

APPG for Early Education and Childcare

Tuesday 15 July 2025, 12.30 - 13.30pm

Online

Attending:

Parliamentarians

James MacCleary MP, Chair, APPG for Early Education and Childcare

Jodie Gosling MP, Officer, APPG for Early Education and Childcare

Speakers

Lucie Stephens, Associate Director, Research and Co-production, EECC

Melanie Wright, Director of People & Culture, LEYF

Secretariat

Juliette Collier, Campaign for Learning

A full attendee list is available on request.

12.30 Welcome and introductions

Welcome by James MacCleary MP, Chair, and Juliette Collier, Secretariat, APPG for Early Education and Childcare.

12.35 Recruitment and retention of the early education and childcare workforce

Lucie Stephens, Associate Director, Research and Co-production, Early Education and Childcare Coalition (EECC) gave an overview of the work of the EECC, which included their recent manifesto which sets out three key priorities for government and findings from their 2023 research with early years professionals, conducted by the University of Leeds.

Lucie highlighted the reasons for professionals leaving the industry, which included lack of training, poor job security, pay levels and career progression. Work intensification was a persistent theme.

Lucie also looked at issues for recruitment including the additional number needed to meet demand and the impact of the Autumn Budget on staffing and planning. Lucie concluded with the need to consult on and publish a new early years workforce.

12.45 The Employment Law Bill: considerations and risks for the Early Years Sector

Melanie Wright, Director of People & Culture, London Early Years Foundation (LEYF) highlighted the importance of the sector, noting that it supports approximately 1.5 million children across the UK and plays a critical role in ensuring children have the best start in life.

Melanie discussed the use of zero-hours contracts, emphasising that many staff choose this option for flexibility. She raised questions about how Government and policymakers can ensure that childcare organisations are well supported, including consideration of funding arrangements.

Melanie also emphasised the need to reframe public and media narratives around the sector, arguing that language plays a key role in shaping opinions and attitudes. She concluded by stressing the importance of protecting providers' ability to operate without restricting worker choice and flexibility.

12.55 DfE policy paper: Giving every child the best start in life

Jodie Gosling MP, Officer, APPG for Early Education and Childcare shared insights on the Department for Education's (DfE) policy paper and implications of the Employment Law Bill for the early years sector.

Jodie noted that there are approximately 30,900 group and school-based nurseries supporting 1.5 million children across the UK. She referred to Government ambitions to support an additional 60,000 people into employment by 2027/28.

Jodie highlighted concerns that current funding rates do not cover the costs of delivering places for three and four-year-olds, identifying staffing as a key issue/challenge facing providers. She emphasised the need for a strong collective voice to represent the sector.

Jodie discussed workforce flexibility, noting that, while zero-hours contracts have a negative reputation, they play a role in maintaining an agile workforce.

She outlined financial pressures facing providers, which includes National Insurance changes, rising salary costs, and uncertainty around future funding rates. While early years work is rewarding, she noted that there is often negative language surrounding it, which may affect recruitment and retention.

Jodie discussed the role of apprenticeships as an entry route into the sector, where many individuals join unqualified and seek progression over time. She raised concerns

about the impact of age restrictions on apprenticeships and stressed the importance of maintaining a balanced employer-employee relationship.

She concluded by calling for measures to target and penalise poor practice, which includes the exploitation of loopholes in zero-hours contracts, and ensuring that Government and other stakeholders can work with the sector to protect business continuity.

Initial thoughts and insights from the sector

13.05 Discussion forum

An attendee raises a question regarding concerns around staff pay, recruitment and training, noting that current government funding levels do not allow providers to charge for additional services to cover staffing costs. They highlight financial pressures on nurseries and childminders, including differences in VAT compared with schools, and challenges arising from staff-to-child ratios.

James responds by outlining the income thresholds and current funding rates paid to early years providers. Though it is a private sector, it provides a public service. James notes that similar funding pressures are experienced in other publicly funded services, such as GPs, where funding does not always cover full operational costs.

Observations shared in the chat:

- Concerns that Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder may be more prevalent than autism and is not receiving sufficient attention.
- Observations regarding differences in staff-to-child ratios between childminders and nurseries, where childminding ratios are 1:3, and nurseries are 1:5 or 1:8. Considers the impact this may have on parents' choices, choosing nurseries rather than childminding because of funding.
- Ongoing challenges in accessing sufficient funding for staff training.
- Difficulties arising from food being treated as a voluntary contribution, which can put providers and parents in challenging positions, particularly in relation to providing healthy meals. Concerns that school-based provision does not address the staffing issues.
- Suggestions that, within the new 'Giving every child the best start in life' policy, extra funding should be designated for staffing.
- Calls for greater access to qualified early years teachers in each setting, particularly in areas of higher need, alongside concerns about the affordability of such provision and the increasing burden of SEND.

- Reflections on inspection frameworks, proposals for earlier initial Ofsted inspections and more frequent inspections in early years settings compared with schools.

13.25 Chair's summary

Consensus across sector. There are solutions out there.

13.30 Close

Challenges to the sector over the last decade. A real trend around funding. Not adjusted for inflation.

Thank you for all that you do.

If you want to get more involved, contact the Secretariat, Juliette Collier at Campaign for Learning.