



Nursery World and NDNA join forces for a behind-the-scenes column

COULDN'T MAKE IT UP? Outrage that the DfE has included private school fees in its 'record' levels of state school spending has led the sector to question the '£6bn-a-year by 2020' it regularly quotes in relation to early years. Sources say that unlike the OECD figures quoted on schools, the £6bn has always been quoted as Government spend and is unlikely to contain parents' average fees.

CHEEKY TIPPLE A reception was held at the House of Commons on 11 September to mark the first year of the 30 hours programme. Childcare minister Nadhim Zahawi did find time to attend – unlike at a recent event on problems with the policy. A DfE spokesman blamed diary clashes for the latter.

CONFERENCE CALL While some councils have now started using the word 'funded' in relation to 30 hours, the Prime Minister resolutely stuck to the script in her conference speech. 'We know how hard people work to make ends meet and provide for their families... it's for them that we cut income tax, introduced a National Living Wage, extended free childcare.' Ken McArthur, formerly of Polly Anna's Day Nursery in York, said, 'What a disappointment to only get the tiniest mention and at the same time insult parents and early years providers' intelligence by using the discredited term "free"!'

UNIVERSAL HEADACHE In response to a call for feedback for a Select Committee hearing about Universal Credit and childcare costs on 24 October, the NDNA has been informed that the new benefit causes problems for settings trying to help parents claim back money from their childcare costs. One nursery said, '[The DWP] asks for specific amounts on a month-by-month basis when most providers work out yearly fees and only issue one invoice.' Another member said her parents had spent the money they had claimed back – but not on childcare.

Wider scope

What can settings do to attract more men, as well as more people from diverse ethnic backgrounds – and why is this important? **Charlotte Goddard** reports



In the UK, 49 per cent of the population are men. Yet in an average nursery, just 2-3 per cent of the workforce is male. The DfE hasn't even – until now – collected statistics on the number of men in childcare. Following the *Workforce Strategy*, which flagged this as an issue, and the men in childcare campaign, it will collect this data for the next instalment of its bi-annual survey, due in November. When it comes to ethnic minorities, there is limited data on them too.

Chrissy Meleady, chief executive of Early Years Equality, says, 'The early years workforce requires a diverse range of people and talents to meet the multiple and holistic needs of children, and to reflect diversity in our multicultural identity. This also aligns to the duty to give due regard to British values.'

Her organisation successfully challenged one such policy, and British Sign Language is now included as an alternative to GCSE English in early years apprenticeships. 'But,' she adds, 'enhancing this ethical case for diverse recruitment is a compelling business case: a more diverse workforce has been proven to be one that will increase organisational performance by providing multiple, fresh perspectives and experiences, leading to greater innovation, higher-quality service delivery and better risk management.'

Government support is lacking, says Ms

Meleady. 'There is a policy deficit in regard to addressing racial, disability, LGBT+, gender, religion and beliefs, diverse languages, age and socioeconomic class and other diversity areas in the early years workforce. Along with this deficit there are even long-held policies that seek to impede the inclusion of diverse people into the workforce.'

Sandra Kerr, race equality director at Business in the Community, says nurseries, like other employers, should aim to reflect the communities they serve. 'With one in four UK primary school pupils coming from a BAME background, having a nursery workforce with employees from diverse backgrounds can be beneficial in many ways,' she says. 'For example, there may be culturally sensitive issues which carers from similar backgrounds may better understand, such as dietary requirements for children from certain religious backgrounds or making hand lotion available to a black child after she has washed her hands.'

However, she admits that in some circumstances an ethnically diverse workforce may not be possible. 'That's why culturally sensitive childcare should be part of training for all nursery employees.'

In practice

Many early years settings report being caught in an endless cycle of recruitment. Managers

talk about the same CVs popping up continuously as a limited pool of candidates circle between nurseries. Making attempts to widen this may seem futile if the pool is small, but having a recruitment policy which reflects diversity is good practice and could throw up new candidates who could be trained up in-house.

To this end, Ms Kerr suggests looking local. 'Employers could look at the demographic data of the residential and primary school population in their area to get an idea of what the talent pool they draw from should look like, and consider posting advertisements in local venues or media outlets used by the group they are looking to attract in order to reach the widest talent pool possible,' she says.

Settings should also ensure that their recruitment advertisements state positively that they actively and positively welcome people from diverse backgrounds and with disabilities. 'The term "positive action" refers to legal measures that are designed to correct existing imbalances caused by past discrimination,' says Ms Meleady. 'Positive action can be taken to encourage people of a particular under-represented group to take advantage of opportunities for training or work experience schemes, or to encourage them to apply for a particular type of employment. It can only be done when a group has been identified as under-represented in a certain area of employment.'

Positive action may include steps such as targeting training programmes or job advertisements to a particular group. 'The Equality Act 2010 extends positive action to recruitment and promotion decisions,' explains Ms Meleady. 'This means that provided two candidates are equally suited for a vacancy, an organisation is allowed to

select the candidate who is under-represented in that organisation based on their diversity profile. No organisation is required to do so.'

Adverts should clearly state employers' commitments to making reasonable adjustments so employees do not experience any barriers to being effective in their roles.

Men in childcare

The issue of recruiting more men into childcare has been particularly under the spotlight recently. Past research has found that only 2 per cent of the workforce are male; Ceeda research recently found that the figure stood at 5 per cent.

Last year the government set up a task and finish group chaired by David Wright, owner of Paint Pots Nurseries, Southampton, to look at the issue. The group compiled a report for the DfE putting forward a number of suggestions, but has been disappointed with its reception.

'There is a history of successive governments commissioning reports, only to subsequently ignore the recommendations,' says Mr Wright, whose book *Men in Early Years Settings: Building A Mixed Gender Workforce* is set to be published later this year. 'It feels as if the Government is only willing to spend money if we can demonstrate that increasing the number of men working in childcare will have a positive outcome for children's learning, where it is actually about improving diversity in the workplace being a good thing, as it is important that boys and girls interact with men and women.'

In response, a Department for Education spokesperson says it is 'working with the sector to increase the diversity of those working in the early years through our

Workforce Strategy' and says it has set up a 'Gender Diversity group' (which Mr Wright sits on) to lead this work. More information will be available 'in due course'.

Proposals put forward by the task and finish group include:

- the launch of a national recruitment campaign with an emphasis on diversity, as well as improvements in data collection, such as requiring Ofsted to assess workforce diversity
- measures to encourage diversity such as a kite-mark scheme
- measures to improve early years training, such as offering men subsidised or free places on courses
- setting up a national 'men in early years' association.

It also suggests carrying out research on the impact of diverse workplaces. 'Many of these items will need more work in terms of definition, responsibility, cost, timescale and implementation,' says Mr Wright. 'The DfE have responded to me to say that they continue to support our proposals, which they are taking forward in alignment with other departments' initiatives.'

Own devices

The sector continues to take action on a local basis: the London Early Years Foundation is running its own Men in Childcare campaign, for example. Most recently, The Fatherhood Institute has joined with Lancaster University to investigate how men are recruited, supported and retained in the early years workforce. The programme, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, will use the evidence it gathers to produce a theoretical rationale and practical resources to enhance efforts to create more gender-diverse and gender-sensitive approaches.

'One of the first things we are doing is a knowledge exchange event with some early years people in Norway,' says Jeremy Davies, head of communications at The Fatherhood Institute. 'We have identified four hubs in the UK where there is already work happening around gender diversity, and a leader from each hub will come to Norway and share thinking about the challenges they face and what they have been doing.'

While there is some momentum towards improving diversity among individual settings or groups of settings in England, Mr Wright believes there is still a need for central support and funding. 'The call to the Government is to give a lead to this area with explicit support, co-ordination and aspiration set at a national level,' he says. 'We believe that unless someone steps up to do this, those of us who are well-meaning but under-resourced and not in positions of influence will continue to plough our own furrows, attract some interest but ultimately find that our efforts are ineffectual.' ■

case study: Sheffield Children's Centre

'Sheffield Children's Centre is one of the most diverse settings in the UK, from its service user base to its staff and its governance,' says Chrissy Meleady, chief executive of Early Years Equality and former chair of Sheffield Children's Centre.

'Some 31 community languages are spoken, the gender mix is half-male and half-female, and the staff team comprises members of the trans and gender fluid community, LGB and disabled staff. There is a diverse range of people of various religions and those from the secular community. Diversity in age and class is also evident.'

The centre undertakes recruitment drives specifically targeting local communities. It holds open days and taster sessions, and provides

recruitment packs in different languages, including in Braille. Staff take part in roadshows to local schools.

The Sheffield Children's Centre training wing delivers training to specific groups, such as Asian women, which then feeds into mainstream training and support.

'The centre has at times had people objecting to diversity in the setting, including objections to men in childcare, to the diverse, racially mixed staff, and even on occasion people objecting to staff who speak with a Sheffield accent and who are working class!' says Ms Meleady. 'The centre takes the view that diversity, inclusion, anti-discrimination and equality are morally right, and they are a prerequisite in early years services.'