

## **Recruiting for the NPQ in Early Years Leadership**

### **Part 1 – Know your audience!**

We appreciate that as school-based delivery partner teams, you may potentially be less familiar with the Early Years sector than with primary, secondary, special or alternative provision. You may be especially unfamiliar with the non-school-based, 'private, voluntary and independent' (PVI) division of the sector, which is often little understood by the wider education community. But the PVI division of Early Years currently makes up the majority of EY provision in England, with nearly two-thirds of 3- and 4-years olds attending a PVI setting (in figures dating just pre-pandemic: Nuffield Foundation, Dec 2020). Therefore, it will be helpful in your reaching out to potential NPQEYL candidates if you understand something of the full range of this incredibly rich and diverse stage in our education system.

### **Key facts about the EY sector**

#### **EY sector 'market' structure**

- Nothing structural in the English education system is simple these days! The EY sector is no exception, comprising a wide range of providers: childminders, voluntary and independent providers (including Local Authority day nurseries), maintained nurseries (standalone nursery schools or classes within primary schools), and private preschools. Each of these is subject to different regulations, has different funding streams and mechanisms attached, and often very divergent working conditions (especially between maintained and PVI sectors).
- As documented by the Nuffield Foundation, the PVI sector suffers from persistent financial instability. Providers are typically small, run on tight margins and with low cash reserves. Largely as a result of these market factors, PVI settings tend to offer poorer working conditions and employ staff with lower levels of qualification.
- Local Authorities continue to play a key role for the EY settings in their areas (for a variety of reasons relating to funding, expertise, legislature and history). LAs usually have excellent insights into the workforce under their jurisdiction, as well as a good awareness of national and regional EY-focused initiatives. Many also hold strong relationships with the managers and staff within their local settings.

#### **EY sector workforce**

- The EY workforce is far more diverse in some ways than the mainstream primary/secondary schools workforce (excepting gender – the workforce is almost entirely female). If EY staff are sensitive about the term 'teacher' being used as a catch-all to describe them, it is because many do not hold QTS, and nor do they always see themselves as teachers. Legislation requires all maintained nursery classes to be led by a qualified teacher, but this is not the case for PVI settings. Therefore, it is more appropriate to use the general term 'early years practitioner' as this encompasses the wide range of roles involved in the sector and does not marginalise childminders.
- **Please note:** as part of the current NPQ sign-up process with the DfE, applicants without QTS have to register to get a TRN (Teacher Reference Number) so that the Department can identify each participant and track them through the process. Some practitioners may find this disconcerting, so do please reassure them that it is a purely technical exercise. (We hope that the DfE will soon find a solution that obviates the need for this step in the application process.)

- As mentioned above, EY practitioners – and EY leaders (including setting managers) too – can hold a wide range of *levels* and *types* of qualification, which do not always indicate their place in the hierarchy of any setting. To be eligible candidates for the NPQEYL, applicants must be qualified to a minimum of level 3 ... *with a full and relevant qualification*. Please see the guidance [here](#) for details.
- It is normal for EY practitioners in the PVI sector to be second-income earners. Many are part-time working mothers, and many have had poor personal experiences of education as well as subsequent low exposure to CPD opportunities.
- Some setting managers will see themselves as curriculum leaders, or leaders of learning, but all have to balance meeting mandatory requirements (e.g., foundational training, staff ratios) with staffing challenges (illness/absence) and prioritising safeguarding, SEND and EAL requirements and business need.

## **EY sector ‘mission’**

- EY practitioners have an absolutely vital role to play in our education system and in our communities and society at large. This can be easily overlooked in the light of their often precarious job security and (generally) low professional status.
- There is a robust bank of evidence, both here in the UK and internationally, that birth to 5 is the period of most rapid, foundational learning. The early years is also the stage where the disadvantage gap can be tackled most successfully. After that point, disadvantage becomes increasingly entrenched and the ‘gap’ harder to close.
- There is equally now mounting evidence that the professionals who work in the EY sector are ‘key to the quality of the provision of early education and care’ (Nuffield Foundation, Dec 2020). The DfE goes so far as to argue that *staff and leaders* are the most important factor in the quality of EY provision.
- The need for excellent EY education and care has become even more acute in the last couple of years. According to a recent Ipsos survey, 56% of parents who used formal childcare before the pandemic reported that the overall disruption to schools and childcare settings since March 2020 has harmed their child’s social and emotional development ([Childcare use, perceived impact on child development, information on working from home, and awareness and use of free entitlements for families of 0-4 year-olds during COVID-19 | Ipsos](#)).
- The government has responded to the vital importance of high-quality EY provision by creating a selective and universal set of entitlements for government-funded hours (see here for details: [Get 30 hours free childcare: step by step - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)). There is also now a £153 million Early Years Education Recovery package, a proportion of which will fund the third iteration of the Early Years Professional Development Programme (currently in procurement, iterations 1 and 2 having been run by us at EDT and just coming to an end with excellent levels of impact – see Part 2 for details!).