing for lunch. Outside: Sand pit, guttering, water tray and brushes outside, large parasols	3/4 (Girl + practitioner: +baby; Home corner play. 4 (group painting with water and playing with guttering) 4 (group with self initiated chasing game 4 (girl tidying up) 3/4 (all 2yos; action rhymes) some 2 waiting to wash hands
7	Childminder : Large county, with rural areas, South England 2 funded places	Time 10:00 to 11:00 am Hot day: four children in childminder's through-kitchen-dining-living room. Activities: snack time; play with pasta and real pots and pans and spoons followed by walk to the park.	3 (snack time) 4 (pouring pasta into different pans) some 2 towards end as walk to park promised when researcher had gone.
10	Small private day-care chain: London 52 funded children on roll	Time 10:00-11:00 am (narrative observations combined with tour; no involvement judgments) It is a hot day so most of the children are outside. Children are engaged in free play, with free access to the outdoors. Activities: Outside; playdough; cornflour and shaving foam. Tidy up time: Ps sing a tidy up song. Children help to tidy up. Some children get drinks. Circle time: magic box (props to prompt stories and rhymes. Preparation for lunch (handwashing).	Children appeared to be engaged in their activities. Some being cleaned up after messy activities. Most children excited about magic box but a few look tired, especially towards the end

5.3.1 Understandings of the ‘twoness of two’

It would be fair to say that each setting reported that working with two-year-olds brought particular challenges in comparison with other age groups: for some settings this was associated with an understanding of two-year-olds as in some way different from other age groups:

[Understanding behaviour is important] especially with the two-year-olds because there is some very challenging behaviour, especially with children who find it difficult to communicate, because you get a lot of tantrums and you need to know how to deal with those tantrums and the biting and pinching. You seem to get all of the behaviours in [the under three’s] room and a lot of it centres around two-year-olds.

Manager, Setting 5.

Two-year-olds are very unique, very different to babies, very different to the three-year-olds. And they are actually the hardest age group I would say to work with. They are kind of in the middle, so they do pose their own challenges.

Two-year-olds are like mini-teenagers. They can be very stroppy, very emotional. They want to do sometimes more than they can actually do, but they don’t want you to help them.

Manager, Setting 10.

Others also identified the potential for growth and intervention with children of this age, and the opportunity to influence these:

I enjoy working with the two-year-olds – I do tend to drift towards them.

I think it’s that learning – you can see them trying to work out how to do things. It’s giving them that little guidance, that little bit of support to help them and then finally seeing them doing that project or whatever they were trying to do on their own. It’s quite satisfying watching that growth in them.

I think it’s a nice age to have, two-years-olds, in a preschool because they are still in the early stages, the foundation, so I think early intervention can happen.

Practitioners, Setting 1.

In our review of the literature we described Eraut's concept of personal knowledge, the knowledge that is available for use in the workplace and made up of different kinds of knowledge acquired in different ways (Eraut, 2000). The comments above reveal how practitioners were applying cultural knowledge about how children develop, which they had acquired through acculturation in their workplace(s) or from general views discussed in the media, home or peer groups. These views were shaping the codified knowledge about child development that practitioners had acquired through study.

5.3.2 Child-led pedagogy

Every setting endorsed a form of child-led pedagogy when working with two-year-olds, although this was expressed in different ways and shaped by practitioners' understandings of the nature of two-year-olds as indicated above. Some settings (from across the sector) explained how child-led practice fitted in with their general ethos of developing children's independence. Sometimes this meant independence in the sense of children being able to look after their own needs:

When the children are then introduced to the two-year-old class, we're starting to teach them independence straight away, get the children really involved; so in the two-year-old class they've got their own cloakroom and the parents are encouraged to support the children in hanging their coats and bags when they arrive. They then need to help them find their photograph along the strip, put it on the tree to indicate they're at nursery, that's what we call a self-registration.

Lead Practitioner, Setting 10

It was also connected with enabling children's autonomy and promoting self-regulation (Whitebread, 2014).

For other settings 'child-led' meant placing emphasis on the adult needing to look at provision from the child's perspective, treat children as individuals and remain adaptable.

[it is important to have an] ability to try and look at things through a child's eye, because their understanding and even what they see - everything - is so much different from what we do, and if we put our expectations on children, then they are going to struggle. Whereas you've got to let them be children, be who they need to be because that's how they are going to learn and develop.

Childminder, Setting 7

"But you need to be with them, to see what they want. We don't have a specific plan; this is what we're going to do with this child, because you don't actually know when they walk in the door. It just develops and evolves with that child and your relationship. [...] We don't come in in the morning and say we're going to do this today. Things change ... we just have to go with the flow".

Manager, Setting 1

Following a child-led pedagogy is not always easy, however, especially when practitioners feel the pressure to achieve certain outcomes. Research has shown that being able to

leave space for child perspectives and ensure that adults make time for children to express their own ideas can be related to practitioners' concerns about keeping control over curriculum content (Jonsson and Williams, 2013). Even when children are taking part in activities that they have chosen themselves, adults can inadvertently shape the progress of that activity by the questions they ask or indeed by the gestures they make. Jonsson and Williams, analyzing interactions between teacher and children aged between one and three, argue that questions from adults can move play in directions shaped by the adults' understanding both of what is happening and where the child needs to be going developmentally. Practitioner's conversational moves will be informed by their knowledge of curriculum, their responsibility to monitor children's progress and by their desire - albeit tacit - to prepare children for what lies ahead; this can lead practitioners to control interactions, even when they think they are engaged in a child-led activity. Jonsson and Williams argue for a 'didactic of the present moment [...] supported by sufficient competence and reflectiveness about cultural and individual issues as well as pedagogical approaches and subject content'. There are tensions here for some practitioners between their intent to engage in child-led pedagogy and the need to address the issue of early intervention that motivates the offer of funded places for two-year-olds. This was particularly evident in discussions about how to accommodate two-year-olds in group activities, which are described in the next section.

5.3.3 Managing groups

Settings found that they had to think carefully about how to work with two-year-olds in groups, whether these were integrated or separate (see section 5.1.1). This prompted particular ways of working which, as noted in section 5.3.2 above, could be related to the practitioners' expectations of how two-year-olds might develop. In some settings, these expectations could be linked to practitioners' anticipation of the sorts of things children might need to be able to do when they reached school, such as sitting in a circle, listening to stories in a group, managing dressing and toileting at scheduled times; see also section 5.2.1. There is a potential tension here between wanting to follow the child's lead and wanting to pave the way for a smooth transition into school.

Practitioners reported making adjustments to how they managed group times in particular and nursery routines in general to meet the needs of two-year-olds. This process of considered adjustment, was especially evident where settings were including two-year-olds for the first time, but also occurred in settings which had already taken two-year-olds but now found themselves taking more two-year-olds who perhaps had additional needs and/or were unused to nursery routines. Several settings mentioned how they had reconsidered arrangements for story time to accommodate two-year-olds; for some this meant including more action rhymes or stories with plenty of audience participation (for example using a 'magic box' or story sack with objects to incorporate into songs or stories); for some it meant finding ways to hold separate groups for two-year-olds; and for others, it had led to a realisation that two-year-olds might not want to sit through a story or group time and so practitioners needed to find ways to enable them to get up and do something else.

[what works well with two-year-olds includes] "in story times reminding other members of staff that they are only two and if they did manage two minutes sitting they should be allowed to get up and do something else."

“I think the majority of the staff have been on the Being Two training. Before going on that – we were asking all children to sit at story time; now we know, at two a child can only sit for as long as they are [interested]”.

Practitioners, Setting 1

The practitioner is referring here to training that was also described to us by one of the key informants, which introduced practitioners to aspects of child development, including physical development and how children who are two ‘learn to move, move to learn’. It is clear that this message was helping to shape provision in this setting, and was also evident in their practice observed during the study (see next section).

5.3.4 Patterns of play

Researcher observations in settings revealed two-year-olds spending time playing by themselves, in pairs or small groups and alongside a practitioner; in integrated settings, two-year-olds’ patterns of play merged into the general pattern of activity although, as two settings pointed out, a sudden influx of two-year-olds can change this:

I do find [including two-year-olds] changes the dynamics of play in the Hall because the Hall is just all open plan. We have to take into consideration the two-year-olds that we do have; we need to change our behaviour towards them.

Assistant manager, Setting 1

Observation of settings where two-year-olds played in a separate room, however, revealed their patterns of play more clearly. Many two-year-olds spent their time absorbed in ‘doing’, moving around the space or watching others, while displaying moderate to high levels of involvement (between levels 3 and 5 on the Leuven Involvement scale for most of the sessions observed). For example, a two-year-old girl (in the very early stage of learning English) in Setting 4 found selecting pens and managing pen tops absorbing in itself:

At writing table, Gina draws a picture. She shows it to practitioner, vocalising. Practitioner says lovely [...] but it’s tidy up time now. Gina carries on; carefully positioning chair, selects pen, talks to another (older) girl, pointing at her drawing. Pens have been put away but Gina selects another one, climbing on storage unit to reach it. Another practitioner comes over and gives her another pot of pens. Gina and friend carry on selecting pens, removing tops, putting tops on end of pens, drawing a bit, putting tops back, swap tops, put pens back then selecting another pen, intensely busy while everyone around them tidies up.

Several practitioners mentioned how popular ‘sensory messy play’ is with two-year-olds, and similar intense involvement by two-year-olds was observed at the playdough table, water tray and sand pit, again where children were absorbed in the mechanics of doing, rather than the production of a particular end product. Practitioners in one setting highlighted the importance of having enough equipment so two-year-olds did not have to wait or negotiate turn-taking on too many occasions: this was a social skill which they were still developing and expecting them to do too much waiting and turn-taking was unrealistic.

When we put things out – it doesn't matter if it's something messy so playdough or cornflour or if it's Duplo or bricks on the carpet – we always make sure that there's enough for the children to be able to have enough to play with. So we are not particularly having to have disputes over toys really. They obviously still have to learn to share and there's always the time where somebody won't share a particular brick or bike but on the whole we've always got plenty to go round for the children and I think that's important with the two-year-olds – that they are not having to sort of battle for the small lump of playdough or a few bricks.

Practitioner, Setting 4

While some two-year-olds were therefore often positioned (sitting or standing) in one place engaged in messy or small world play, others spent their time moving around the nursery, visiting different activities, sometimes carrying one item around with them, sometimes collecting items. To the casual observer, this could look like 'flitting' between activities, aimlessness and distractibility, whereas with more careful observation and special attention to levels of involvement, the children were clearly deeply involved in moving around the space visiting different places; that was what they were doing. Interviews and observations showed all settings had strategies in place which accommodated this 'roaming' behaviour; for example, Setting 5 with a separate room for under-threes enabled access to a small outside side area by adding patio doors and Setting 4, which had originally set aside a room for two-year-olds, soon realised that integrating two-year-olds into the main playroom would work best for them, because the children 'voted with their feet'. Some practitioners spoke about how they were using their understanding of 'schemas' to help them think through the way two-year-olds enjoy moving themselves (and other things) around the space, and to make sure that this could be accommodated within their setting, alongside the needs of other children.

There's a time with children from the age of two especially who transport equipment around the hall. So you could have a particular member of staff who thinks that should stay on the table, but you've got to think of the needs of the child, the child might have a schema. That can be quite difficult because although the member of staff is aware of that – she knows just let them carry it through because we can put it back – she is also looking at the three-year-olds who wanted to play with the puzzle game but can't because the two-year-old's come along and put it all in a little trolley and waltzed off .. So it's being aware of it and trying to compromise and find a balance really. We've just got to be aware of their learning needs as well, whether it's 'transporting' or whatever. I think with doing observations on that child, you just find that transporting is a way of learning for them, then plan for that.

Assistant manager, Setting 1

A practitioner in Setting 3 also explained how she managed resources to accommodate the needs of children who liked to move things around while still ensuring that children would want to engage in activities:

They tend to go back to the activity if it's reset up again whereas if you leave it they don't go back to it, so I like to keep it so that it still looks interesting for them, so it still looks appealing so they still want to go and play with it. ... we do try, especially

in the main room, to keep it set up and then if they're not playing with it after we've set it back up again then we'll put it away and get something different out for them, so that they've always got something set up for them to go to.

Practitioner, Setting 3.

5.3.5 Observation

The comments above point to an important aspect of working with two-year-olds mentioned by all settings, notably the need for practitioners to know individual children very well. In section 5.1.2 we discussed the paperwork and procedures settings used to provide some details about children's needs, but there were other practices in place. Over half of the settings emphasised the importance of observation so that practitioners were able to tune into children's needs, interests and ways of learning. Some settings also explained how they managed timetables to make sure there were opportunities both to carry out and to share observations so that everyone in the setting knew all the two-year-olds well. Setting out and clearing away times before and after sessions provide natural opportunities to catch up on what had been observed and plan accordingly, but some settings were also able to take part in discussions in regular meetings. This included one school setting (Setting 6) that ensured that hourly paid staff working in the two-year-olds' room had time each day to reflect and discuss as well as matching PPA time with the nursery teacher from the three-to-fours' room, while another school setting (Setting 4) held weekly meetings for all staff. It was also emphasised that hourly paid staff should be paid to attend these meetings.

There were many instances in observations carried out for this study which suggested that staff did indeed know two-year-olds well and used their knowledge to inform their interactions; they spoke in short sentences about the here and now, used gestures and demonstration to support children's interpretation of their meaning and drew on their experience of what a particular child had shown interest in previously, or from familiarity with the child's background, to guide their interactions in play. Some examples from observations (where it was possible to capture speech) are presented below to illustrate this.

<p>Setting 4</p> <p>10:00 on mat inside</p>	<p>Practitioner sitting on floor with 2yo girl (Ellie) and 2 older children, talking about a small world bus.</p> <p>Practitioner: are they going to get out of the bus now?</p> <p>Ellie: no.</p> <p>Practitioner: are they going to the shops?</p> <p>Practitioner introduces small car for Ellie (avoiding potential sharing issue as older children whizz bus off on journey)</p> <p>Practitioner looks at Ellie with her sunglasses on: is it getting dark? Ellie looks at Practitioner and smiles. They talk about going shopping.</p> <p>Now Practitioner introduces another car. Ellie has one in each hand and rotates them. Puts them side-by-side.</p> <p>Practitioner starts singing rhyme about cars, and clapping in time.</p>
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10:25 Writing table	Ben at writing table, writing ABC on scrap of paper. Practitioner comes over and asks him if he wants to write and gives him his own piece of paper. He writes ABC and vocalises as he writes, excitedly. Ben calls out to practitioner 'teacher!' and she smiles and praises his writing: that's good writing. He is now singing as he writes and smiling. Sings and turns to practitioner, looking at her. She smiles and praises his singing: 'that's good singing, Ben. You are one of our good singers'.
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Setting 5 11:10 Inside	Practitioner and Susie (2 year old) and baby (he is newish to Nursery) looking at shopping basket. Practitioner introduces words for food. Encourages children to feel knobbly plastic food. Asks questions: Can you eat it? Susie now walking around with doll and phone. Listens to Practitioner talking to baby then goes into corralled area. Practitioner calls over: can you get your baby some milk? Practitioner: Susie's baby is having some milk. Is she hungry or thirsty? Asks more questions (want milk or food?). Adds gestures when Susie shows by answers that she hasn't understood. Practitioner asks another two-year-old, Mollie: are you taking off your shoes? Mollie replies 'teddy'. Practitioner expands: have you got a teddy on your shoes?
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Setting 3 10:10 Outside	Practitioner is helping a child on a bike by pushing it so that he can get used to the pedals going round. Spots a boy with his shoe off so goes and helps him put it back on. Asks a child what that noise is (sound of a circular saw). Goes over to the fence to watch and three children join her. Practitioner goes back to talking to the children about the man sawing. A fourth child picks up a Barbie outfit and asks what it is. Practitioner explains. Practitioner also spots a jacket on the floor, so picks this up. The child that it belongs to comes over and indicates that she wants it on. Practitioner helps her put it on and does a 'wooo' noise as the zip goes up. Child goes off. Practitioner goes 'boo' through the window of the playhouse. Conversation with the children about the washing machine being on and the washing going round and round. 'Washing again. Going round and round. Is it nice and clean?' Talks to remaining child about whether or not they want to go in for snack. Child decides to go in for snack.
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In the excerpts from setting 4, for example, the practitioner used more complicated sentence structures with Ellie (who was a very chatty two-year-old) and used play as an opportunity to talk about shopping (a favourite topic), whereas the practitioner in the second excerpt sat alongside Ben, a two-year-old boy who spoke little English, and took her lead from him, introducing a simple sentence format (that's good [verb+ing]) accompanied by facial expressions to reinforce her meaning. When the practitioners discussed the observations with me, they also demonstrated their knowledge of the favourite activities of the two children and their reasoning behind the way they had acted. It should be added that these practitioners were both very experienced members of staff; less experienced staff were not as able to discuss why they had acted in particular ways (although their actions were similar).

Interviews and discussions with managers and practitioners indicated that their knowledge of individual children had been built up, through both formal observations and less formal 'watching', as well as through sharing information with parents. Even though keyperson systems were in place in all non-domestic settings, two-year-olds spent time with a wide range of practitioners who adjusted their interactions to match children's level of understanding. These practitioners had also been watching the children carefully and so were ready if they came to join in the activity that they were leading:

Researcher: What opportunities do you have to learn about the two-year-olds?

In everyday, general things. [We] just watch, observe when they're in [the main playroom] with the others. Some [two-year-olds] might start their day quietly with [their key person ... but then] they come into [the main playroom] and they come to all different people.

Practitioner, Setting 4.

Practitioners working with two-year-olds tended to divide their time between playing alongside them and maintaining a watchful distance. The latter option reflected settings' ethos of fostering independence and providing opportunities for children to take risks. In a space where there were many small individuals busy pursuing learning through individual schemas, practitioners needed to maintain a balance between enabling children to do what they wanted but ensuring that they did not endanger themselves or upset others in the process. In the sessions observed in this study, staff were managing to achieve this balance, often by tuning in to a child by their side while simultaneously remotely supervising and shaping the behaviour of other children nearby. For example in setting 5, a practitioner simultaneously calmed a crying baby while helping a two-year-old to find her doll's bottle, pitching verbal instructions so that the two-year-old had an opportunity to listen carefully and experience a great sense of achievement when she found the bottle by herself.

5.3.6 Focus on language development

In interviews and discussions, both managers and practitioners emphasised the central importance of supporting children's language development and observations revealed the extent to which this was influencing how they worked with two-year-olds. Both when playing and when engaged in care or domestic tasks, many practitioners (particularly the more experienced and/or more senior members of staff) gave running commentaries on what they were doing or what children were doing. They also expanded children's one-word utterances into full sentences, introduced new words to extend their vocabulary and provided experience of increasing syntactic complexity. When two-year-olds started to play with an object by exploring perhaps its mechanical properties, staff sometimes overlaid a narrative (e.g. of a bus/taxi/rocket journey). During sessions observed in the study, there were instances where this moved children from exploring the physical properties of objects (wheels that go round) to more social play involving another person (such as whizzing a car between two people). Occasionally this developed into a simple story (for example, in which play-people were put into a rocket, went up in the air in a circle and came back again). Building on children's interests without taking the lead – bathing them in language without swamping them with questions – is skilled work that requires deep knowledge of both individual children and general patterns of language development. There was evidence of practitioners engaging in meaningful interactions with children in all types of

provision, but the skilled work described above was particularly marked in settings that had engaged in training related to language development. Practitioners here were able to pinpoint strategies, which managers had mentioned in interviews and which had been included in training courses (such as 'wait ten seconds before prompting again'), and which were particularly appropriate for developing children's language and emphasised the importance of giving children time to respond.

5.3.7 Additional needs and interprofessional working

For most settings, working with children with additional needs was part of what they were already doing before the advent of the two-year-old offer, so supporting two-year-olds with additional needs did not involve embarking on a completely new way of working. However, some settings were finding that they were now working with children with more complex family backgrounds (see sections 5.1.2. and 5.2.2) and this was involving them in systems and procedures that were new to them.

The progress check at age two also places new responsibilities on settings both to identify possible developmental delays and raise this discovery with parents.

I think early intervention can happen: if you see children struggling with speech or behaviour, or vulnerable children, you can catch sight of that while they are with us at two instead of coming to us at three. I think it's something that we are all aware of and we all look out for. When we do the progress [check] with the parents, it can be brought up particularly with speech and language, children who are very clingy, it sort of opens their eyes as well.

Assistant manager, Setting 1

In settings which cater for children from birth/age 1 there is already experience of earlier stages of development, which provides a potential fund of knowledge for practitioners who find themselves working with two-year-olds whose development is delayed (for whatever reason). In settings that are new to working with two-year-olds, practitioners are likely to need new knowledge about how both to identify and support two-year-olds with additional needs. Discussions with managers and staff revealed, however, that even settings which had not formally admitted children before the age of three (such as Settings 1 and 4) did have experience of working with younger children with additional needs (e.g. through stay and play sessions) and they were eager to be able to extend this work with two-year-olds on a more regular basis.

Research has shown the importance of strong personal relationships to facilitate both formal and informal access to knowledge when working with children with additional needs (Edwards, 2007) and settings were active in finding different ways to develop or access knowledge about additional needs and two-year-olds. Within settings, practitioners knew whom they could consult on the staff team if they had concerns about a child's developmental progress; sometimes this was the room leader, sometimes the setting's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo). Setting 6 mentioned that the school SENCo had particular expertise in early years and Setting 4 had in the past hosted a Special Nursery and so had staff with relevant experience.

Managers reported drawing on specialist support, often from their existing network of personal contacts built up over time.

A few of these children (funded two-year-olds) do have behavioural problems I think, probably speech delay – probably one of the reasons they've actually been earmarked to have the funding. So when we meet up, we do go forth and ask other agencies to come in and help us out, and just give us their opinion of, you know, what can be done. So we do liaise with [local authority].

Manager, Setting 11

We have a little boy who's starting in September; he's got additional needs with his hearing and his speech is delayed. And so I've got links with someone, one of my friend's girlfriends, her mum was deaf and dumb and she runs support for other children in small groups, using British Sign Language. I work closely with [another manager] too; we did our EYPS together. We kind of have a bit of a network, if we need each other and we've got other people we know.

Manager, Setting 9

Two settings provided examples of interprofessional training which they had been able to attend and which had helped them both to extend their network of contacts and to provide deeper insight into how to support children with additional needs than a course attended only by childcare practitioners might have done. Setting 8 staff had just attended training with the speech and language team and Setting 5 staff had found a new interagency child protection course:

The child protection course that we do is interagency. So you've got practitioners from [different agencies] – and I think that is so useful when you're sitting in that group situation. It's put on by the local safeguarding board; two of our practitioners have just accessed it and they said it was fantastic. They were the only ones from a childcare setting. There were all sorts of people and I just find that really useful because there you do a lot of group discussions in that sort of training.

Manager, Setting 5

Several settings had strong links with children centres (such as Settings 3 and 8) and sometimes with health visitors, although these were less widespread. Sharing information from the two-year-olds' progress checks with Health Visitors had also met with a patchy response; some settings reported that Health Visitors were not interested although, within the same area, another parent (using Setting 7) had been offered support after sharing the progress check with her Health Visitor. New ways of working with Health Visitors were being trialled within the county and were clearly still filtering through. The uneven response to the progress checks was also partly attributed to heavy caseloads and frequent changes of personnel, often as a result of local authority cuts. This was true for Area SENCos in some regions, which was making it difficult to build and maintain the network of relationships with outside agencies that is so important to being able to access information and support.

The most frequently reported links with other agencies were with speech and language therapists, although in one area this was problematic in relation to two-year-olds with communication difficulties, because children could not be referred to a speech and language therapist until they were three. Some settings (such as Setting 10) felt that the way that they work generally supports children with speech and language difficulties and settings that had undertaken training on supporting language development and behaviour management drew on this when discussing issues emerging with accepting two-year-olds with additional needs.

Individual practitioners had also developed experience of working with two-year-olds with particular needs because of the two-year-olds offer:

In the last year, I have worked with a little girl who has a cleft palate and cataracts in her eyes, and another little boy with a cleft palate as well. I've been on training for speech because I've got to do one-on-one speech and language [work]. The speech and language [therapist] sends me stuff to do and we do the work together.

Practitioner, Setting 1.

Settings therefore feel that they 'develop a range of specialism over the years' (Setting 9). It is probably worth pointing out, however, that all the settings visited reported stable staff teams who were committed to professional development in general and to extra training in particular, including carrying out research in anticipation of children with particular needs who might be starting in September. Practitioners also mentioned that working with children with additional needs was not something that had been covered well in their initial training and much of what they knew about working with children with additional needs had come through experience or training once in post. This model of professional development clearly worked well in the settings we visited, where there was expertise/experience within the staff team, or good links with external agencies or access to appropriate training.

5.4 What makes practitioners 'good with two-year-olds'?

As indicated in section 5.1.1 above, settings put considerable thought into the environment to make it work for the two-year-olds in their care, but they also emphasised particular aspects of the workforce that make the most difference to successful work with two-year-olds. In discussing the skills and qualities needed to work with two-year-olds, there were three strong threads in discussions with both managers and practitioners in the settings we visited: qualifications, experience and personal qualities. As well as enthusiastic advocacy for a well-qualified workforce to support work with two-year-olds (which was also a feature of interviews with key informants), there was also agreement that qualifications alone were not enough; experience of playing and caring for two-year-olds and the ability to relate well to two-year-olds and their families were also very important.

I would say both [qualifications and experience are important]; experience obviously is a massive part of as an adult your development and your skills of understanding of children. Obviously it comes over years, it comes with courses and understanding. You can go and do a course on something for a year, but putting it into practice is just amazing. As an adult as well you become more confident in your play with children.

Lead Practitioner, Setting 10

The ways in which different settings negotiated a balance between these three factors varied and were shaped by the particular circumstances of the setting, including the financial constraints of the two-years-olds offer.

5.4.1 Qualifications and experience

Graduate status

All but three settings were graduate-led; in the remaining three the childminder in setting 7 was an experienced NVQ 3 practitioner with aspirations to graduate status and the managers in the two settings from chains were also considering embarking on a degree or supporting staff members to do so. Settings with graduates highlighted two valuable aspects of studying for graduate level qualifications: the opportunity to acquire not only a deeper understanding of child development – particularly language and personal/social development - but also to develop the ability to engage in critical reflection on practice. Knowledge of curriculum, theory and child development must be in the form of what Eraut describes as ‘codified knowledge ready for use’ – that is, topics that have been studied and can now be used in real-life situations to help practitioners to think through what is happening in the workplace.

This is how the maths comes in but it's coming through more in play ... You have learnt it, but now you can see this is working and children are gaining that good first rule of experience with things and quantities - to get their hand on things.

Manager, Setting 2

Some managers, reflecting on the value of graduate qualifications, commented that what these qualifications provide is confidence in what you are doing, as well as ways of talking about this to someone else who might not understand or agree with what you are doing. The teacher in Setting 4 gave an example of how she was able to justify to Ofsted the setting's decision to integrate two-year-olds into the main playroom, but the manager from Setting 1 explained that this confidence could only come from achieving a qualification that was rigorously assessed:

My experience of going through the Early Years Professional Status was, I felt quite 'grilled' and I felt quite confident then; it's brought me on. And I'm able to have a discussion on a more professional level. And it's given me confidence now. [If I get] a comment from, say, the Local Authority or Ofsted, if I don't agree then I will say, well actually I don't agree with that, and this is my reasoning. So that's given me confidence just on my own professional development level.

Manager: Setting 1

Both school settings commented, however, that the per capita level of funding was not sufficient to employ a graduate to work directly with the two-year-olds:

I think that financially it's not viable because of the high ratio, one member of staff to four children, and a teacher would just be too expensive.

Teacher: Setting 6.

I think £5.09 an hour isn't sufficient to attract high quality staff, if you value the staff and that has to be a decent wage. I think a decent wage is important for me.

Teacher: Setting 4

In some settings (e.g. Settings 1, 4 and 5) graduate leaders deliberately planned to spend time 'on the floor'; this included interacting with two-year-olds and was evident in observations in these settings. But when asked whether staff *needed* to have graduate status to work with two-year-olds, managers and practitioners came back to the importance of experience – or if not experience then special personal qualities which made some people particularly well suited to work with two-year-olds (see section 5.4.2 below).

Maybe [graduate status is important] for overseeing the EYFS because it has to be there for inspection purposes, maybe that side. I don't think you need to be a graduate to look after a two-year-old and care for them in a good way that will aid their development.

Manager: Setting 1

Level 3 qualified staff

Both discussion and observations confirmed that, in the settings in our study, two-year-olds were interacting with mainly level 3 practitioners; in some settings they were also interacting with graduate, level 4, level 2 and unqualified staff to different extents, depending on the setting but not specifically related to the type of setting (see section 5.4.3 on the 'team around the two-year-olds'). In the two settings from nursery chains, level 3 was the highest qualification; setting 10 aimed for a 50/50 balance of qualified and unqualified staff, although the manager added that 'ideally in all nurseries everybody would like the majority of their staff team to be qualified'.

Several settings were, however, sharply critical of current level 3 National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), as 'not fit for purpose', largely because of inadequacies in assessment processes ('I've never seen anyone fail'), as well as of online qualifications, because these did not offer face-to-face exploration of critical issues through reflective discussion. Critical reflection and rigorous assessment therefore featured strongly in responses to what was important in a 'good' qualification at level 3, as well as at graduate level. This does imply that some qualifications are not trusted in the field. Settings were looking for a level 3 'plus' practitioner to work with two-year-olds; discussions about the selection of staff to lead work with two-year-olds generally included mentions of something extra, over and above a level 3 qualification. This 'extra' could be relevant experience (for example in a children's centre with work focused on supporting families) or particular skills in relating to two-year-old children and their families. There was strong endorsement of "brilliant practitioners that aren't graduates" (nursery teacher, Setting 6) and "highly experienced gifted [practitioners] with the old NNEB training – I love the NNEB" (manager and governor, Setting 4) – but with the implicit caveat that a level 3 qualification does not in itself indicate a brilliant practitioner.

Gender

Observations and interviews confirmed that work with two-year-olds, as with the whole of the early years provision, is strongly gendered; we saw one male practitioner in Setting 1,

and the manager in Setting 4 specifically mentioned this as an aspect of provision which needed addressing nationally.

5.4.2 Skills and dispositions

The following section helps to develop an image of how successful graduates and level 3 practitioners work with two-year-olds by summarising what managers and practitioners told us on our visits to their settings.

The first thing mentioned in managers' responses to our questions about the skills and dispositions needed to work with two-year-olds was **patience**: this was elaborated as a combination of learning to wait for responses, allowing plenty of time for children to carry out tasks (self-chosen or adult-led) and not transmitting irritation at having to repeat actions and activities. In addition to these behaviours (which perhaps could be learned by most of us, with varying amounts of effort) was the suggestion that some practitioners naturally possessed a calmness – “being generally laid-back”, as one practitioner put it – which helped them cope with difficult behaviour. These were often the practitioners who mentioned how much they enjoyed working with two-year-olds, rather than diplomatically referring to the ‘challenge’ or the need for sense of humour.

The next most frequently mentioned skill was **communication**: practitioners had to be able to interact skilfully with two-year-olds. The observations carried out in this study showed it was often the experienced level 3 (as well as graduate and level 4) staff who were engaged in the skilled interactions promoting children's language development described in section 5.3.6. This included observation of the childminder (setting 7), whose interactions with the children in her care were fine-tuned (in terms of sentence length, complexity of syntax and vocabulary) to the different ages in the group and, because these interactions occurred in the course of daily chores and domestic routines, had an unsurprisingly ‘natural’ quality that could promote the sort of informal language learning identified by Painter (2005) (amongst others) as preparation for future pedagogic exchanges. But managers were referring not just to knowledge of language development, but to the **relational skills** of being a good communicator – working out what someone else means from all available cues – as well as adjusting one's own speech to match the listener's interests and communication skills.

It's listening to the children, watching their body language and how they touch you to make sure you know what they want, if they want you to help them. It's a number of communication ways that are important, probably more important with the two-year-olds and we're thinking of the children we've got from other countries coming in here at the moment. It's really important.

Manager: Setting 4

Skilled communication was also important when working with families (see below) and was related to the capacity and inclination to **empathise** – being ready and able to look at things from the child's and family's points of view

Managers also mentioned the importance of **confidence** – noting that this was something that could be developed (rather than considering it as just a personality trait) as a result of

training and qualifications (Setting 1) as well as through experience of trying things out and finding solutions (Settings 2, 10).

Researcher: So do you think that with experience comes confidence in your ability to deal with parents?

Yes, absolutely, being able to talk to parents ... confidence in your practice so that when parents come in and say, well I just want him to sit down and write numbers do letters, and you're thinking well, actually, I think that being able to communicate with your peer group might take a little precedence. [Then explaining] these are the ways we do this and this is where the maths comes in but it's coming through more in play ... But I think it takes a long time to have the confidence to see that and explain how those skills are being built up.

Manager: Setting 2

Sensitivity to children's intentions was also mentioned, knowing "when adult input is a benefit and when adults can back right off because you're just going to ruin the game or the experience. I think that only comes from experience" (Setting 2). This was also apparent in the 'watchful distance' noted during observations in the settings, as well as with planning to "go with the child's interests" after careful observation (Setting 8).

Finally three settings (Settings 2, 7, 11) explicitly mentioned the importance of being able to **love** the children in their care, particularly in relation to children attending through the two-year-olds offer:

You've got to be able to relate very well to children, come down to their level. You've got to be able to love them. Children. If you don't really love children then you can't really do that job.

Manager: Setting 11

I couldn't look after the children if I didn't love them. You've got to have the ability to really care about them because if you think it's important how they do and how they develop you've going to put in that time and that effort. [...] But I think with the two-year-old funding as well you're going to have some children who don't necessarily get, if not love, then the actual affection and the showing of love because some parents, they don't. They haven't been shown how to love and that is one of the fundamental things that children need to be able to develop.

Childminder: Setting 7.

Not everyone was comfortable talking about 'loving' children, however, and this was connected to current concerns about inappropriate kinds of love and young children. They found other words, like **care** and **compassion**, to express the need for some kind of emotional connection between practitioner and child.

It might be good to call it compassion; it would have less of a worry in terms of the child's protection but which is a kind of love but not necessarily having to be so personalised or so individualised but I think compassion is a huge asset. You have a little bit more compassion for them for what these children are dealing with. I would have said that originally my impetus to do the work has/is coming out of a

place called love; that is where I would have situated it. [...] I think that now maybe from a terminology point of view I suppose compassion is just as good a word; we are in a very reactive [time].

Manager: Setting 2.

... it's a mindset; I think you need to care; you really need to care about children

Manager: Setting 1.

Other staff spoke more generally about the need for practitioners to have **passion** for working with young children, either because the job is not well paid so staff need to feel rewarded by doing something worthwhile that they believe in, but also because working with young children needs **commitment**; it is not something you can do half-heartedly.

You've got to have passionate people about Early Years, people who want to learn and for me you're still learning after all these years, if you stop learning you might as well finish

Manager: Setting 4.

If you're not very keen at what you're doing, you wouldn't do it to the full impact.

Manager: Setting 11

It is very encouraging when people do have that passion as it's hard work every day, but you need people who can see and appreciate the changes in children, which are incredible. What you do is in front of your eyes, really visible.

Manager: Setting 2.

Skills for working with families

The constellation of skills and dispositions mentioned above all contribute to being able to work alongside families to support their children's development. All settings recognised the importance of being able to work with families, especially in the context of work with funded two-year-olds, and informed by their particular understanding of the motivation behind the funding (supporting parents to work or early intervention – or both – see section 5.2). Settings had systems in place (as described in section 5.1.2 above) but these needed practitioners with the skills and inclination to make them work. Managers identified a wide range of different skills for working with parents of two-year-olds, from being able to offer a “friendly face to parents with no extended family nearby” (Manager, Setting 8), offering support, tips and advice to parents and signposting them to services (Settings 7, 9) or tactfully handling discussions with both parties following an incident of biting or pinching (Manager, Setting 5). Practitioners were also aware of the need to find the right balance between offering guidance and parenting strategies while still maintaining

... a good rapport with the parents, especially when they have just started talking to some of us. To be honest we don't want to be putting them down and criticising and saying you should be [doing this].

Practitioner: Setting 4.

In some cases, parents established a close relationship their child's keyperson, who was able to offer advice and support.

The parent often comes in and talks more with the keyperson. Some parents are given the funding but aren't exactly sure if they want to use it, so they come in and say I've been given this, can I use just a few hours and you build up the relationship slowly, can they come in for another 2 hours next week, but that's again the keyperson. Sometimes they are a little bit lost when that keyperson is not around so it's [important] to make sure they have relationships with all the adults in the room.

Manager: Setting 2

In practice, the progress check at two years old introduced in the last revision of the EYFS was also offering practitioners good opportunities to develop their skills in talking to parents and to open up conversations about possible issues to be addressed. Practitioners in Setting 5 had attended a training course on carrying out the progress check and had just started to sit down and share these with parents and were finding it was something that both they and the parents enjoyed and found useful. The childminder in this area (Setting 7) had also completed the check early to coincide with a parent's meeting with the Health Visitor. The parent was able to discuss a behaviour issue with the Health Visitor, was offered support but declined saying she was happy with the work she was doing with her childminder on this issue.

Practitioners needed to give particularly careful consideration to communication with families with complex needs:

Staff have to think hard about skills with parents and developing good relationships with them. Some children are on the Child Protection Register or have had referrals from school, perhaps because of hygiene issues: staff have to deal with parents in those circumstances and retain a positive bond with the parent.

Manager: Setting 8

Practitioners' skills (and experiences) of observing children were therefore needed to highlight issues which might suggest that a parent needed extra support; whether this was then addressed by that practitioner or a more senior member of staff varied between settings but generally there was recognition that this is skilled work and was often taken on by the manager or deputy:

[Deputy] sets up a nice little meeting with the parent and keyperson and quite often that's the beginning - especially with the funded two-year-olds – of the story. They don't always tell their story at the beginning sometimes; [Deputy] has to use a lot of skill so that they are not really worried about this fact or that a little bit of support is needed, in a gentle way. Basically you've got a skill as a practitioner, [Deputy] sometimes knows, when they are being showed around, that that child is going to be added to her list of observation and needs. These are people that have been looking at children for years. Sometimes people think there is nothing wrong with their child so that's a piece of work, drip feeding it in.

Manager: Setting 2.

The manager of Setting 9 also took on responsibility for talking to parents, after issues had been identified by staff, who then signposted parents to manager, or manager to parents.

Skills for working with children with additional needs

Practitioners' skills in working sensitively with parents are also essential for work with children with additional needs, particularly if parents are not yet aware of these:

If we ever take children in and we suspect that there might be some issues, we obviously have an approach that we would take in addressing that with the parents. There have been parents in the past who [say] 'no there's nothing wrong' which is difficult. And then there are some that have just been so excited and happy because they were thinking it, but they didn't want to say, they weren't sure. Maybe they were being over paranoid, but then hearing it from practitioners they are able to work together and that should be really good and give lots of support to the parents and child.

Manager: Setting 10.

Managers mentioned other skills and dispositions, which included the capacity to build knowledge about specific additional needs as outlined in section 5.3.7. Practitioners needed to be able to plan activities and routines that would support the inclusion of children with additional needs into the group

So we're not in a position where we are having to just have one-to-one and separate a child. We are actually able to involve a whole group, but still what we would do is we'll do small group activities involving those children, so that we are really able to work with them. But involving other children so that they're not feeling separated or put aside and why can't I do this with my friends. We always try and involve them and have their inclusion there.

Manager: Setting 10.

Practitioners also needed to be able to find ways to manage provision for all children, especially if additional support for children with special needs was not yet in place. Several managers highlighted current difficulties in securing funding for children who required one-to-one support because of challenging behaviour or complex needs.

But you would just like M. [two-year-old with Down Syndrome] to be supported totally. We could just pull it out after six weeks if he doesn't need it but it would just be nice for him. [Local Authority] support are just saying he has no additional needs, but he will not be able to function here and I can't get support for him. Because like P. - he couldn't walk properly when he arrived and now we have just got support and he's three years. We haven't got support for D. yet we have just applied for it and that's a year after he's been with us. But we are still trying to apply for it.

Manager: Setting 4.

In settings where there were children who were learning English as an additional language (EAL), practitioners were able to draw on and extend their skills in supporting children's language development:

I think K's [funded two-year-old] mum and possibly J's mum, I think their English is a little bit less maybe, and I think they took a little bit longer to start [speaking]. J. is speaking English now but it took until she was three: she didn't really say a lot and K. hasn't really said much in English at all. That's often the way with EAL; they will take it on board and they understand and listen. They're absorbing so much all the time. Their understanding is good but I think that's partly why they gravitate towards each other to play because it's easier. They can rely on the language they're confident with.

Practitioners, Setting 4.

Practitioners also needed to develop intercultural capabilities to help them understand where the children and their families were coming from:

Some of the children are refugees: what we don't know is any history. For instance one little boy from a French-speaking African country, he got upset one morning and he was distraught. Now you just knew that wasn't just about what had happened, that was something in his past that had happened. You know nothing about what that child's seen; I think he'd experienced something very frightening at some point in his life and that brought it back, and but I don't know whether we can have that conversation with the mother at any time or even if they can do a brief history. It's probably too painful for them because he came from such a painful background. But he came in with no language, not a word and he's now [got] single words.

Manager, Setting 4.

In some of the complex situations outlined above, where support was not yet in place or children clearly had issues but practitioners did not know what these were, settings worked as a team to decide what to do; "having good team around you helps you to meet challenges. Staff can lighten feelings and atmosphere" (Manager, setting 8). We will look more closely at how these teams worked in the next section.

5.4.3 'Teams-around-the-two-year-olds'

From our conversations with managers and practitioners, it is clear that settings are operating with distributed knowledge, skills and experience and it is therefore important to look carefully at the whole team to understand how two-year-old children are being supported. Settings employed different mixtures of graduate, level 2, 3 and 4 staff, with some unqualified staff, to work with two-year-olds, often drawing in less well qualified practitioners from the local community while ensuring they have access to expertise and theoretical underpinning for their work.

The managers of Settings 2 and 10 used their knowledge of the way staff worked with different age groups to place practitioners while ensuring a balance of age and experience of staff working with two-year-olds:

We all have skills in a variety of areas. I think you need to look into what sort of staff you have and what skills they have, and who's best suited in each room. That's what we do here. When they come in to me, I like them to try in different rooms so we can see who functions better with different age groups. And that's how we do it. Because just having a qualification isn't enough, you've got to see them in action to

see how they get on with children, and who has the patience, especially with the little ones, and who's better off with the older children. Bearing in mind that having a good mix of age ranges within staffing is very important as well, because the younger ones have things to offer and the older people do have things to offer as well.

Manager: Setting 10

I think naturally when you do your NVQ training and on your future training there is always an age group that inspires you more; that you have a specific interest in a certain age group. Some adults prefer to be with the older children than be with the pre-school children. I know when you work with children you don't always get a choice but if you have someone who has a passion for working with two-year-olds, you do need that extra patience as you are repeating what you are saying continuously. I think for myself you have to have that interest [in that age group].

Manager: Setting 2

Setting 4, which had opted to integrate two-year-olds into the main nursery, also deliberately included local practitioners in the staff team as teaching assistants (TAs) because this helped to build connections with families in the neighbourhood. The manager explained how the different staff worked as a team:

So we have NNEB trained staff, we have NVQ 3 trained staff, we have a teacher, we have TAs who are not trained but have got experience. So that is our team. We work hopefully as a team and you build on people's strengths. So the people who are more theory based you can bounce off with the people who are more practical based so we learn from each other. I think that's the key.

Manager: Setting 4

This was very much in evidence both in observations and in discussion with practitioners, where they explained how they had worked through the difficult period where the setting admitted their first cohort of funded two-year-olds all at the same time:

So the thing that made [the first few weeks after admitting two-year-olds] better was actually talking together and pooling our resources, what might work, and trying it out. We all have different ideas and the children take to different people as well. They sort of vote with their feet, who they'll go with.

We did it ourselves; we worked together and we had challenging children that needed us, not just [funded two-year-olds]. We're backing each other; we're trying this and we're trying that.

Practitioners, Setting 4

Working through this experience as a staff team helped them to come up with solutions – and to put in place clear recommendations that future admission of two-year-olds would be staggered to ease their transition into the nursery.

Setting 6 was putting together their team to support work with two-year-olds in a different way: an experienced level 3 practitioner from a children's centre was to be room leader for

the two-year-olds, with two other level 3 practitioners and two apprentices from the local college, one of whom would be working towards level two and one towards level 3. The nursery teacher had planned her timetable so that she had time out of the nursery each week to support the new room leader. Setting 9 adopted a flexible approach, redeploying staff to work with two-year-olds when special skills were needed, with the proviso that they understood how two-year-olds are different and what their needs are. Elsewhere managers point to the importance of their keyperson system to ensure that there was someone on staff who really knows the individual child and the family and can plan for that child. There was clear evidence therefore of a team approach in group settings, sometimes extending to the high quality teamwork and 'systematic sensitivity' which Sajaniemi et al. propose is needed to regulate stress levels both for staff and children in preschool settings (Sajaniemi et al., 2014).

5.4.4 Professional development

The settings that we contacted all had a strong ethos of ongoing professional development for their staff. Budgetary constraints, coupled with the desire to support local practitioners into work, meant that settings were developing the practitioners already in post or 'growing their own', rather than employing more highly qualified staff. This approach went hand-in-hand with a willingness to take on students and created a culture of lifelong learning. Setting 5's commitment to professional development made them front page news in the local paper when each member of staff gained a new qualification in one year. Other settings readily offered work placements for secondary school through to degree level students:

So we've got those students who are really starting from the very, very beginning right through; we do level 2, level 3, we've had foundation degree students we've had EYPS, we've now got EYTS; we've got one from [local university] and three from [another local university] at the moment and then we've got B.Ed. coming in for a student placement just to get some experience of working with a younger age group, so we sort of take everybody.

Manager: Setting 1

Informal strategies included ensuring that less experienced and less well qualified staff were able to learn from working alongside more experienced staff who explicitly recognised the importance of modelling good practice.

It's modelling isn't it? We've got two highly experienced, gifted practitioners with the old NNEB training. They are superb and so you have good modelling of how you talk to children, how you work with children, how you sit with children, so that comes through all the time.

Manager: Setting 4

Taking on responsibility for the professional development of others is an example of distributed leadership, which fits in with the distributed knowledge structures evident within settings visited in the project (see section 5.4.3). Staff other than managers took responsibility for aspects of practice, displaying 'leadership from within'; for example, the practitioner in Setting 1 (see section 5.3.3) who made sure she reminded other members of staff that two-year-olds cannot necessarily manage to sit through story time.

In settings with a strong ethos of lifelong learning, offering places for funded two-year-olds is viewed as another opportunity for staff development:

The two-year-olds offer has been a good thing; it has brought out the best in the practitioners as they've had to look a little bit further. It has brought out better qualities in the staff as they've had to think more about who they are. And has brought the staff on a lot more. [...] It has offered a useful route to working with parents, although we could use more training in this area.

Manager: Setting 8

The manager of Setting 9, however, wanted to see more funding for development of staff because she felt that some staff were “flat lining and in some cases dipping in knowledge” and new practitioner entrants had less knowledge than new recruits from previous years. This echoes concerns with ‘fitness for purpose’ of qualifications discussed in section 5.4.1 and underlines the need for further professional development once in post.

Discussions with practitioners during the study generally revealed enthusiasm for training; this was practitioners’ most frequently mentioned wish for the future – along with more space. As well as informal in-house training, some managers arranged on-site training delivered by training providers:

When we have our staff meetings every other month, the training provider comes in and we do it as a whole staff team. And it's a project geared around two-year-olds, how two-year-olds learn and that's going really well. And it also allows us as practitioners to reflect on how we work and are we actually adapting according to the needs of the two-year-olds.

Manager: Setting 10

But most settings made use of training offered by their local authorities, which was provided off-site and had the advantage of offering opportunities for networking, particularly if other agencies were involved in training or being trained (see section 5.3.7). Settings also took advantage of other opportunities for networking such as local support networks for Early Years Professionals (EYPs) and SENCOs:

They have regular practitioner meetings where we go and get all the latest legislation. We have regular networking meetings for EYPs. (We're calling them EYPs because that's what the group chose to call themselves). They also do locality meetings for the SENCO of the setting. You can just go along to that if you wish. But they do update their skills all of the time.

Manager, Setting 1

5.5 Summary of findings from case studies

Provision for two year olds

- Many settings already have experience in taking two-year-olds. Where settings had not previously admitted two-year-olds, they have taken advantage of local support structures and training to inform their work.

- Settings structure their provision based on age groupings but where possible use the age cut-off points flexibly to meet children's needs. Often the age groups are accommodated in different rooms, meaning that children of different ages can be separated from each other.
- Practitioners emphasised the importance of children having access to outdoor provision and settings had made alterations to buildings to make this possible.

Understandings of the two-year-olds offer

- Practitioners identified with the policy agendas underpinning the role of the two-year-old places in early intervention. Their understanding of early intervention reflected the role of early years provision in providing the foundations for later learning and the potential for early identification and support for educational and/or emotional needs.
- Practitioners emphasised that the two-year-old offer was about supporting both children *and* their families, including children and families with a range of complex needs. Some felt that the time during which children attend early years provision could proactively be used to engage with families and offer them support and advice.

How are settings working with two-year-olds?

- The ways in which settings worked with two year olds were shaped by the understandings of two-year-olds held by those working within the setting, and by the setting's particular interpretation of child-led pedagogy. There was evidence of skilled work to support children's language development, which had been the focus of professional development in many settings.
- Many two-year-olds spent their time absorbed in 'doing', moving around the space or watching others, while displaying moderate to high levels of involvement. Settings emphasised the importance of formal and informal observations to make sure that they know children well and can respond appropriately as they interact during play, and made adjustments to some daily routines, such as story time, to ensure that these met two-year-olds' needs.
- Managers made use of expertise both within and beyond the setting to support children with additional needs, but work with other agencies was patchy and often dependent on personal networks of contacts.

What makes practitioners 'good with two-year-olds'?

- Qualifications, experience and personal qualities (including patience, confidence, and a range of relational skills) were all seen as important for working with two year olds and their families.
- Case study participants also emphasised that qualifications needed to be rigorous but felt that these did not necessarily have to be at graduate level for work with two-year-olds as long as staff had access to support and expertise within the setting.
- Settings made use of distributed knowledge, skills and experience to support two-year-olds by drawing on the skills of different members of the staff team. Practitioners were enthusiastic about training and also took on responsibility to develop practice within their settings.

We return to the findings of the key informant interviews and earlier chapters of this report, that the two-year-old offer is asking a lot of from early years practitioners, but the settings in our study were responding creatively to the challenges that have arisen.

6. Summary, conclusions and implications

Our research has highlighted the complexity, the challenge and the rewards of working with two-year-olds. It also highlights how hard settings and practitioners are working to provide for them, including those taking two-year-olds for the first time, who are often working very quickly and effectively to adapt their practice and provision to meet this new challenge. This enthusiasm from the sector is reflected in the response to this research, with respondents from all sectors and many different organisations willing to give up their time to be involved.

It should be noted that the respondents (particularly to the online survey) tended to be better qualified and more experienced than we might expect from a representative sample. Many were in leadership positions and the majority were from settings with good or outstanding Ofsted grades. Our case study settings similarly had mostly good or outstanding Ofsted grades. This should be taken into account when interpreting the findings, as it is likely that our sample represent the most proactive, confident and motivated of settings and practitioners.

We would like conclude by pulling together some thoughts about what and who might be involved in good quality practice for two-year-olds and how this might be achieved,

Perspectives on quality

- Support for communication and language, personal, social and emotional development (PSED) and the pedagogical principles of child-led practice and playful learning were identified as the most critical dimensions of good quality provision for two-year-old children both in the survey and case studies.
- Despite widespread recognition of the importance of outdoor play in early years literature (e.g. Tovey, 2007; White, 2011; Waite, 2011; Knight, 2013) and in the key informant interviews, fewer online survey respondents identified movement and physical development – the third prime area of the EYFS – as a key dimension of quality (19% as compared with 43% for communication and language, and 53% for PSED). Observations in the case studies indicated that settings had taken steps to ensure that two-year-olds had easy access to outdoor areas and ample opportunities to ‘roam’ freely, but in interviews and discussion managers and practitioners put particular emphasis on communication and the development of independence and other personal, social or emotional competences. This reflects the research literature, where evidence on the importance of movement and physical play for under-threes is sparser than the evidence-base for communication and language and emotional support. Further work is needed to identify whether our findings reflect a genuine understanding by practitioners of the fact that PSED and communication and language are more critical for two-year-olds, or imply a need for further efforts to raise awareness of the importance of movement and physical development.
- Partnership with parents was recognised by participants in all elements of the research as a key component of good quality for two-year-old children, and particularly so for children who might be experiencing disadvantage or who had additional needs.

- The early years workforce was recognised as the cornerstone of quality for young children. However, our findings suggest that a more nuanced solution is required than simply recommending that all practitioners are qualified to Level 3 or promoting graduate-led provision. Rather, it is important to recognise the complexity of the journey towards becoming a skilled, confident and experienced practitioners (see following section for more detail)
- Just under half of respondents to the online survey cited ratios as being a key factor in ensuring good quality for two-year-olds, with many (80% of home-based respondents and 53% of group-based respondents) proposing ratio of 1:3 as ideal.
- Settings' understanding of quality in provision for two-year-olds was shaped by their general ethos, their interpretation of 'child-led pedagogy' and their motivation for offering funded places, for example, by prioritising children's independence, ensuring a service to the community or working on inclusion.

Initial qualifications

- There was a general consensus that a 'good level 3 practitioner' was needed for day-to-day work with two-year-olds, that the majority – and, for some staff, ideally all – of staff should be qualified to Level 3 or higher).
- Graduate-led provision was not considered a priority for this age group. However, there was also a clear recognition (particularly among key informants and some managers) of the value of degree-level study in terms of deepening understanding, increasing confidence, developing reflective practice and knowledge (particularly in relation to child development) necessary for working with two-year-olds. There was also recognition that graduates were more able to defend settings' decisions about provision in the face of potential disagreement from regulatory bodies.
- Many respondents felt that less experienced staff working directly with two-year-olds needed access to expert support, for example from a graduate, a SENCo, or an experienced level 3 practitioner. Participants recognised that not all staff would need the skills to deal with some of the more specialised aspects of working with funded two-year-olds (e.g. dealing with very challenging families); but that there should be someone within each setting (e.g. the manager) who can take this on themselves, or provide advice.
- Many participants supported the drive to up-skill the workforce, but gave a strong message about the critical importance of ensuring that qualifications and assessment procedures are robust and fit for purpose. At present there are particular concerns over the adequacy of the Level 3 qualifications in relation to the thoroughness of the different pathways and the robustness of the assessment procedures.
- Some settings with a strong community ethos sought ways to enable local people to develop skills and embark on routes to qualification.
- While majority of respondents to the online survey felt that their initial qualifications had provided effective general preparation for working with children from birth to five, there were shortcomings in terms of the more specialist knowledge and skills

needed to work with specific age groups (e.g. two-year-olds), to support children with additional needs, to engage and support families and to work with other professionals and agencies (e.g. health). In these areas, fewer than half of respondents to the online survey felt that their qualifications prepared them 'very well'. While it is not possible to cover all specialised areas of knowledge through initial training (see below), our findings do suggest that more could be done to provide the foundations for these essential areas. This may be most appropriate at graduate level, and for Level 3/4 practitioners moving into leadership positions. Participants also noted the need for appropriate content on child development, identifying this as the most important aspect of qualifications and training required to prepare the workforce to meet the needs of two-year-olds.

Experience, support and training after initial qualification: the ongoing journey

- Alongside initial qualifications, our findings also remind us that effective CPD and learning through experience (i.e. opportunities to link theory to practice) are essential to develop deeper and more specialised skills and knowledge following initial training. Respondents to the online survey identified 'staff with experience in working with two-year-olds' as most important in ensuring that children's needs can be met (more important than qualifications) and on setting visits participants spoke of 'developing a range of specialisms over the years'. Case study participants were enthusiastic about taking up opportunities for training; all settings had accessed some extra training before or early on in the admission of funded two-year-olds, and were keen to do more training to meet specific needs.
- As with qualifications, opportunities for CPD and on-the-job learning need to be high quality in order to be effective in developing the workforce. This highlights the need for continued efforts to provide:
 - high quality placement and supervised practice during initial training;
 - effective on-the-job supervision and mentoring;
 - targeted CPD and financial support for practitioners to access it.
- A significant minority practitioners responding to our survey had accessed no recent CPD in some of the key areas relevant to working with funded two-year olds. For example, 22% had not attended training on the two-year progress check in the last 5 years, 34% had attended no training on specific additional needs (e.g. autism), 20% had attended half a day or less on communication and language and 34% had attended half a day or less on engaging and supporting families. This was particularly evident among settings graded as 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement', among whom CPD participation rates were often much lower. Although the number of such settings within our study was relatively small, this nonetheless indicates a need to ensure that settings with low Ofsted grades have access to – and are accessing – CPD opportunities. We should also remember that respondents are likely to be the most proactive and motivated of practitioners. Training attendance rates in the practitioner population as a whole may be lower than indicated here.

- Successful workforce development will require top-down input from central and local government, including effective policy and funding to develop supportive frameworks, and strategies to ensure the availability and affordability of good quality CPD in the areas identified here. However it will also require a firm commitment from the sector to an ethos of professional development. It is clear that this is in place among settings responding to this survey. Further work will be required to ensure that settings leaders more generally – particularly in settings of poorer quality – are promoting a culture of improvement and making the most of any CPD opportunities on offer.

Working with families and other professionals

- Although the study settings provided many positive examples of engaging and supporting families and children with specific needs, they also highlighted the challenges inherent in this work and the demands on time, skill, commitment and experience. Managers felt that this was work their setting should be doing, but that they needed more resources to do so; and practitioners responding to the online survey reported feeling least confident in this area. Supporting disadvantaged families requires new skills of practitioners and settings, particularly those working with two-year-olds for the first time and it is essential that they receive adequate and appropriate training for the work they are being asked to do (i.e. training specifically designed for early years practitioners working with families with complex needs).
- Our findings highlight the value of interprofessional working, particularly in terms of supporting children and families with additional needs, but also the challenges. Among study settings, interagency working was not yet fully embedded and settings had met with a number of practical difficulties. Among respondents to the online survey, interagency working was not as highly valued as other dimensions of practice. Further support is needed in this area to build on the creative beginnings being trialled in a number of local authority areas, and ensure that interprofessional working becomes an everyday reality rather than an ideal.

Motivations to take funded two-year-olds

- For settings, particularly those already offering full day-care, taking funded two-year-olds represented a natural extension of their work. In some settings in the case study that had not admitted two-year-olds before, extending provision to two-year-olds was something they were already seeking to do before the two-year-olds offer was introduced, and the initiative enabled them to do this officially.
- There was some evidence from discussion with practitioners and managers that the two-year-olds offer was generating some tensions – between child-led pedagogy and school readiness, between practitioners' own views on whether two-year-olds should be at home and the policy agenda of early education as intervention – even over understandings of what two-year-olds are like. These are difficult issues which need to be thought through carefully and CPD should include opportunities for this.

Observations of practice and pedagogy

Observations of what two-year-old children were doing in settings when they were given the opportunity to choose, and of how experienced staff supported them to do this helped to add detail to the emerging picture of how high quality provision for two-year-olds might be achieved.

- Observations of two-year-olds showed clearly their tendency to move around settings for the sake of moving around. Some two-year-olds in contrast preferred to stay in one place with a favourite activity, repeatedly manipulating objects and materials; others spent time observing other children. None of these activities has a clear end point or product; the 'doing' or 'moving' is the thing, and this needs to be emphasised in training and CPD, especially when concerns about assessments (for the two years progress check for instance) might dominate.
- Observations and discussions revealed a particular kind of 'watchfulness' by practitioners as they supported two-year-olds in their independent play, giving them opportunities to pursue their interests in moving, doing or watching, anticipating problems which might interrupt the flow, but without removing all the challenge of overcoming these problems. Practitioners were maintaining a 'balance' between success and failure, stress and contentment. This is clearly skilled work, tuning in to children's needs and responses and also needs to be explored in training and CPD.
- Many practitioners in the setting we visited had taken part in training to help them support children's communication and language development, confidently putting all these strategies into practice with the two-year-olds in their care to supported secure routes in promoting language development, including those with additional needs whose language development was delayed. While applauding the success of the many forms of training to support communication development, we might now consider how this could be extended to deeper reflection to support children with atypical language development, children who speak languages other than English and how language can shape attitudes and expectations.

7. References

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1: The Funded Free Entitlement (Two-Year-Olds)

Extract from a joint briefing produced by the Local Government Association and Department for Education for leaders, lead members, chief executives and directors of communications to inform them of the new statutory duty and funding.

Available at: http://www.local.gov.uk/schools-and-education/-/journal_content/56/10180/3919621/ARTICLE#sthash.57xPcR58.dpuf

EARLY EDUCATION FOR TWO-YEAR-OLDS

What is this about? All three and four-year-olds are currently entitled to 15 hours of funded early education per week. From September 2013, this will be extended to around 20 per cent of two year olds, increasing to around 40 per cent from September 2014.

What children are eligible? From this September, children will be eligible if their families meet the income and benefits criteria used for free school meals or if they are looked after by their local authority. The criteria for those additional children, who will be able to access places from September 2014, will be announced by Government soon.

Your local authority may already provide some early education places for two-year-olds but this new programme, which becomes a statutory duty from September 2013, represents a significant expansion. The new early education places form a significant part of a wider landscape of early intervention to support families and help improve outcomes.

Why is this important? There is strong evidence that good quality early education at age two helps improve children's outcomes. But fewer children from lower income families get early education at this age (in 2010, only around 40 per cent of two year olds from families). While the main purpose of the programme is to support children's development and help put more children on the path to success in later life, it will also help parents balance their home and working lives. It may also enable some parents to take up training opportunities or help them (particularly women) back in to the work place.

How much funding will my council receive? The Government is investing £525 million in 2013-14, and around £750 million a year from 2014-15. The Government has also made available £100 million of capital funding to support local authorities in meeting the new duty. [..]

How do eligible families in my area access this provision? All eligible children will be entitled to a place and your council will decide how to best meet parental choice and demand e.g. some local authorities are using their Family Information Service as part of the process. It is up to your council how you to communicate this offer to parents and providers. It is also up to you locally to ensure sufficient places are available.

Who can provide places?

Any suitable providers such as nurseries, playgroups, childminders, Sure Start children's centres, nursery schools and nursery classes are all able to provide places. The Government launched "a basket of eligibility" which is a set of criteria which can be adapted by your council according to local discretion and needs to decide which providers to fund. Research evidence is clear that high quality early education is critical to the success of the two year old entitlement. Therefore the Government is encouraging councils that whenever possible, places should only be funded in settings that are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted.

Appendix 2: Interview questions for Key Informants

1. Can you tell me about your role?
 - How does this relate to the current policy agendas to provide places for two-year-olds?

2. Quality is regarded as central to the provision of places for two-year-olds. What do you think are the key characteristics of good quality provision?
 - What has shaped this understanding?
 - What quality assessments are you using within your local area (if relevant)?

3. One aspect of the quality of provision is the workforce; how do you feel the workforce has coped with offering two-year-old places?
 - Variation between sectors?
 - Issues relating to qualification levels?
 - Have you offered any additional training or advice to help support practitioners in offering two-year-old places?

4. What do you see as the next steps?
 - Practitioners (including those not providing the places)
 - Parents
 - Children

5. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Appendix 3: Analysis of Key informant data

All key informant interviews but one were audio-recorded and detailed notes made from the recording. The notes were then sent to the key informants to check for accuracy and to enable them to make additional comments. In most instances the notes were accepted as an accurate account of the conversation, with a few occasions where key informants supplied supplementary information, such as internal reports pertinent to the conversations.

All notes were entered into Nvivo for analysis. The first wave of analysis coded the key informant responses in relation to the questions that had been asked (see Appendix 2). The second layer of analysis adopted the principles of grounded theory to identify themes that were emerging from the data in relation to each of the questions. This thematic approach was particularly important for the two key questions:

- Quality is regarded as central to the provision of places for two-year-olds. What do you think are the key characteristics of good quality provision?
- One aspect of the quality of provision is the workforce; how do you feel the workforce has coped with offering two year old places?

To support the thematic analysis, a framework analysis using Nvivo was also adopted. The framework analysis enabled the project team to create a summary table that considered the responses to each of the themes by the individual key informants as well as a summary of each key informant's responses.

Following an initial written outline of the data being generated and to support the discussion of the findings, the recordings were revisited to check for accuracy of analysis and to identify relevant quotes from the key informants. Details of who made the comments that are quoted are limited to preserve anonymity.

Appendix 4: The Online Workforce Survey

The content (but not the formatting) of the online survey is reproduced below:

In this survey, we are interested in finding out about the qualifications and experience of **practitioners who work with two-year-old children** (in all sectors), and about what is needed to provide good quality for two-year-olds.

Our main aim is to explore implications for the expansion of the early education programme for two-year-olds, particularly in relation to quality and workforce-readiness.

If you are a practitioner, leader or manager of a setting or school providing for two-year-olds (whether or not you offer funded places) we would be very grateful if you could find time to complete our survey.

It takes around 15 to 20 minutes to complete. There are 38 questions in total (and one or two extra questions for leaders and managers). All information will be anonymous, and it will not be possible for anyone to identify your responses.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

1. By taking part in this survey, I consent to my answers being used as part of this research. I understand that, because the survey is anonymous, I will not be able to withdraw my answers at a later date because it will not be possible to identify them.

I agree to take part in this research.

I do not wish to take part in this research.

2. What kind of setting(s) do you currently work in?

Full day care Sessional Childminder Primary school Nursery school

Other (Please specify)

3. Is your setting or school?

Local authority-maintained Private (for profit)

Voluntary (non-profit) Independent/free school Other (Please specify)

4. Is your setting/school linked to a Children's Centre? (tick all that apply)

Yes - we offer on-site early years provision for a Children's Centre

Yes - we provide off-site early-years provision for a Children's Centre

Yes - other link to Children Centre (please specify)

No

Comments?

5. In which local authority is your setting/school?

6. In your most recent Ofsted inspection, how was your setting/school graded?

Outstanding Good Satisfactory or requires improvement Inadequate

7. How many places does your setting/school offer? (enter number of places per session if you are a sessional provider)

In total for children under five?

(Schools, please include any under 3s, nursery and part-time reception children)

Funded two-year-old places?

(If you offer funded places but do not set a specific number of places aside, enter 0)

Please expand on your answer to Q.7 if you would like to.

9. About how many two-year-olds does your setting/school have on register at the moment?

All two-year-olds (24-35 months?)
Funded two-year-olds?

10. What staff-child ratio do you operate in your setting or school for two-year-olds?
 1:4 1:3 (or close to this) Other. Please specify

11. Did your setting take two-year-olds before the funded two-year-olds offer began?
 Yes No

12. In a typical week, how many paid hours do you work directly with:
Two-year-olds (24 to 35 months)?
Funded two-year-olds?
(If you are a manager and do not work with this age group enter 0)

13. If you work directly with two-year-olds at the moment, did you work with this age group before your setting/school began to offer funded two-year-old places?
 Yes No Not applicable

14. How many years of experience do you have working with children aged 5 and under?
(Please include paid work only. If you are not sure exactly, estimate to the nearest year. Years do not need to be consecutive)
 10 or more years 5-10 years 2-4 years 1-2 years Less than a year

15. How many years of experience do you have working with two-year-olds? (Please include paid work only. If you are not sure exactly, estimate to the nearest year. Years do not need to be consecutive)
 10 or more years 5-10 years 2-4 years 1-2 years Less than a year

16. What is the level of the highest childcare related qualification you hold?
 Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 Level 4
 Level 5 Level 6 Level 7 or 8 Other (e.g. overseas qualification)
 I do not hold a childcare-related qualification

17. Do you hold any of the following qualifications or statuses? (tick all that apply)
 Early Years Professional Status Qualified Teacher Status

18. Are you working towards any of the following qualifications or statuses? (tick all that apply)
 Relevant degree Qualified Teacher Status Early Years Teacher

19. How well do you feel your qualifications (e.g. NVQs, diploma, EYPS) have prepared you for:
Working with children aged from birth to five
Working with two-year-olds specifically?
Engaging and/or supporting families?
Completing the two-year-old progress check?
Working with children with additional needs
(e.g. with special educational needs, disabilities, or who speak English as a second language)
Working with other professionals and agencies (e.g. health professionals)?
(response choice for each: Very well : To some extent : Not at all well)

In this section, we are interested in training you have received in addition to your qualifications which would help you to support children with specific needs (e.g. SEN, disabilities, challenging behaviour, children with language delay or who speak English as an additional language).

Please tell us roughly how many hours/days of training you have completed in the following areas both within and outside your institution.

Response choices for each:

*More than 10 days : 5-10 days : 2-4 days : 5-8 hours (Whole day) : 1-4 hours (Half a day):
None.*

In-house / External (outside your setting/school)

20. In the last 5 years, how much language and communication (e.g. ICAN, ECAT) training have you completed in total? (Please add up all hours completed. If you have moved settings in the last 5 years, include training completed while you were at your previous setting)

21. In the last 5 years, how much behaviour management training have you completed in total? (Please add up all hours completed. If you have moved settings in the last 5 years, include training completed while you were at your previous setting)

22. In the last 5 years, how much SENCO training have you completed in total? (Please add up all hours completed. If you have moved settings in the last 5 years, include training completed while you were at your previous setting).

23. In the last 5 years, how much training on specific needs (e.g. autism) have you completed in total? (Please add up all hours completed. If you have moved settings in the last 5 years, include training completed while you were at your previous setting)

24. In the last 5 years, how much Portage training have you completed in total? (Please add up all hours completed. If you have moved settings in the last 5 years, include training completed while you were at your previous setting)

*25. Are you a SENCO or InCO (Inclusion Co-ordinator) for your setting or school?
 Yes, SENCO Yes, InCO Both SENCO and InCO Neither*

*26. In the last 5 years, what training have you undertaken to specifically prepare you for:
Working with two-year-olds?*

Engaging and/or supporting families?

Completing the two-year-old progress check?

Working with other professionals and agencies (e.g. health)?

27. How confident do you feel that you can (or could)...

Support the learning needs of two-year-olds in general?

Support the learning needs of two-year-olds with additional needs (e.g. language delay)?

Work with and support families who may be challenging or have particular needs?

Complete the two-year-old progress check?

Work with and support parents and families in general?

Work with other professionals and agencies (e.g. health)?

Response choice: Very confident : Confident : Developing confidence : Not at all

28. In areas where you feel less confident, do you feel you have opportunities available to you which would help you to develop your knowledge, skills and/or experience? (tick all that

apply)

- Yes, external training
- Yes, support or supervision from others in my setting (e.g. manager, EYP, my supervisor or mentor)
- Yes, in house training or staff meetings
- No, not currently
- Other. *Please give details*

29. *In relation to working with funded two-year-old children, what are (or would be) your main professional development needs?*

30. *What do you think are the most important dimensions of quality for two-year-olds? Tick your top three. If you think we have missed an aspect which you would include in your top three, please add it under 'other'.*

- A good quality physical environment (e.g. ample space, outdoor area, appropriate resources)
 - Effective routines (e.g. changing, sleeping, mealtimes)
 - Opportunities for movement and physical development
 - Support for communication and language
 - Support for personal, social and emotional development
 - Reliable and continuous key person
 - Partnership with parents
 - Planning and provision which are adapted to meet children's individual needs
 - Inter-professional working, for example links with health
- Other (*Please give details*)

31. *Please think about the features of a setting or school (not just your own) which help to ensure that the needs of two-year-olds can be met effectively. What do you think is most important? Tick your top three. If you think we have missed an aspect which you would include in your top three, please add it under 'other'.*

- Provision which is led by a graduate
 - An overall well-qualified staff team (e.g. 75% of staff at Level 3 or higher)
 - Staff who have experience working with two-year-olds
 - Staff who have training in meeting additional needs including SEN and disabilities
 - Staff who are skilled in engaging and supporting families
 - Strong leadership within the setting/school
 - Effective supervision and mentoring for staff
 - Having a good ratio of adults to children (e.g. 1:4 or higher)
 - A good quality physical environment (e.g. ample space, outdoor area, appropriate resources)
- Other (*Please give details*)

32. *The legal ratio for two-year-olds is 1:4. What do you think is the ideal ratio for meeting the needs of funded two-year-olds?*

- 1:6 1:5 1:4 1:3 Other (*please specify*)

33. *Now please think about the qualifications and training needed to prepare practitioners to work with two-year-olds. Which aspects do you think are most important? Tick your top three. If you think we have missed an aspect which you would include in your top three, please add it under 'other'.*

- Training in child development/ theory
- Training in practice/pedagogy
- Good quality practical placements when training (i.e. opportunities to link theory and practice)

- Training in how to support children with additional needs (including planning for individual needs)
 - Training in how to engage and support families
 - Training which encourages reflective practice
 - Training in interprofessional working (e.g. working with health)
- Other (Please give details)

34. In your view, what would most improve quality for two-year-olds in your setting/school?
 35. And what are the main barriers to this (if any)?

36. In your view, what would most improve quality for two-year-olds nationally?
 37. And what are the main barriers to this (if any)?

38. What is your role in your setting or school?

- Practitioner/teacher
 - Head teacher
 - Manager
 - Supervisor (e.g. room leader, deputy, Foundation Stage co-ordinator)
- Other (please specify)

39. How many practitioners in your setting work directly with two-year-olds?

In Total:

40. Of the staff you listed in Q39, how many are qualified to Level 3,4 or 5?

41. Of the staff you listed in Q39, how many have a relevant Level 6 graduate qualification (e.g. EYPS,QTS)?

42. Are the funded two-year-olds in your setting or school catered for in the same group or room as other children (e.g. unfunded two-year-olds, or children of other ages)?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

43. It can be difficult to recruit the quality of staff you need to cater effectively for two-year-old children. Please rate the skills of the team you currently have working with two-year-olds:

Understanding of child development/theory relevant to this age group

Practice/pedagogical knowledge and skills relevant to this age group

Experience working with two-year-olds

Capacity for reflection

Skills in engaging and supporting families

Understanding of how to plan for and meet additional needs including SEN & disabilities

Skills in interprofessional working (e.g. working with health)

Response choice: Highly skilled : Average skills : Low skills

44. To what extent do you think that current Level 3 qualifications are fit for purpose in preparing early years practitioners to offer good quality for two-year-old children?

- Very
- Somewhat
- Not at all
- Not sure/don't know

Comments

45. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Appendix 5: Manager's interview and tour

Interviews were carried out with whoever was managing provision for two-year-olds in the setting; in some cases, this led to a group interview because management was distributed, but we have generally opted to attribute comments to 'Manager' to retain confidentiality. Interviews took place in the setting and we also asked managers take us on a tour of the setting as seen from a two-year-old's perspective, except for Setting 11, where a late change of appointment made this unfeasible and a telephone interview was conducted instead, and Settings 9 and 10 where setting tours and observations are to take place at a later date.

The questions that shaped the interviews appear in the topic guide below. We audio-recorded conversations and returned transcripts to managers to check for accuracy to enable them to make additional comments. In most instances transcripts were accepted as an accurate account of the conversation, with some clarification of mistakes in transcriptions, and provision of useful additional materials such as detailed plans of the setting.

Transcriptions were entered into NVivo for analysis, along with data from observations and discussions with practitioners (see Appendix 6 and 7 below). Overall, the analysis still fell within the 'what, who and how' structure which had emerged from the literature review. Managers' comments were coded in relation to the questions that had been asked and the framework that had emerged from analysis of the key informant interviews, with subcategories added as new themes emerged. We also collected together anomalies – things that respondents reported which either did not fit our framework or their understanding of the spirit of the two-year-olds offer. These are reported mainly under section 5.1.3.

During analysis, the recordings were revisited to check for accuracy of transcription, particularly when relevant quotes from the respondents were used to illustrate points in the report.

Topic Guide for Managers

6. Can you briefly tell me a little bit about your setting?
 - Overall number of children on roll, number of two-year-olds, number of funded two-year-olds.
7. What do you understand to be **the purpose of providing funded places for two-year-olds?**
 - prompt for relation to setting's own vision, and local and national policy objectives
8. Quality is regarded as central to the provision of places for two-year-olds. **What do you think are the key characteristics of good quality provision for two-year-olds?**
 - Is this view of quality different when looking at other age groups?
9. One aspect of the quality of provision is the workforce. **Could you tell me what skills you think are needed to work with two-year-olds?**
 - Is graduate status important?
 - Do you feel that existing qualifications are fit for purpose? What amendments (if any) would you make to existing qualifications?
 - Do you feel additional, specific training on working with two-year-olds is needed?

- i. Is there a need for other types of additional training (e.g. working with parents, SEN, working in partnership)
 - What role do you feel experience plays in the skill set of the workforce?
10. Thinking about the future of the provision of places for two-year-olds, what do you see as the next steps for:
- Policy makers/ Local decision-makers
 - Practitioners
 - Regulators
 - Your organisation
11. Questions for tour (unless answered already): How have you organised the provision of funded places for two-year-olds?
- What challenges have you experienced? (prompt for sufficiency of places, match to location of families eligible for funded places, Ofsted criteria, workforce issues, including provision of training for leaders/practitioners).
 - What have you found useful in meeting these challenges, or supporting this initiative in general?
 - What impact has this initiative had (if any) on provision for two-year-olds not eligible for funded place, (prompt for comments from parents or other settings).
 - What impact has this initiative had on the rest of your provision?
12. Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Appendix 6: Observations

Observations were carried out by two members of the research team in six of the settings contacted during the study. Researchers drew a plan of room(s) and outside areas before starting observations, and paid particular attention to areas of interest that had arisen following the interview and tour with the manager. Each observation lasted an hour and in all but Setting 7 (childminder) these followed a schedule of five minutes focused on adult(s) interacting with two-year-old(s) followed by five minutes in which the observer's attention zoomed out to track what all two-year-olds were doing and where they were doing this. This pattern was repeated for the whole hour as closely as possible, given the context of observing small children some of whom wanted to interact with the observer, and some who clearly didn't want an observer looking at them at all. For each five-minute interval, researchers added a judgement of level of involvement either for individual children or all two-year-olds, depending on what they had been able to observe, using Laever's involvement scale for observing babies and infants (Leavers 2005). On this scale, 1 represents little or no involvement, and 5 intense involvement. It is not possible to treat these judgments arithmetically, because of the variability in length of time in which individual children were observed within the five-minute periods. Instead, they offered a means of discussing variation in children's involvement across sessions and between activities.

Observations in the childminder's setting followed a different pattern, as it was not feasible for total research activity to extend beyond one hour. Observations therefore ran currently with the interview and took the form of narrative observations and recorded interactions between childminder and children.

Observations were included in the analysis as described in Appendix 5, with interpretative comments added to highlight the import of particular observations.

Observation Schedule:

Room/group		Location(s)	Date/Time observed	Observer	
Activities			Staffing	Involvement level	
Time	What practitioner/s is/are doing / What 2yos are doing		2 yo	others	

Appendix 7. Discussions with practitioners who work with two-year-olds

We had intended to carry out focus groups with practitioners following observations but in practice this proved difficult to arrange, except Setting 4 where the setting gave over their weekly staff meeting to enable a focus group to take place. Elsewhere we fitted in discussions with practitioners around lunch times (Setting 5) or individual interviews while the manager covered for them on the floor (Setting 1), or, in the remaining settings, discussion while practitioners were on the floor but able to spare a few moments to talk. The topic guide for our discussions appears below, but it was not possible to cover all questions with practitioners who were on the floor and in these case we concentrated on questions 3 and 4, with brief background information from question 1 where possible, often supplemented by information from the interview with the manager.

Focus groups and individual interviews were audio recorded and returned to setting to check for accuracy, but elsewhere notes were taken and checked at the time with participants. Both transcripts and notes were included in the NVivo analysis described in Appendix 5.

Topic Guide for practitioners

1. **About yourself.** What is your role in this setting? What experience of working with younger children, including two-year-olds? Have you had any training to support this work?
2. **About the setting.** How is provision for two-year-olds (funded and unfunded) organised in your setting?
3. **Daily experience.** How are you involved in working with two-year-olds, both funded and unfunded? What works well? What doesn't work so well? What would help?
4. **Observations.** I noticed during the session I observed. Could you tell me a bit more about what was happening? How did you know what to do to do? (probe for experience, training, role-modelling?). Was this an unusual event?
5. **Understanding of initiative.** What do you understand to be the purpose of providing funded places for two-year-olds?
 - a. Do you think it is meeting these objectives?
 - b. What effect is it having on the rest of the setting (if any)? (prompt for relation to setting's own vision, and local and national policy objectives)
6. **Future directions.** What would you like to see happening to support your work with younger children? What would help? What might get in the way? If you could design a top quality environment what would it look like and who would be working in it?

Appendix 8: Background information to regional setting visits

The fieldwork has been carried out in four different regions of the country: a city in South England, a large rural county in South England, a small rural county in the North of England, and a London borough.

The following information has been gathered from two main tools: the childcare sufficiency assessment relevant for each of the areas in which the research has been carried out and the indices of multiple deprivation calculated for each area. These provide the context to understand the conditions of each of the settings.

The childcare sufficiency assessment (CSA) is aimed at identifying gaps in service and areas where specific issues need to be addressed. Desktop research and consultations were carried out to assess the need for childcare. These were informed by information gained from parents and carers as well as providers, employers, stakeholders and children's centres managers.

The Childcare Act 2006 (section 6) places a series of duties on local authorities to provide sufficient, high quality and flexible childcare and work in partnership with NHS and Jobcentres to improve outcomes for children and reduce poverty.

The indices of multiple deprivation, published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (2010), were originally designed to target policy intervention aimed at allocating funds and resources in the most deprived areas of the country. This was the case for the planning and development of the Sure Start Programme. In 2010, 32482 neighbourhoods in England have been ranked according to seven different indicators of deprivation: income, employment, health and disability, education skills and training, barriers to housing and services, crime and living environment.

City, South England

The city comprises six locality areas. According to the CSA published in 2011, deprivation is significantly higher than the national average; 41% of children and young people and 46% of the children who have a SEN (special educational need) live in the southwest and northwest localities. These have been identified as major priority areas for childcare needs.

The research has been carried out in four sites: one community pre-school, two children's centres and a primary school. Three out of the four settings visited by the researchers are situated in the southwest locality within the city, with one setting among the 2% most disadvantaged areas in England, with the lowest scores for income, employment and health.

In terms of population, the city has experienced a steady growth in birth rates since 2001, with a total of 3460 births predicted in 2014. The areas that have been most affected by birth rates are also the most deprived localities in the southwest and northwest of the city. This has important implications for the children and young people living in these localities as the analysis reveals that they are 'significantly disadvantaged' (ibidem: 4).

Data gathered through questionnaires distributed across parents, carers, children's centres manager and early years teams, has highlighted insufficiencies in childcare places in the two of the areas where settings from the study are located. In general, there are insufficient

places for children under two, childcare for secondary school age children and holiday places for special needs children. It is stated that childcare in the city is expensive and does not offer flexible hours, meaning that parents share the childcare by working different hours or due to the unemployment of one partner (ibidem: 7) or ask family members or older children to help. The main reasons provided by respondents for not using formal education were that they did not need formal education (not working) or that their children were too young or too old to attend. The cost of childcare was considered prohibitive and the lack of arrangements for children with additional or special needs was also pointed out.

Since the last assessment in 2008, childcare places in the day-care sector have increased, particularly for two-year-olds. Five new day-care providers opened and three closed. Three out of school clubs opened and four closed. The number of schools delivering breakfast and after school activities has increased. However, the demand is still unmet in the most disadvantaged areas of the city. Funding from Aiming High for Disabled Children and Disabled Children's access to Childcare supported leisure activities and the inclusion of disabled children into mainstream childcare.

Large rural county in South England

The research has been carried out in three different settings: a rural pre-school in the North of the region; a primary school and a childminder's home in the South West in or near the largest urbanised area in the region.

This is a large rural county comprising nine towns with a total population of 532,000, which is predicted to increase by 19% between 2011 and 2030. The county has one of the highest rates of unemployment in the South. Several areas are within the 10% most deprived in England and experience high levels of deprivation with transport and barriers to housing being the key-factors. In contrast, some coastal localities in the north of the region are among the wealthiest in the country.

The data for the most recent CSA published in 2013 have been collected through a range of both qualitative and quantitative methods including questionnaire surveys, focus groups and face-to-face interviews with parents and carers, as well as a detailed analysis based on data provided by the local Council.

Free early learning for two-years-olds is being rolled out across the country. The number of two-year-olds eligible for a free early learning place was 1,054 (DWP: 2013). In September 2013, the county funded 887 children to access a place, around 84% of the eligible number, which is 13% higher than the national average. In September 2014, 3600 children were eligible, placing a considerable pressure on the 'under 5 ' age range. In the autumn term 2013 early learning for two-year-olds was delivered in group (PVI) settings with relatively few in schools and childminding settings.

From the survey, respondents identify an overall lack of childcare arrangements in the east and west of the county with the greatest need in the pockets of highest unemployment. As stated in the CSA (84), 'these areas would not have traditionally been seen as sustainable markets for the private sector. Potentially the introduction of the free entitlement for two-year-olds will support the sustainability of settings, along with the increase in birth rate'. Use of childcare was highest among the three- to four-old range, while it was lowest in the youngest (birth-to-one years) and oldest (11-14 years) groups. Use of childminding was

highest for the youngest age range of children: almost a third of parents and carers with a child aged from birth to one, while use of day nurseries cover the 54% of the responses for the birth-to-one age and 72% of the 'two years' group. The use of family members to provide childcare was relatively high across all age ranges.

The most commonly cited reason for using childcare was out of necessity due to work, training or study, mentioned by 63% of the respondents, while opportunities for socialisation and personal growth were also quoted by 45% and 39% of the participants respectively.

Sixty three per cent of the respondents were satisfied with the cost of childcare arrangements, with 91% being satisfied with the quality of the childcare provided. Among users, 38 % of the respondents (88 subjects) felt that current arrangements for childcare did not meet their needs. The biggest single barrier to accessing additional childcare was cost, which sits in contrast with the high rates of satisfaction for childcare costs expressed above.

Small rural county in the North of England

This constitutes the largest borough in the region with a high percentage of rural areas and a total population of approximately 137,600, predominantly of white ethnicity, with a 0.2 % of Pakistani group and 0.15 % of White and Asian (CSA, 2011). The highest proportion of employment is in the public administration, education and health sector (28.4 %), while manufacturing accounts for almost the 19% of the labour market. In 2010 5,168 people received Job Seekers Allowance, which is a rate of 6.0% higher than the percentage prospected for the North East and Great Britain.

This strand of the project is based in two PVI (private, voluntary and independent) institutions both situated in the northeast of the region: the first located on a learning campus which includes a primary school and a Sure Start children's centre; the second is a nursery.

The first setting is ranked as the least deprived among all the sites in which the research has been conducted in particular for education (15351st position) and living environment (30,487th position). On the contrary, the second setting is among the 3% most deprived areas in England particularly for employment (113rd position) and health (588 rank) with a total score of 726, while is regarded as among the least deprived localities for barriers to housing and service (32,212nd position out of 32482 neighbourhoods considered).

The childcare sufficiency assessment published in 2011 highlighted that there is 'vacant provision for all type of childcare across the borough' (ibidem: 165). The main barrier to usage seems to be cost. School nursery provision is sufficient, while parents would like more day nursery provision for children under twos than the one supplied. Demand is higher than supply for childminding settings for the under twos in the east and centre parts of the county. The demand for pre-school playgroup provision is modest. The most significant gap between parents' childcare demand and current supply seems to be for holiday childcare, especially in central localities. Free entitlements are used in the three to four age range and high levels of interest is shown from parents of two-year-olds.

London Borough

The settings visited comprise two nursery schools, one private and one independent, both situated in the same district, which consists of a multi-ethnic community with a high percentage of African and Caribbean groups.

According to the Child Poverty Reduction Strategy 2011-2014 the borough is placed 10th among London Local Authorities with the highest number of children and young people in poverty, and is ranked at the 15th place for the UK.

The first setting is situated in the top 6% most disadvantaged areas, with a rank of 800 for income; the second setting is located in one of the 10% most disadvantaged area with a significantly high percentage of crime (594th position out of 32482 neighbourhoods considered).