

Foundations for the Future:

West Yorkshire's Early Years Workforce Plan



West
Yorkshire
Combined
Authority

Tracy
Brabin
Mayor of
West Yorkshire

BIRTH TO 19

INSTITUTE FOR THE EARLY YEARS

Table of Contents



Introduction	3
Empowering the Workforce	4
Current Workforce Landscape and Implications	5
Professional Recognition	6
Recruitment and Retention	7
Qualifications & Skills	8
Leadership & Quality	9
Recommendations: Professional Recognition	10
Recommendations: Recruitment and Retention	12
Recommendations: Qualifications & Skills	13
Recommendations: Leadership & Quality	15



Introduction

The early years of a child's life are crucial for their development, laying the foundations for lifelong learning, health, and well-being. High-quality early years education and care are proven to support better outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children.

The early years sector includes a variety of settings such as nurseries, pre-schools, childminders, maintained nursery schools, and reception classes in primary schools, all working under the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. At the heart of this provision is a skilled, motivated, and well-supported workforce.

Foundations for the Future: West Yorkshire's Early Years Workforce Plan sets out a strategic vision for strengthening and sustaining West Yorkshire's passionate and dedicated early years workforce.

It acknowledges the existing challenges, including recruitment and retention difficulties, inconsistent access to appropriate training, and workforce recognition, and aims to address them through a coordinated and forward-looking approach.

By setting a five-year timeframe, this plan not only acknowledges the deep-rooted workforce challenges facing the sector, but also issues a clear and compelling call to action, urging all stakeholders to unite to deliver the recommendations in order to shape a stronger, more sustainable future for this critical sector.

The timeframe is designed to be ambitious while still allowing adequate time to thoughtfully consider and address the complex, long-standing workforce challenges faced by the sector.

By prioritising the early years workforce through improved recruitment, retention, training, and recognition, **Foundations for the Future: West Yorkshire's Early Years Workforce Plan** directly supports the national ambition to ensure that every child has access to high-quality early education and care.

It closely aligns with the Department for Education's Giving Every Child the Best Start in Life strategy by recognising the vital role that the early years workforce plays in securing positive outcomes for all children, but particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Grounded in evidence and informed by sector voices across the region, the plan outlines clear recommendations to:

- Improve pathways into the profession,
- Enhance professional development and qualifications,
- Promote career progression and leadership,
- Ensure better workforce wellbeing and retention.

By investing in the people who educate and care for the region's youngest children, this plan seeks to elevate the status of the early years profession and ensure every child in West Yorkshire has access to the high-quality early education and care they deserve.



Empowering the Workforce

This workforce plan is structured around four interrelated focus areas. These areas are closely connected, meaning that changes, challenges, or improvements in one area are likely to affect others.

The full implementation of the recommendations that are outlined in this plan will rely on collaborative work across the whole of the early years system. The Combined Authority will work with key partners, such as the different early years providers, Local Authorities, education and training providers, and careers support teams.

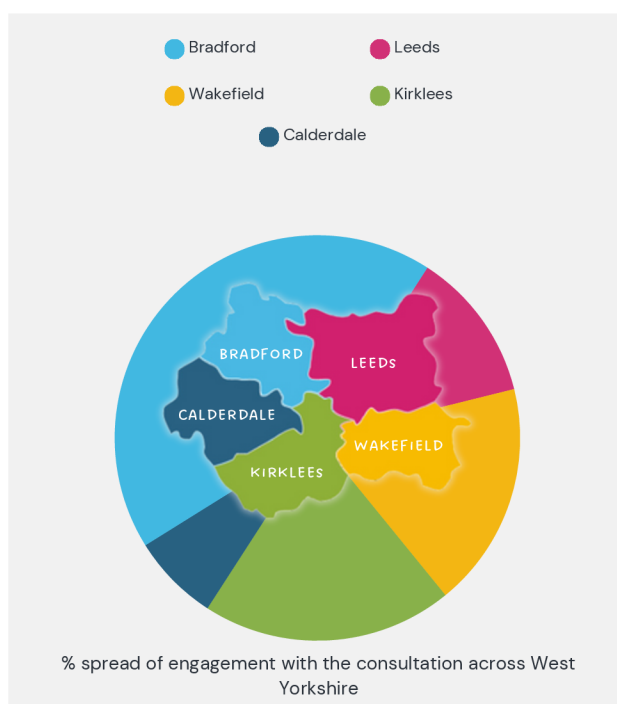
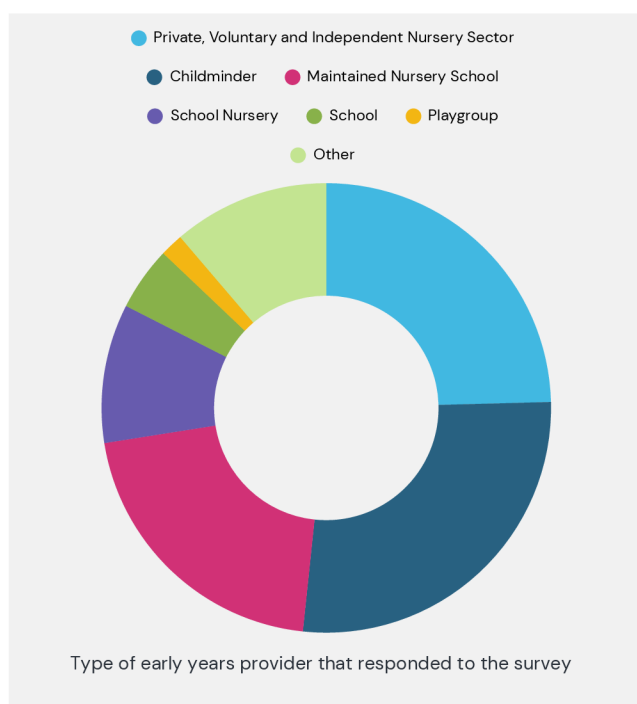
This coordinated approach is designed to ensure that workforce issues are addressed in a consistent and supportive way across the sector.



Grounded in Evidence and Informed by the Sector

Foundations for the Future: West Yorkshire's Early Years Workforce Plan has been developed through extensive consultation with the workforce, including those who lead and/or work in early years settings, childminders, local authority teams, and education and training providers across the region. This plan was also developed in response to the advice and guidance of an Editorial Board, made up of colleagues from regional universities and Better Start Bradford.

The plan was informed by the Early Years Education and Childcare System in West Yorkshire Report by The Yorkshire and Humber Policy Engagement and Research Network (Y-PERN) who also helped bring the Editorial Board together. The board comprised Dr Tom Haines-Doran, Prof Louise Tracey, Dr Jo Burgess, Dr Aimee Code, Dr Erin Dysart, Dr Jack Simpson and Dr Xanthe Whittaker (University of Leeds), Gill Thornton (Better Start Bradford), Dr Josie Dickerson (Born in Bradford) and Dr Nathan Archer. With circa 250 survey responses, regional listening events, focus groups and 1:1 meetings, this collaborative approach has ensured that the plan reflects the real challenges, needs, and priorities of the Early Years workforce throughout West Yorkshire.



Current Workforce Landscape and Implications

The early years sector in West Yorkshire is facing a growing but often overlooked challenge. The workforce that supports early education is under increasing pressure. Issues such as limited funding, low wages, staffing shortages, and gaps in required skills are making it more difficult to provide high-quality, accessible care for young children across the region.

The early years sector is grappling with conflicting demands

- Expected to expand services, but often without corresponding increases in support.
- Required to uphold high standards, while managing workforce shortages and rising operational costs.
- Recognised as key to economic growth, yet frequently operating in financially constrained and unstable conditions.

The pressures facing the early years sector in West Yorkshire mirror national trends.

The expansion of childcare entitlements is a well-intentioned effort to support working families, but the sector is straining. The Department for Education has estimated there will need to be an extra 40,000 workers in the early years sector, across England, by September 2025 to support the roll-out (Childcare workforce in England. Research Briefing 18 September 2024)

Meeting this ambition will require a coordinated approach that addresses funding, workforce development, infrastructure, and provider sustainability. Without this, there is a risk of growing stress on providers, increased fees for families, service closures, and pressure on the quality of care.

Maintaining high-quality early years provision is becoming increasingly difficult, particularly for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), as staffing challenges intensify. Ofsted's 2024 annual report highlights that vulnerable children are especially affected by high turnover and shortages of qualified staff, placing added pressure on settings.

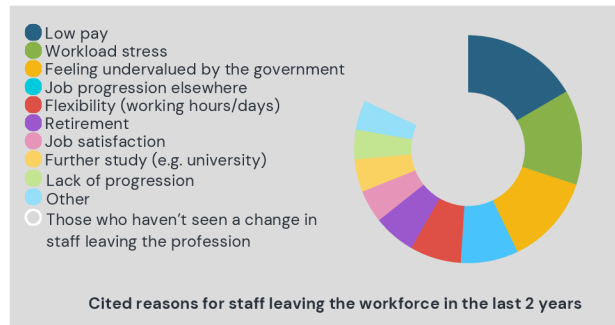
In West Yorkshire, these pressures are compounded by a lack of access to specialist training in how to support children with SEND. Providers across the region report limited opportunities for staff to develop the skills and

confidence required to respond effectively.



A 2020 Education Policy Institute commissioned study by the National Centre for Social Research and the Nuffield Foundation found that low pay, heavy workloads, and lack of respect lead to many of the workforce leaving the sector, with the proportion of Level 3 qualified staff dropping from 83% in 2015 to just 52% in 2019.

This aligns with the picture in West Yorkshire, where research indicated that a perceived lack of recognition, low pay and workload stress are contributing to poor recruitment, high turnover, and low morale, with many in the workforce feeling undervalued despite their vital role in supporting child development.



In England it is reported that average earnings of the early years workforce remain significantly below the average income across the female workforce. Many report difficulty in meeting basic living costs, prompting them to leave the sector altogether in favour of other low-skilled roles that offer higher wages. This experience is reported across West Yorkshire, too.

Crucially, low pay in the early years sector is not solely the result of market forces or oversight, but has been significantly influenced by limitations in government funding. There are undoubtedly significant challenges in front of us, but following the publication of the government's Best Start to Life proposal, there is a palpable strong sense of optimism in the early years sector.

Professional Recognition

The early years workforce plays a **crucial role in shaping the foundations of children's learning, wellbeing, and development**, yet it remains one of the least professionally recognised sectors in education. Unlike school teachers, early years practitioners often receive lower pay, less public recognition, and limited access to professional development. This disparity undermines not only the value of early education but also the stability and quality of the workforce delivering it.

Over **50%** of respondents to the survey stated that a **lack of recognition** by the government was a **reason staff are leaving the sector**. The question **"What do you think would encourage more people to work in the early years"** produced statements including:

Being valued by the government, parents and other professionals
Greater appreciation of the skill and knowledge it takes to be an early years worker by the Government, Senior Leadership Teams in primary schools and the wider public
Being valued and paid a fair wage for having the most valuable little humans
More recognition for the work we do and the impact we make on the early years of children's lives
Recognition for the importance of early years education from the government
Public awareness of the high level of qualification needed to care for children.
Raise awareness and the professionalism of childminders.
More recognition from senior leaders/government
Recognised on a wider level than just within the company
Showing the importance of early years
Respect for the sector

Professional recognition is essential for strengthening the early years workforce, ensuring that staff have the skills, motivation, and accountability needed to deliver high-quality care and education.

Far from being low-skilled, early years careers demand deep knowledge, dedication, and emotional intelligence. It is important to present the roles in the sector as rewarding and impactful professional opportunities.

Research from the UK, Australia, and global bodies like the OECD links professional recognition, including qualifications, leadership pathways, and workforce inclusion, to stronger staff retention, better staff well-being, and improved child outcomes.

"We are not just babysitters, we are so much more than that and I think it is time other professionals see that too."

West Yorkshire Practitioner



Diversity

The sector is also marked by significant gender imbalance, with very low numbers of male staff and limited ethnic diversity. Without more inclusive recruitment strategies and flexible working options, the workforce will continue to reflect only a narrow segment of the communities it serves.

Research shows that children thrive when cared for by practitioners who reflect their communities and bring a wide range of perspectives and experiences into early education settings. However, the primary engagement for this plan has consistently received feedback that whilst this is a recognised issue, the sector is unable to prioritise workforce diversity over workforce numbers.

"I wish I had the luxury to focus on a more diverse staff team. Right now I just need enough quality staff."

West Yorkshire Setting Leader

Whilst the current priority is simply having enough quality staff to deliver the best possible care and education for children, as part of addressing both immediate staffing shortages and longer-term workforce sustainability, recommendations within **Foundations for the Future: West Yorkshire's Early Years Workforce Plan** support efforts to diversify the early years workforce, particularly by increasing the recruitment of men into the sector. This aligns with the Department for Education's 2025 "Do Something Big" campaign, which promotes gender diversity and offers financial incentives to attract new practitioners.



Recruitment and Retention

Attracting and retaining a highly engaged workforce is becoming more challenging. It is evident that **staff go above and beyond to care for the children and families they work with**, but this can lead to workload stress and ultimately staff are leaving the sector. Furthermore, consultation responses from training providers indicated that courses are getting harder to fill.

Improving recruitment and retention in the early years workforce requires a combination of national support and local action, something **Foundations for the Future: West Yorkshire's Early Years Workforce Plan** is well placed to deliver.

Leaders across West Yorkshire have shared that there is a lack of applicants applying for roles, and those that do often lack the necessary skills, qualifications or experience needed for roles.

They are experiencing **particular difficulty recruiting practitioners with a Level 3**, or higher, qualification because there are too few candidates. This is of particular importance for settings to comply with government regulations: a Level 3 qualification, that is 'full and relevant' for the early years sector means it has been officially approved by the government as meeting the required standards to work with children and be counted in staff-to-child ratios set by law.

77% of employers surveyed stated that they had **difficulty recruiting** in the last 12 months.

86% cited "Lack of applicants with necessary qualifications" as a reason for the difficulty.

"There needs to be an improvement in the career as a whole as not as many students are wanting to train."

West Yorkshire Course Tutor

To address these shortages and ensure a sustainable pipeline of skilled practitioners, a coordinated approach is essential to attract individuals onto Level 3 early years training routes, including via a Level 2 pathway to build a talent pipeline, as well as into vacant roles.

Employers are competing with other sectors of the economy, such as retail, hospitality, and education, which often offer better pay, more flexible working hours, and enhanced benefits.

This competition is particularly challenging as there is little recognition for the demands of early years roles, such as specialist knowledge and significant emotional and professional responsibility. As a result, staff are moving out of the sector, impacting on the quality of provision, the stability of places available and creating a long-term risk to achieving equitable outcomes for children.



61% of the workforce surveyed stated that they had **had to ask staff to work extra hours** in the last twelve months due to staff shortages.



36% have had to **limit the amount of children** they are caring for due to a lack of staff.



80% of the workforce surveyed stated that **they have seen an increase in staff leaving the sector**.

Low pay is cited as the most common reason, closely followed by **workplace stress** and **lack of recognition from the Government**.

Supporting new staff as they transition from training into employment is vital for retaining staff, especially given the challenges of low pay and limited recognition.

Providers play a key role in demonstrating that early years is a valuable and long-term career choice, but this message must be consistent and reinforced across the entire system.

Careers support, education and training providers, local authorities, and the Combined Authority all have a part to play in promoting clear pathways, supporting progression, and raising the profile of the sector. **A joined-up approach ensures that new entrants feel valued, supported, and see a future in the profession from day one.**

Qualifications & Skills

The quality of the workforce is a key factor in achieving positive outcomes for children. Evidence, including findings from the [Effective Provision of Pre-School Education](#) study (Sylva, Melhuish et.al, 2004) consistently shows that higher practitioner qualifications are linked to better child development and school readiness.

Well-qualified practitioners are better equipped to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage effectively, foster positive interactions, and use evidence-informed strategies to extend children's learning and development.

Higher levels of training also equip practitioners with strategies to manage challenging behaviour and emotional stressors, which are common in early years roles. However, it is important to note that qualifications alone do not guarantee resilience. Supportive leadership, reasonable workloads, and access to ongoing training are also critical in fostering staff well-being and retention.



While theoretical knowledge provides a strong foundation, it is through hands-on practice that students truly learn how to build relationships, observe and respond to children's needs.

80% of early years providers surveyed reported that newly qualified staff are not equipped with the skills needed to enter the workforce.

Providers, practitioners and local authority teams in West Yorkshire have reported that there is a critical need for trainees and apprentices to see real examples and good practice across a range of settings as part of their course.

"Too many people are coming out qualified who really aren't good enough to work with young children and crucially know how to extend children's learning and development, and be able to assess them on the curriculum."

West Yorkshire Setting Leader

A significant number of children in the region face barriers to learning and development due to a combination of complex needs, socioeconomic challenges, and gaps in early identification and support. Therefore, the workforce requires up-to-date training on inclusive practice, effective communication strategies, and how to navigate and signpost the local SEND system. They also need the knowledge, tools, and confidence to work in true partnership with families.

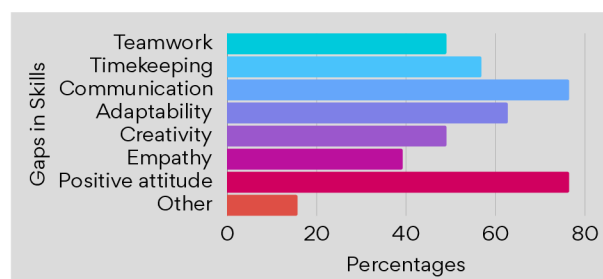
Supporting children with SEND and strengthening family engagement are also noted as priorities across the early years sector in West Yorkshire.

Education and training providers have also expressed concerns that current course content does not always provide their trainees with sufficient depth of subject knowledge.

"Currently, our Level 3 course includes only a single three-hour unit on SEND. Given the increasing levels of need in settings, I feel this is inadequate."

West Yorkshire Course Tutor

In addition to this sector specific knowledge, employers have seen that applicants are significantly lacking in the soft skills needed for employment, with attitude and communication coming out on top.



Recommendations within the **Foundations for the Future: West Yorkshire's Early Years Workforce Plan** support the development of soft and employability skills to ensure high-quality, sustainable practice across the sector. This aligns closely with the Department for Education's Best Start in Life vision, which prioritises high-quality early education led by a skilled and qualified workforce to improve outcomes for children.

Leadership & Quality

Strong leadership is a cornerstone of high-quality early years provision. Effective leaders set the vision and culture of a setting, influencing everything from staff morale and professional development to the quality of interactions children experience on a daily basis.

Their role is to inspire and support their teams, promote a culture of continuous improvement, and ensure that evidence-based practice is embedded across the setting.

However, unlike in schools, leadership development in early years is not consistently supported or structured. There are few clear progression routes into leadership roles, and many early years leaders receive little or no formal leadership training. This means practitioners often step into management positions without the tools or confidence to lead effectively.

“Settings often lack the leadership needed. Many managers have found themselves in the role with no previous experience of leadership. There is an element of “Unconscious incompetence” where individuals are unaware of the knowledge and skills they lack because they have never been taught or supported to develop them.”

West Yorkshire Local Authority Advisor

Course leaders and tutors have told us that their students often miss out on the mentoring needed and exposure to a full range of experiences, when in settings. They reflected that managers do not have capacity or that they lack the knowledge to be able to support appropriately.

In order to ensure a high quality workforce, students do not just need ‘a placement’, they need to be in a learning-rich environment led by people who understand how to nurture both children and future professionals.



The lack of availability of staff with full and relevant qualifications is also impacting on the way setting leaders and managers are working.

The Pulse Survey of Childcare and Education providers 2024 shared that 63% of settings were using managers to work with children more to meet ratios.

In West Yorkshire the issue also apparent. Setting leaders at the listening events, and in the survey shared, that **due to a lack of qualified staff with full and relevant qualifications leaders were having to work directly with the children and be counted in ratios.**

When leaders are in ratio, without time to reflect, keep up to date with trends, provide strategic vision, the quality of settings is impacted.

“Being in ratio is having a significant impact on our own workload and capacity; reducing our development work.”

West Yorkshire Setting Leader

Effective, informed leadership directly impacts staff development, setting culture, and ultimately, outcomes for children. Recommendations within the **Foundations for the Future: West Yorkshire’s Early Years Workforce Plan** intend to equip leaders with vital skills in pedagogy, business management, and team leadership. This fully aligns with national plans to increase development and leadership opportunities.

Recommendations

Professional Recognition

The consultation has highlighted the need to elevate the status of early years practitioners as skilled, knowledgeable, and essential contributors to the education system and society at large. Commitment to advancing the professional recognition of the early years workforce is demonstrated through the following measures:

- 1** **Raise awareness of, attract more people to and support progression within the early years workforce through targeted, careers education, information, advice and guidance that compliments the national 'Do Something Big' campaign.**

West Yorkshire early years careers support should:

- a** Showcase the value and impact of early years education on children and families
- b** Highlight West Yorkshire's diversity as a strength for attracting and recruiting talent, including men and people from minority ethnic backgrounds
- c** Provide up-to-date sectoral resources to West Yorkshire schools and colleges as well as early years settings to support their career education about early years sector career and progression opportunities
- d** Consider the different audiences, including: school-leavers; people looking for a career change or employment; parents; early years settings; and colleges or training providers
- e** Offer simple career pathway information about available qualifications and training to enter the sector and progress into different roles within the sector, including childminding and leadership roles

- There is a clear connection between the early years sector's ability to attract high-quality and the wider community's perceptions of the sector's value and importance.
- It is essential to ensure that the vital role of high-quality early childhood education and care in supporting children's future educational and developmental outcomes is recognised and valued, not diminished or overlooked.
- A sustained, multi-level approach will enhance public understanding, attract high-quality candidates, and strengthen the workforce.

82%

of responding leaders feel professional recognition is necessary to support better staff progression.

70%

of responding leaders are saying they are no applicants for jobs they advertise.



2 Recognise, appreciate, and celebrate the dedication, creativity, and compassion of early years professionals.

This could include:

- a Sharing case studies or good news stories of settings to celebrate the sector, success and good practice
- b Introducing an Early Years category at the Adult Learner Awards
- c Maximising existing networks such as the Women of West Yorkshire and the Early Years Stronger Practice Hub
- d Maximising the sign up of West Yorkshire practitioners to the forthcoming national professional register to promote continuing professional development and give early educators the recognition they deserve

- Recognising the workforce's contribution helps to boost morale, enhance professional pride, and foster a sense of community within the sector.
- Award events provide an opportunity for West Yorkshire Combined Authority to publicly acknowledge and appreciate the dedication, skill, and impact of the early years workforce.

66%

of responding practitioners join the workforce due to their passion for working with children, but...

59%

of responding practitioners leaving the workforce state feeling undervalued was a contributing factor

3 Support the Early Years sector to improve workforce pay and conditions.

This could include:

- a Champion the sector on a national level, including feeding in regional data and evidence into national policy development
- b Support providers to sign up to the West Yorkshire Fair Work Charter
- c Share best practice for business efficiency and retention

- Low pay and poor conditions lead to high turnover, low morale, and reduced capacity to offer consistent, high-quality care.
- Supporting fair pay and progression helps tackle regional inequalities, gender pay gaps, and low paid insecure work, all priorities in the West Yorkshire Combined Authority inclusive economic strategy.

79%

of responding practitioners share that low pay is a contributing factor to people leaving the workforce

43%

of responding leaders shared pay levels were not enough for applicants when trying to recruit

Recruitment and Retention

The early years workforce is essential to West Yorkshire's future, laying the foundations for children's development, enabling families to thrive, and powering inclusive economic growth across the region. A commitment to working in partnership with early years providers, local authorities, education and training providers, and the wider community could help tackle the recruitment and retention crisis facing this vital sector. Together, West Yorkshire can build a stronger, more sustainable early years workforce, one that is valued, supported, and empowered to deliver the best possible outcomes for children and families.

4 Explore how the sector could utilise non-wage employee benefits to increase staff wellbeing and satisfaction as well as retention.

This could include:

a Share best practice of settings with high retention

b Consider commissioning of training that supports workforce resilience, stress management and creating a positive workplace culture

- Supporting staff wellbeing is not just the right thing to do, it is central to solving recruitment and retention challenges, ensuring quality provision, and securing a stable, skilled, and motivated early years workforce for the long term.
- Prioritising wellbeing leads to a healthier, more supported workforce, which improves retention, reduces absenteeism, staff shortages, and the cost of ongoing recruitment.
- Supporting wellbeing ensures that practitioners are fully present, responsive, and resilient in their role, enabling them to form secure attachments with their children, which is fundamental to early childhood development.

79%

of the responding workforce shared that workload stress is contributing to people leaving the sector

57%

of the responding workforce have seen a significant increase in colleagues leaving the sector in the last 2 years.

5 Support transition from training into employment for career entrants and to support progression into management/leadership.

This could include:

a Commission mentor training for staff in setting to support trainees and career entrants and progression

b Explore employer support to offer quality placements, including administrative resources

- Supporting career entrants through structured training-to-employment transitions and mentor programmes helps build confidence, skills, and job satisfaction, reducing early attrition and improving long-term retention.
- Upskilling existing staff to be mentors and equipping them to guide trainees and career entrants effectively, fosters continuous professional development and is a step to preparing future leaders for management roles.

57%

of responding leaders state that career entrants lack the necessary qualifications and skills to do the job

86%

of responding leaders would like to see more training relating to real life examples, having the opportunity to see good practice in action during training



Qualifications and Skills

Investment in high-quality training and strong partnerships between providers, and education and training providers, will upskill the workforce, improve children's outcomes, and build a resilient, inclusive talent pipeline that supports the region's long-term goals for inclusive growth.

6 Support acquisition of key identified soft and employability skills for the early years workforce, to support consistent, high-quality practice and workforce development across the region.

This could include:

a Maximise roll out of the West Yorkshire Promise across the sector

b Consider how soft skills can form part of commissioned provision for the early years sector

- Significant gaps in workforce skills risk undermining the quality and consistency of early years education. A strategic, region-wide approach to professional development will equip the West Yorkshire early years workforce with core soft skills, like communication, empathy, and teamwork, essential for delivering high-quality, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate care.
- Equipping staff with essential skills boosts confidence, job satisfaction, and career progression opportunities, contributing to a more motivated and stable early years workforce.
- A region-wide approach fosters collaboration, peer learning, and consistent quality across settings.

91%

of responding leaders state that career entrants lack the soft skills necessary for the role

60%

of responding practitioners stated they want more understanding of topics such as SEND, Speech & Language



7 Raise awareness about full and relevant early years qualifications to be counted in staff:child ratios across all-age careers education, advice and guidance provision.

This could include:

a Ensure the AI powered West Yorkshire Careers Chat Bot provides up to date information to learners

b Ensure sector leaders make use of the new national online qualification checker

- Career entrants often do not know what qualifications they need or what options exist. Raising awareness helps them understand the qualifications that are valued and required, so they can plan their learning journey from the start and aim for relevant certifications that will boost their employability.
- Raising awareness of the qualifications needed would help position early years as a skilled profession by clearly outlining the qualifications and career pathways needed to attract, retain, and develop the workforce.

37%

of responding leaders report that there is lack knowledge from applicants around the status of their own qualifications

41%

of responding leaders report it is difficult to understand the training and qualifications on offer as there are too many course options



8 Develop and commission early years sector led training through the Combined Authority adult skills funding

This could include:

a Position Skills Bootcamps/other routes to support pathways into full and relevant qualifications

- The early years workforce in West Yorkshire must adapt to the evolving needs of children and families. A targeted strategy to upskill existing staff with contemporary knowledge, such as inclusive practice, supporting children's communication and working with families is essential to ensure high-quality, future-ready provision.
- A region-wide training strategy ensures that all practitioners, regardless of employer, setting, or local authority, are developing the same core skills and knowledge. This improves consistency in practice and outcomes for children across West Yorkshire.

93%

of responding employers felt that staff members entering the profession have gaps in knowledge

39%

of responders feel the current offer of training is not enough

Leadership and Quality

Leaders play a vital role in shaping quality in early years education, it is more than management, it's about inspiring, guiding, and empowering teams to deliver the best outcomes for children. Strong, visionary leadership is one of the most reliable predictors of high-quality early years provision. Leaders in West Yorkshire are facing a range of challenges that make it increasingly difficult to maintain high-quality provision. Support for leaders will be provided through the following recommendations:

9 Recruit a cohort of experienced early years practitioners across West Yorkshire who can act as support peers and best practice advocates to support setting leaders and training providers with putting evidence informed practices into action.

- This cohort, embedded in practice across the region can offer contextual, sensitive support, ensuring evidence is applied effectively in different settings.
- This cohort can provide tailored support to setting leaders, enabling them to build leadership capacity and drive sustainable improvements in practice. By embedding a culture of continuous learning and collaboration, the role helps ensure all children benefit from high-quality early years experiences.
- This cohort would provide tutors with current evidence-informed strategies, guest sessions or mentoring that bring practical, regional insights to the students to ensure the ever-changing picture of the early years sector is reflected in course delivery.

55%

of responding leaders would like to see better opportunities for professional development to support progression in the workforce

84%

of responding leaders cite the ability to release staff for training as a barrier to providing professional development opportunities for their staff



10 Design and pilot a regional leadership programme, with a focus on pedagogical leadership, business skills, team leadership and resilience

- Leadership training is a vital investment in the early years sector because strong leadership impacts on the quality of teaching, staff morale and children's outcomes
- Many early years leaders have strong practical experience but lack formal training in leadership theory or strategic management. A regional programme ensures access to high-quality, contextualised professional development that meets the specific needs of early years leaders in the region.
- Embedding business acumen into leadership training promotes sustainability, growth, and improved resource management in the face of economic pressures.

40%

of responders feel that the quality of current training is a barrier to professional development opportunities.

