

Gaps in the market

The new About Early Years Sector Skills Survey finds soft skills are more problematic than maths and English, while recruitment remains a problem for many. By **Hannah Crown**

Skills gaps by role

Gaps in generic skills	Percentage of all settings	Percentage of all settings with skills gaps	Senior practitioner level 3 or above	Level 3 practitioner	Level 2 practitioner or below	Apprentice	Support role
Interest and enthusiasm	26%	56%	7%	27%	26%	13%	6%
Problem solving	31%	67%	12%	27%	30%	20%	8%
Resilience and self confidence	25%	55%	12%	24%	23%	15%	5%
Listening & verbal communication	24%	51%	8%	18%	24%	12%	6%
Team working	21%	46%	8%	20%	18%	13%	6%
Basic ICT skills	11%	24%	3%	10%	10%	4%	5%
Advanced ICT skills	12%	26%	7%	11%	8%	6%	7%
Data protection	11%	24%	5%	10%	10%	9%	2%
Written English	18%	40%	5%	19%	18%	4%	6%
Functional maths	10%	21%	3%	6%	11%	6%	4%
Higher level maths	9%	20%	5%	8%	8%	6%	3%

Taken from the 55 per cent of settings reporting skills gaps

SKILLS GAPS

More than one in two settings (55 per cent) report skills gaps in their existing workforce, a huge proportion compared with the 13 per cent of employers across the wider economy. An estimated 35,600 early years staff (11 per cent) have skills gaps, compared with 4 per cent across all sectors.

'Soft' skills and attitudes are particularly lacking (see table above). A lack of interest/enthusiasm, problem solving, resilience and self-confidence, listening and communication and team working are cited in more cases than formally-taught skills such as maths and English.

The biggest gap was in problem-solving skills, cited by 67 per cent of settings with gaps, with 27 per cent identifying this as an issue with Level 3 staff without senior responsibilities. This was also an issue for 12 per cent of staff at more senior levels.

Other issues for Level 3s were a lack of interest and enthusiasm (also identified by 26 per cent of settings). Resilience and self-confidence are cited by 55 per cent of those settings with skills gaps – with nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of Level 3 staff lacking these.

Apprentices fare better than Level 2 and 3 staff in all areas

surveyed, apart from maths where they are equal.

Methods and practice of supporting learning, and knowledge of stages of development were sector-specific skills gaps for over half of settings.

More than half of providers (55 per cent) reporting a skills gap said it resulted in an increased workload, while 39 per cent said it increased stress.

For 42 per cent, it made maintaining standards harder, and around one in ten said it meant less SEND provision.

RECRUITMENT

Current picture

One in three settings is now recruiting (compared with nearly one in two last year), looking to fill 14,300 posts, a 42 per cent decrease in vacancies. Most (61 per cent) are for Level 3

roles – see chart, right.

The proportion of staff qualified to Level 3 or above increased from 71 per cent in 2017 to 76 per cent in 2018 (Ceeda estimates remain below DfE estimates of 81 per cent).

So why do staff leave?

The table (below left), based on responses from employers with one or more staff leaving, echoes previous findings citing low pay.

According to Jo Verrill, author of the study and Ceeda managing director, 'the high proportion of employers (26 per cent) losing staff because they've found jobs closer to home suggests an unwillingness to travel, which is likely to be related to pay. The implication is that providers are confined to fishing from a relatively small geographic pool.'

She added, 'The early years workforce is predominantly female and feedback flagged challenges in retaining staff after maternity leave, linked to low pay rates and the high cost of childcare. Along with other reasons, this contributed to the 9 per cent of employers who had lost staff because they decided to take a career break.'

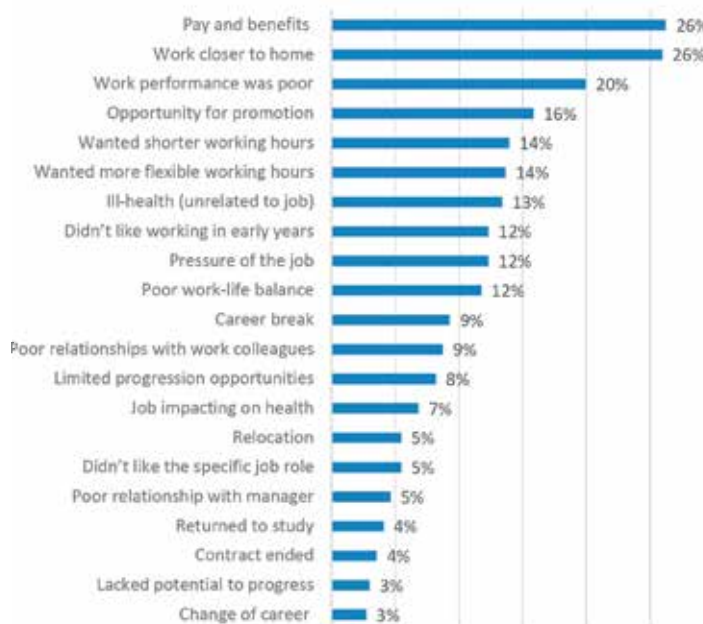
The fact that one in five employers cited poor work performance of the staff member will be of serious concern and is linked, says Dr Verrill, to the high average incidence of internal skills gaps in the sector.

Hard to replace

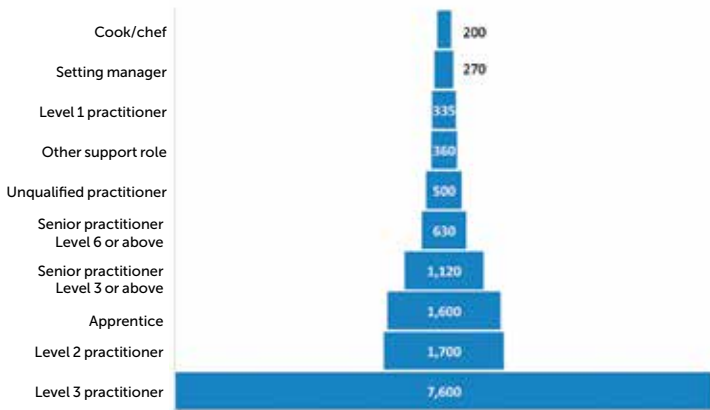
Seventy-seven per cent of settings say vacancies are hard to fill, compared with 84 per cent in 2017. One in four providers (24 per cent) has hard-to-fill vacancies, treble the figure for all employers (8 per cent).

Lack of qualifications of candidates is the principal

Reasons reported by providers for one or more staff member leaving in the past 12 months

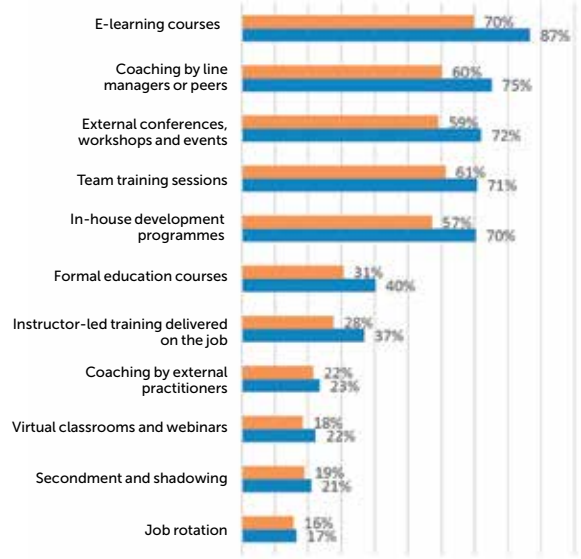


Estimated staff vacancies in 2018



Source: AEY Sector Skills Survey 2018
Figures rounded

Training methods used in the past 12 months and planned use in the next 12 months



Plan to use in next 12 months Used in last 12 months

Source: AEY Sector Skills Survey 2018

reason vacancies are hard to fill (78 per cent), followed by lack of softer skills – 17 per cent said there were few applicants with the right attitude.

The strategies employers use to tackle these difficulties reflect the fact they are fishing from a small pool of candidates.

Half of providers with hard-to-fill vacancies said they were recruiting people with potential but no experience, while 35 per cent said they were recruiting people without qualifications. The most popular strategy was to ask staff to recommend jobs to friends (55 per cent).

Business-focused solutions included upskilling existing staff (44 per cent) and developing apprenticeship schemes (38 per cent). Less positive ones included increasing the use of overtime (37 per cent), while a

significant proportion were paying for bank and agency staff.

Impact

More than half of settings with hard-to-fill vacancies say work has become more stressful (56 per cent), while recruitment and payroll costs are rising (51 per cent and 49 per cent).

One in five reported that team qualification levels have fallen.

TURNOVER

Unlike previous studies which have put the sector's staff turnover rate at about a third, this data puts average turnover at 15 per cent.

Factors influencing turnover include the size of the setting, with single sites winning out over chains with the lowest rate (14 per cent). The study found no significant difference across regions.

Keeping staff

Managers say they are using a plethora of positive strategies to try to entice staff to stay.

More than two in five providers with staff leaving in the past 12 months said they were providing more CPD to existing staff, the most common response by far. Nearly a third increased pay (29 per cent), while the same proportion found new ways of consulting with staff.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Training is a requirement of the EYFS so it is no surprise that 88 per cent of providers had

arranged off-the-job training in the past 12 months.

Online training is the most popular (see table above), followed by coaching from line managers and external events. All forms of training are set to reduce over the next year, perhaps a reflection of increased costs, which is concerning if it is a key method of retaining staff and filling skills gaps.

UPSKILLING

The proportion of early years providers with one member of staff training for a Level 3 qualification is 55 per cent. This was dependent on size of setting, however, with 29 per cent having no employees pursuing a qualification at Level 2 or above.

Level 3 is a training priority, while over the next 12 months employers also plan to spend on safeguarding, behaviour observation/assessment/planning and SEND.

Almost one in three settings saw personal effectiveness training (e.g. communication, listening, problem solving) as a priority training need (see left). ■

More information

The 'About Early Years Sector Skills Survey' is at www.aboutearlyyears.co.uk/our-reports AEY's *Workforce Roundtable* is on 31 January bit.ly/2DafYm1

Early years training needs matrix	Level 6 plus	Level 5	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1	Entry level
Personal effectiveness and soft skills	6%	4%	7%	30%	13%	3%	8%
Knowledge of stages of development and how children learn	3%	2%	6%	37%	17%	5%	11%
Methods and practice of supporting children's learning	5%	1%	8%	41%	17%	4%	10%
Observation, assessment and planning	6%	3%	8%	45%	18%	4%	11%
Understanding and managing children's behaviour	6%	3%	9%	45%	17%	4%	10%
Safeguarding children's health, safety and well-being	11%	8%	10%	46%	21%	5%	9%
Practical personal-care skills such as toileting and feeding	1%	1%	2%	13%	8%	2%	7%
Nutrition and physical development	3%	2%	6%	19%	10%	2%	5%
Identifying and supporting SEND	10%	8%	11%	45%	14%	3%	7%
Supporting children with English as a 2nd language	6%	5%	9%	34%	14%	3%	6%
Leadership skills	14%	9%	14%	18%	2%	0%	1%