

Children's workforce

GUIDE TO QUALIFICATIONS AND TRAINING

With a new government in place, the sector is hoping for action to tackle workforce and recruitment issues. *Joe Lepper* identifies developments in initial training and ongoing professional development

The children's services sector is anticipating a range of new policy announcements that will affect roles and training following the election of a new Labour government in July.

A Crime and Policing Bill, announced in the recent King's Speech, includes a Young Futures programme to support children at risk of involvement in crime.

This includes a £95mn investment in local youth work hubs offering young people support from professionals including youth workers, mental health practitioners and careers advisers.

Other commitments include placing youth workers in A&E departments and pupil referral units and ensuring there are mental health professionals in every school to support children and young people with early signs of emotional or mental distress.

The new government has promised £450mn to recruit 6,500 more teachers, paid for by ending tax breaks for private schools. An expansion of vocational education is also planned for 18- to 21-year-olds.

When it comes to the early years sector, Labour plans to create 3,000 new nurseries in primary schools and wants to improve the quality of maths teaching in early years settings.

The party's manifesto promised better support for kinship, foster and adoptive families and tighter regulation of the children's social care sector.

A Children's Wellbeing Bill will strengthen multi-agency child protection and safeguarding arrangements for vulnerable children.

Meanwhile, former Conservative government policies are still being rolled out, including £200mn of social care improvements by 2025 set out in the *Stable Homes, Built on Love* strategy.



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SOCIAL WORK



Children's social work vacancies dropped slightly over the last year but are still at record levels, according to latest Department for Education data.

The figures show there were 7,700 full-time equivalent vacancies in 2023. This is down 200 on the previous year but is the second highest set of figures in seven years.

As of 30 September 2023, there were 33,100 full-time equivalent social workers in children's services, up 1,500 from 2022 and the highest level since 2017.

But children's services continue to rely on agency social workers. As of September 2023, there were 7,200 workers from agencies, the highest level in seven years and an increase of 400 on the previous year. The Conservative government had planned to cap council spending on agency staff this year but the move was delayed.

Policy

Last year's *Stable Homes, Built on Love* government strategy pledged £200mn in funding by 2025 to improve children's social care in England – much less than the more than £2bn investment over four years recommended by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

Developments include a £45mn investment in the Families First for Children pathfinder

programme, which is testing new ways of working with a focus on early intervention. This includes setting up multi-disciplinary family help teams and appointing lead child protection practitioners to better co-ordinate local safeguarding.

The pathfinder programme launched in Dorset, Lincolnshire and Wolverhampton last September, with seven further areas joining this year. Difficulties in recruiting and

retaining lead child protection practitioners are among the challenges raised by pathfinders so far.

Early career framework

Stable Homes, Built on Love pledges an early career framework (ECF) to improve career development for children's social workers, to be launched by September 2026. It will replace the current assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE).

The two-year ECF programme includes an option for a further three years training to become an "expert practitioner".

Elements of the ECF will be tested from September 2024 in areas including East Sussex, Tower Hamlets and Birmingham. A digital service to enable social workers to register and submit work is being developed.

Training standards

Social Work England (SWE) regulates, inspects and approves training for social workers with 300 courses available via 80 providers. Priorities in its strategy for the next two years include simplifying training and improving equality, diversity and inclusion guidance.

Training standards include requiring social work students to spend 200 days learning in practice settings.

New standards for professionals, including social workers, to become approved mental health professionals, who can make assessments under the Mental Health Act, will be published by September.

Later this year, SWE will launch readiness for professional practice guidance.

CAREERS IN CAFCASS

England's largest employer of social workers is the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), which works across private and public law to support children involved in proceedings.

Its social workers must have experience in supporting vulnerable children and families. Practice supervisor roles are available for those overseeing casework and supporting service managers with complex cases.

Its Social Work Academy for newly qualified social workers offers mentoring and training over three years, with credits towards a master's degree. This helps it ensure its social workers meet Cafcass standards. The academy has 78 practice educators to support students.

Last year, Cafcass updated its practice quality standards for working with children and families in public law proceedings based on latest reviews and significant incident reports. These include standards around reducing delays and engaging with children.

Cafcass also introduced standards for those working in private family court cases last year, covering issues such as understanding children's rights, welfare and safety. Tackling bias and prejudice and ensuring plain, jargon-free language is used with children and families are among the issues covered.

In February, Ofsted rated Cafcass as "outstanding" and praised its "highly impressive" training.

The regulator is also developing its work with practice educators, who supervise and train social workers. Currently, they are only registered as social workers, their role is co-ordinated by informal arrangements and there are concerns about a lack of diversity, found a Social Work England-commissioned review of practice education in England

A practice education development group involving the regulator, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and principal social workers was set up this year to take forward findings from the review.

BASW is custodian of the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF), which outlines skills social workers need as they progress through their career.

Labour's manifesto made a commitment to strengthen regulation of the children's social care sector.

Routes into social work

A three-year social work degree or a two-year master's are the main routes into children's social work. Undergraduate bursary rates of £4,862.50 (£5,262.50 in London) are available for the final two years of study. The postgraduate rate for 1,500 students is £3,362.50 (£3,762.50 in London).

A three-year integrated university and workplace degree apprenticeship is another route into the profession.

In October 2023, the government allocated £11.7mn for councils to hire up to 461 apprentices based in children's services with funding going to 79 councils in England.

Another route is the fast-track, employer-based, 14-month Step Up to Social Work programme for graduates. Trainees receive a £19,833 bursary.

The Centre for Systemic Social Work runs



Meet the practitioner

Annabel Smith,
professional lead for
social care in CAMHS,
Hertfordshire
Partnership
University NHS
Foundation Trust

Having achieved disappointing A-level results at school, Annabel Smith says she "couldn't foresee I'd be doing a doctorate" around 30 years later.

She took a further A-level in psychology and enjoyed that subject so much she studied it at degree level. She went on to work as a family support worker for a local authority, where she was sponsored to undertake a diploma in social work.

This led her to a placement with a child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)

team where her combined skills in psychology and social work have seen her become part of Hertfordshire CAMHS' senior leadership team. She is due to complete a social care doctorate within the next year.

She has also completed a social work master's and the NHS Leadership Academy qualification, as well as a therapeutic qualification in interpersonal psychotherapy.

On reflection, she wishes she'd had more confidence in her ability to do a doctorate earlier in her career. "At this point in my career, balancing it with my current role is extremely challenging," she says. Looking back she also wishes she had experienced working in other sectors including social work in prisons.

However, she urges other social workers to consider working in CAMHS. "It's really fulfilling," she says.

courses, including a foundation-level certificate in systemic social work practice with children and families.

Child protection

Fast-track provider Frontline has been contracted by the DfE to train 500 specialist child protection social workers a year from September this year.

Trainees qualify as a social worker after their first year, which involves in-person and online learning, tutor support and a placement.

In the second year they become full-time social workers and manage caseloads, while

the final year sees trainees carry out a research project and complete a master's degree in advanced relationship-based social work practice with children and families.

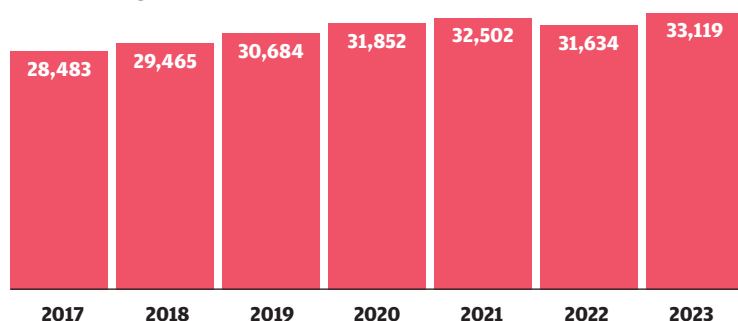
The cost of training is covered by Frontline, with trainees receiving a tax-free bursary in year one of £18,000, or £20,000 in London.

Earlier this year, the then government announced it would not renew funding for the Pathways leadership development programme for children's social workers. The programme was run by Frontline in partnership with North Yorkshire Council and Foundations and had been expected to get funding for two more years.

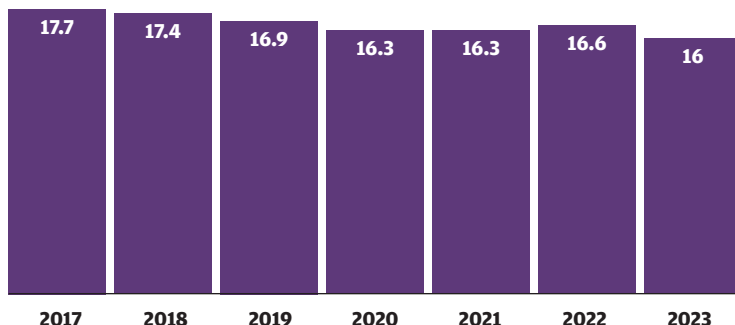


CHILDREN AND FAMILY SOCIAL WORK WORKFORCE IN ENGLAND

Number of full-time equivalent children and family social workers in post



Caseload per full-time equivalent social worker



Source: Reporting year 2023, Children's social work workforce, Department for Education, February 2024

Social work continued

The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (CSA Centre) offers a range of training from half-day to three-day courses covering issues including sibling abuse, sexual abuse of disabled children, online harms and supporting families following an arrest.

Adoption

Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) began operating seven years ago to bring together councils to improve adoption placement and support.

But recruitment and retention challenges within adoption services “remain unresolved”, according to an Ofsted review published in March this year. Four out of six RAAs visited by the regulator were experiencing recruitment and funding challenges with demand for support from families exceeding the resources available.

Regional care co-operatives

Stable Homes, Built on Love proposed regionalising the planning, commissioning and delivery of children’s social care through regional care co-operatives. These are set to be piloted this year in two areas ahead of a national roll out.

More than half – 55% – of those who responded to a consultation on the plans identified potential difficulties with implementation including lack of clarity around workforce issues.

Children’s homes

Stable Homes, Built on Love outlines plans to develop professional registration of residential child care workers and a leadership programme for new managers, to run alongside a new knowledge and skills statement and training for managers.

The DfE has since held meetings with residential children’s care representatives to develop standards for supporting children in children’s homes.

The first set of findings from a children’s home workforce census were published by the government this year. This found 69% of managers reported difficulty in recruiting care staff while 61% said they had problems finding managerial or supervisory staff with the appropriate level of skills and experience.

Retention of staff was also a problem. Two in five managers said that when staff left their children’s home post, they were leaving the sector altogether.

The research found registered managers were paid an average of £20.75 per hour while care staff in a non-supervisory role earned an average of £11.97 per hour. Boosting pay, providing more training and offering flexible working are among ways managers are improving recruitment and retention.

Two thirds of those in the sector are female, three quarters are white, and the majority are under 44 years old, the survey found.

Registered managers are required to

hold a Level 5 diploma in leadership and have three years’ experience as a registered manager. The survey found the vast majority of managers meet these requirements.

Care staff are required to have a Level 3 diploma in residential childcare, or equivalent, within two years of starting work in the sector. The census found 13% of care staff did not meet these requirements and were not working towards qualifications.

Training for staff working with children with complex needs is offered by residential school Mulberry Bush, including a two-year Level 3 foundation degree in therapeutic work with children and young people, validated by the University of the West of England.

Mulberry Bush is developing a Level 4 certificate in therapeutic child care. This is being piloted in Dorset and looks at issues such as trauma and attachment difficulties.

A Labour and Plaid Cymru backed bill was introduced in Wales this year to ensure only non-profit residential and foster care providers can register with Care Inspectorate Wales from 2027. Currently, four in five children’s homes in Wales are run by private providers.

Kinship care

At least 141,000 children in England and Wales live in kinship care arrangements where children are looked after by extended family or friends. *Stable Homes, Built on Love* pledged better support for kinship carers and the Conservative government launched the first national kinship care strategy for England in December 2023 backed by £20mn for 2024/25.

The strategy includes a trial of kinship carer allowances – paid at the same rate as fostering allowances – in eight local authorities, new statutory guidance for local authorities and better information for kinship families. It also promised more training for social workers on the role of kinship care.

Supported accommodation

Supported accommodation providers for looked-after children and care leavers aged 16 to 17 in England must now be registered with Ofsted.

The first inspections will start from September and will look at staff skills and development, especially around safeguarding. Inspections were due to start this April but were put back due to the large volume of registration applications.

TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR FOSTER CARERS

Last year’s *Stable Homes, Built on Love* strategy promised action to improve recruitment and retention of foster carers including a commitment to give foster carers an above inflation increase in allowances.

Ofsted figures show there were 43,400 fostering households in England at the end of March 2023, a figure that has remained fairly stable over the last five years. But more are needed. According to the Fostering Network there is currently a shortage of 6,500 foster families across the UK amid rises in the number of children coming into care.

A survey of 2,500 foster carers by fostering platform FosterWiki found three in four feel undervalued and are considering leaving the role with many citing burnout, exhaustion and lack of breaks.

Councils are taking steps to recruit foster carers. The London Borough of Hillingdon is

offering to pay foster care recruits up to £1,500 per week alongside a 25% cut in council tax, a leisure pass and £1,000 off utility bills. This is the equivalent of a £72,000 annual salary, says the council. Meanwhile, Hertfordshire County Council is offering annual pay of £65,000, including allowances, to recruit experienced carers to be intensive foster carers to support children with complex needs.

Courses offered by the Fostering Network include training for potential carers based on latest standards in England, Scotland and Wales.

The network’s Skills to Foster course, for those involved in recruiting and assessing potential carers, includes a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion, child development, trauma and therapy. It can be accessed in person or through remote learning.

YOUTH WORK

In the past, youth work was mainly delivered by local authorities but today is provided by a range of organisations such as housing programmes, voluntary organisations, within the NHS, social care or youth justice.

Funding for council youth services has been cut by three quarters over the last decade with charities often stepping in to provide support, particularly in areas of disadvantage. Voluntary and community providers in England are twice as likely to operate in England's most deprived areas than in the most affluent, found last year's National Youth Work Census by the National Youth Agency (NYA).

Where targeted support is being provided, the most common activity is to help young people with their mental health and wellbeing. Council-run services are more likely than charity sector counterparts to prioritise tackling youth violence, the NYA census found.

Policy

The Labour government's £95mn Young Futures programme will offer opportunities for youth workers to support young people in hubs across every community. The Oasis Charitable Trust announced in July that it is to pilot the first in a series of hubs on the site of a former girls' school in London.

The new government also wants to see more youth workers in hospital A&E departments and pupil referral units to prevent violent crime.

Under the Conservative government's National Youth Guarantee £300mn is being invested through the Youth Investment Fund to build and refurbish facilities by March next year. This closed to applicants last summer due to intense demand. As of May this year, £250mn worth of grants had been handed out to more than 220 projects.

In March, a review by MPs called for a national workforce strategy to "stimulate demand" for youth workers and create a standardised national system to tackle wide variation in youth services nationally.

According to figures published in 2022, an estimated 10,000 additional qualified youth workers are needed to meet demand.

There was no national target set by the Conservative government on how many youth workers councils should deploy locally. Its statutory guidance, published last September, says only that local authorities should "secure or support an appropriate local workforce with the skills and qualifications to meet the needs of young people".

Salary

Grades and pay for youth work jobs are negotiated each year by the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC), which includes staff and employer representatives. Youth and community support worker annual salaries are between £23,496 and £33,141, while a professional youth worker earns between £29,606 and £47,316.

Qualifications

Undergraduate and postgraduate youth work courses are validated through the NYA and Welsh Local Government Association to show they meet JNC quality standards.

Courses include the Level 2 Award in Youth Work Principles, for those aged 14 and above with experience of working with young people and looking to become an assistant youth support worker.

The Level 3 Certificate in Youth Work Practice and Diploma in Youth Work Practice are for those aged over 16 with at least a year's experience working with young people and looking to become a youth support worker.

Professional youth workers can gain a three-year full time BA (Hons) Degree in Youth Work or a Level 6 Youth Worker Degree Apprenticeship. Levels 3 and 6 can be taken through an apprenticeship.

The NYA is working with NatWest to provide almost £3mn worth of apprenticeship training for youth workers through the bank's apprenticeship levy transfer scheme. Last year, seven providers ran apprenticeship

programmes enrolling more than 160 learners.

A Level 7 qualification, including a postgraduate diploma or master's degree is also available. The number of postgraduate programmes has risen from seven to 12 in the last four years, says the NYA.

Level 4 certificates in professional development are available for youth workers in multi-agency roles and to improve leadership skills.

The NYA has also launched a short Introduction to Engaging with Young People course through its NYA Academy, which takes three hours to complete.

Social prescribing

Social prescribing, where community activities are prescribed to improve people's wellbeing, is becoming increasingly popular in youth services.

The charity Street Games runs a Social Prescribing Youth Network made up of GPs, youth workers, police officers, teachers and others. It would like all primary care networks in England to employ at least one social prescribing link worker dedicated to working with children and young people.

In December last year, the charity published a children and young people's toolkit to advise on developing and delivering social prescribing. Training for children and young people social prescribers can cover issues such as mental health first aid, domestic abuse in teenage relationships and neglect.



Meet the practitioner

Sarah Shameti, Patient Empowerment, Employability, Self Esteem and Resilience (PEEER) youth service manager, University

Hospital Southampton NHS Trust

Sarah Shameti experienced a long period of ill health as a teenager and now manages a team of hospital-based youth workers.

She admits she has had a "varied career", starting off as a professional dancer before moving into event management and working at charities such as Solent Youth Action, where she ran youth volunteer schemes, and Rethink, where she supported care leavers.

After spending six years in Greece, she

returned to the UK to work as a hospital youth worker in Southampton, initially with a renal team and progressing to her current role.

While at Solent Youth Action she completed a Level 2 youth work qualification and she has since completed the NYA's Level 4 professional development certificate. "This gave me the confidence not only to lead a team but lead a team in an environment where youth work is not the norm," she explains.

Her own experience of being ill when she was young helps in her current role with the PEEER team. "At the time, I couldn't put my thoughts into words," she says. "For me being a youth worker gives me an opportunity to help young people to find their voice."

Help build the next generation of youth workers

Sponsored

The tides of change are turning for youth work, and not before time. Youth work organisations have been struggling to recruit and yet the need for more youth workers to provide the holistic support which young people so desperately need is ever more urgent.

But with an aging workforce – almost half of those in youth work are over the age of 46 years according to the National Youth Agency (NYA) – it's imperative that young people recognise that youth work is a viable career route and that employers utilise all the support and funding available to attract newcomers into this rewarding and varied profession.

The launch of a new *Introduction to Engaging Young People* course, available through the NYA Academy aims to give anyone with an interest in working with young people a taste of the theoretical and practical foundations, as well as the basics of safeguarding, as a stepping stone into further youth work qualifications.



Bursaries

Taking advantage of youth work training bursaries, administered through the NYA in partnership with the Network of Regional Youth Work Units, with funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, is one way that employers can upskill existing staff and volunteers to Levels 2 and 3. Depending on an employee's learning style there's a range of webinar-led, self-led and face-to-face courses available.

Apprenticeships

Accessing the new youth work apprenticeships is providing an appealing option for employers to train up staff 'on the job', with the majority of the cost of the apprenticeship paid through the government's apprenticeship levy scheme. This includes a £3 million gift from NatWest dedicated to youth work apprenticeships until 2026.

The apprenticeship route is helping employers struggling to plug recruitment gaps and provides an inviting option to those leaving allied professions looking to gain a degree level qualification.

So far, seven universities offer the apprenticeship with at least five more aiming to begin recruiting for September 2025. As apprentices 'learn while they earn', this path is proving attractive to those considering a career change and not eligible for student finance.

Levi Hodge, 28, has just completed his first year on the BA Youth Work Integrated Degree Apprenticeship at Plymouth Marjon University whilst working as a youth support worker at Youth Moves in South Bristol, focusing on Youth Voice and Participation.

Levi started attending the youth club himself as a 13-year-old and he credits the project for keeping him on the right path and also supporting him when his mother passed away, when he was just 16.

"Attending Youth Moves was a big turning point for me because I think my life could have gone one of two ways. I genuinely think if I hadn't gone to Youth Moves, I probably would have ended up in prison. Instead, I got my head down, got GCSE's and went to college."

Now with a family to support Levi couldn't afford to give up his job to study, so the apprenticeship offers an affordable route to progress his career. Levi is thriving on the course and enjoying putting what he is learning into practice back at Youth Moves.

"We always encourage young people to be their best, but I also feel like I'm being inspired by my mentors at Youth Moves to be the best I can be. The apprenticeship enables me to have more strategic and practice-led conversations with my manager, which I'm enjoying."

Grow your own

The Boathouse Youth, which operates across Blackpool and Fleetwood, is helping to rebuild the youth work offer in Blackpool.

Pete Crossley, Deputy CEO, explained: "Our solution has been to 'grow our own', which means we've been able to take on ten 16-year-old apprentices doing their Level 3 youth support worker Diploma, having completed their Level 2 training at 14.

"We've also got three young employees on the new youth work apprenticeship at the University of Central Lancashire, on route to becoming fully qualified youth workers. Thanks to the support of the NYA and with funding from NatWest's levy scheme we've been able to give these young people, many of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds, the opportunity to gain a university level qualification."

The NYA supports youth work organisations with advice and guidance on the process of accessing apprenticeship funding.

Kevin Jones, Deputy Director of Youth Work (Workforce), at the NYA explained: "Our focus is on working with training providers and universities to promote the various routes into youth work, as well as to hold the hands of employers through the process of strengthening the quality of their provision. It's an exciting time to be entering the youth work profession but employers have a responsibility to develop that culture of learning and professional development and exploiting all the means at their disposal to attract and retain skilled staff."

To find out more about training available from the NYA visit www.nya.org.uk/nya-academy and visit www.nya.org.uk/apprenticeships or email Harry Rutter, Apprenticeships Officer via HarryR@nya.org.uk for information and guidance on the youth work apprenticeships.



EARLY HELP



Early help workers support vulnerable families before any challenges they face escalate and further action is needed such as children being taken into care.

However, councils are struggling to make early intervention services a priority due to funding constraints.

A joint report by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary published in November found councils “recognise the importance of early help” but are unable to prioritise it due to “lack of capacity and resources”.

Based on inspections of services in six areas, it also found approaches to early help are too focused on parents rather than children. “Areas must be both family-focused and child centred,” says the report.

Start for Life

The Conservative government’s Start for Life programme aims to improve support for parents during their babies’ first two years.

The programme is based in 75 council areas across England, with a focus on areas with high levels of deprivation.

Support is delivered through family hubs, which offer universal and specialist support for families with children aged from birth to 19, or up to 25 years old for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Around 400 family hubs are now up and running.

The programme and hubs are backed with £300mn in government funding up to 2025. This includes £100mn to promote positive early relationships and offer mental health support to families while £50mn is being used to establish infant feeding support services.

In addition, £10mn is being spent on trialling new workforce models in five council areas as

well as improving workers’ caseloads and job satisfaction.

The Conservative government said it wanted to see family hubs open England-wide.

Family help

The Conservative government’s *Stable Homes, Built on Love* strategy outlined plans to bolster the early help workforce with a focus on improving early intervention work with families.

It includes a Families First for Children (FFC) pathfinder programme to test new ways of working and a Family Network Pilot, backed by £45mn.

The FFC programme launched in July last year and runs to March 2025. Three councils, Dorset, Lincolnshire and Wolverhampton, took part in the first wave to test new approaches to family help, child protection, family-led solutions and multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.

A further seven pathfinder areas, including Wirral, Luton and Walsall, were announced in April this year.

The Family Network Pilot is testing the impact of investing in extended family networks to help keep families together and avoid taking children into care in seven areas: Brighton & Hove, Gateshead, Sunderland, Telford and Wrekin, Hammersmith & Fulham, Hartlepool, and Staffordshire

The National Children’s Bureau, along with Verian and Alma Economics, is evaluating the FFC programme and the Family Network Pilot over the next five years.

Supporting Families

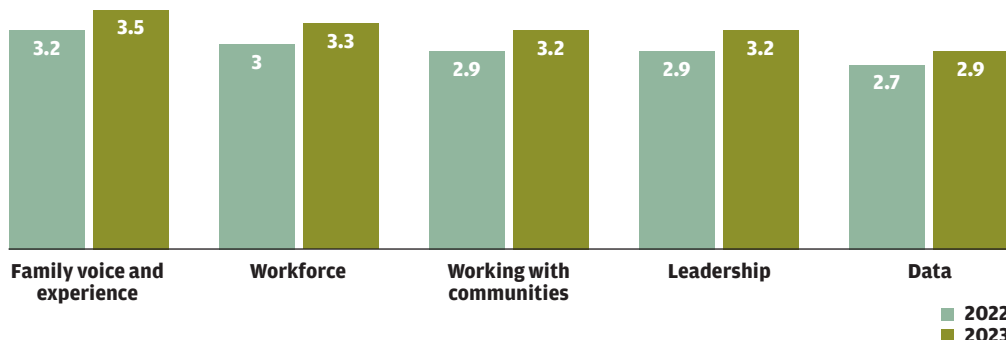
Another government early help scheme is Supporting Families. This has been running since 2013 and focuses on early help for families facing multiple problems, including unemployment, poor school attendance, health concerns, domestic abuse and risk of being involved in crime and anti-social behaviour. The Conservative government had committed £695mn to the programme in the three years to 2025.

Supporting Families roles include co-ordinators, key workers and employment advisors. The programme was overseen by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities but moved to the Department for Education in March this year so it could be co-ordinated with other early help initiatives such as family hubs.

The scheme’s latest annual report shows outcomes improved for 77,203 families during 2023/24. A total of 21 areas involved in the initiative received funding upfront after gaining “earned autonomy” status due to the maturity of their early help services.

PROGRESS ON DEVELOPING EARLY HELP SERVICES

Self-assessed average scores out of 5 for different aspects of early help services in England



Source: Annual report of the Supporting Families programme 2023-2024

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EDUCATION

School support staff are becoming increasingly important amid an exodus of teachers and rising demand for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and mental health support.

Two in five teachers plan to quit within the next five years, according to a National Education Union (NEU) survey carried out last November. Workload pressure is the top reason for leaving.

A survey of 6,000 teaching assistants published by the union Unison in April, found almost half are covering more classes for teachers than they were last year.

Latest government figures show there were 282,925 teaching assistants (TAs) working in 2023, up 1,800 on the previous year.

However, the NEU's 2023 survey of school support staff found one in four plan to leave their role within two years due to low pay and career development concerns.

Already three in four primary school head teachers are cutting TA numbers, a National Foundation for Education survey revealed in April.

Workload pressures on special educational needs co-ordinators (Sencos) are also increasing.

In January last year, the number of children with education, health and care plans in place rose to 517,000, up 9% from 2022, according to latest government figures.

Three in four education workers say more learning support assistants are needed to meet

demand for SEND support, according another NEU survey, published in April.

Measures taken by the Conservative government to meet rising SEND demand include creating 16 new special free schools in areas including Bury, Surrey and Solihull.

Meanwhile, the new Labour government has pledged to recruit 6,500 teachers.

Sencos

All mainstream schools are required to have a Senco, a qualified teacher who co-ordinates support for colleagues, pupils and families.

An 18- to 22-month national professional qualification (NPQ) for Sencos launches in September and effectively replaces the National Award for SEN Co-ordination qualification.

The new qualification covers areas including identifying need and managing support. It is being delivered by Ambition Institute, Best Practice Network, Church of England, National Institute of Teaching, Teach First and University College London's Institute of Education.

Teaching assistants

Training for TAs includes the Maximising the Practice of Teaching Assistants course run by Maximising TAs. This includes two half-day sessions covering latest research and guidance, developing pupil independence and class strategies.

A new teaching degree apprenticeship will launch next year to enable more TAs to become

qualified teachers. Recruitment is set to start this autumn.

Senior mental health leads

Efforts to improve mental health support in schools include training school leaders to become senior mental health leads. State-funded schools and colleges can apply for a £1,200 Department for Education grant with applications due in by the end of this year. Courses are available at DfE-approved colleges and providers.

Educational psychologists

Educational psychologists support children with learning, social or communication issues and must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. A psychology degree is a typical training requirement.

The government- and employer-backed Educational Psychology Funded Training scheme provides funding for 204 educational psychologists, who undertake a three-year doctorate degree followed by a three-year work placement.

In February, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman warned educational psychologist shortages in many areas are leading to delays in support. Surrey, for example, has a backlog of 1,000 assessments.

Careers leaders

The Labour government is looking to use tax paid by private schools to increase careers guidance for young people.

Careers leader courses include online learning modules for those new to the role offered by The Careers and Enterprise Company.

A two-day top-up course for experienced careers leaders is delivered by the Career Development Institute.

Causeway Education and the University of Wolverhampton offer a Level 7 course on improving careers provision.

School attendance

Government figures show one in five children are persistently absent from school. To tackle this, the charity School Home Support is launching a one-year attendance support and development training programme aimed at school support staff and leaders involved in pastoral care.

The programme, which gets under way this September, features two to four online sessions a month, covering issues such as supporting complex cases. It also involves group discussions and networking.



Meet the practitioner

Anna Speke, special educational needs co-ordinator

After working in the music and charity sectors, including management roles at Sony Music and

Teenage Cancer Trust, Anna Speke switched careers to education.

After completing her PGCE teacher training she worked in primary schools and "quickly discovered my passion" for supporting children with special education needs (SEN).

This saw her complete a national award for SEN co-ordination with the University of Birmingham and become a full-time special educational needs co-ordinator (Senco) in

the city. She then spent almost four years until 2023 as an SEN specialist in Telford and Wrekin. She completed additional training including a Level 3 course to become a forest school leader.

Last year, she became an education officer at the National Association for Special Educational Needs (Nasen), which supports Sencos.

She advises others wanting to become a Senco to "gain as much experience as you can" working with children with additional needs. She also advises those interested in the role to stay up to date with research, legislation and policies, including listening to podcasts on SEN issues.

"It's a tough but rewarding and amazing role, requiring a range of different skills – communication, leadership, advocacy and organisation to name a few," she adds.



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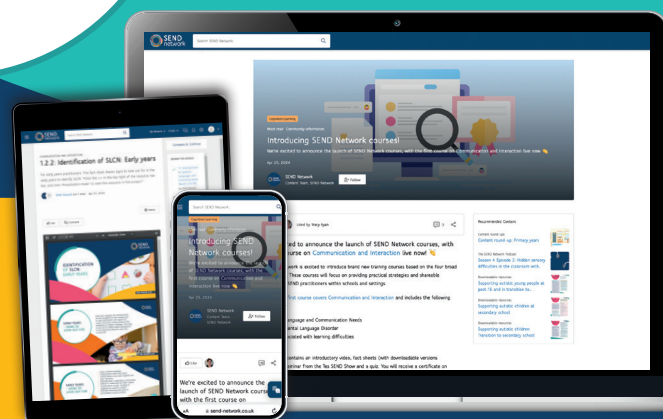


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EARLY YEARS

Expansion of funded childcare places for working families is being phased in under former Conservative government plans.

By September 2025, working families with a child aged at least nine months will be entitled to 30 hours of support.

But nine in 10 councils are not sure there will be enough places in their area to meet demand during the final phase of the roll out in 2025, found a survey published by the charity Coram in June.

This expansion comes as early years providers face challenges recruiting and retaining staff amid ongoing concerns about low pay and lack of funding in the sector.

Vacancies are now more than double pre-Covid levels, according to the Recruitment and Employment Federation's Labour Market Tracker for this year.

For years the early years sector "has had to survive on shoestring funding rates" and that has affected pay, says Early Years Alliance chief executive Neil Leitch.

A Department for Education survey in April found two thirds of nursery group providers are experiencing staffing challenges, with low pay the main reason for staff leaving.

To improve staffing levels the government is trialling a £1,000 signing-on bonus for starters in 19 council areas, including Birmingham and Doncaster.

Additionally, an experience-based career route for unqualified practitioners is being developed to improve recruitment. A consultation on this new qualification closed in May.

The Labour government is planning to boost the supply of places by creating 3,000 new nurseries within primary schools.

Childminders

Childminder numbers continue to fall, despite incentives for new recruits of £600, or £1,200 for those that sign on with an agency. Latest Ofsted figures show a 50% slump in their numbers from 56,300 in 2013 to 27,900 last year. During 2022/23, 5,200 childminders left the profession.

A childminder-specific Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) launched in January. It means childminders no longer have to complete EYFS training but are "required to demonstrate sufficient knowledge" of it.

Levels 2 and 3

Staff with a DfE-approved Level 2 qualification are known as early years practitioners and apprenticeships are available at this level. Level 3-qualified staff

are known as early year educators. DfE early years qualification requirements and standards for both levels were published earlier this year.

The Level 3 criteria comes into force from September this year and removes a requirement for trainees to have a maths GCSE or equivalent. However, nursery managers are expected to have a maths qualification or achieve one within two years of being hired.

It remains to be seen whether this requirement will be reinstated given the Labour government has pledged to improve maths teaching in the early years.

A Level 3 Education and Childcare T-Level is also available.

In January, social mobility charity the Sutton Trust urged the government to make Level 3 "a benchmark" for minimum qualification levels for early years workers, alongside higher wages and funding to support training.

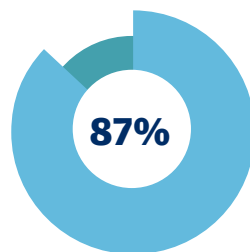
Degrees and foundation degrees

Level 6 Early Childhood Studies degrees are available. These can include Early Childhood Graduate Practitioner competencies, developed by the Early Childhood Studies Degree Network, to prove graduates can put their learning into practice in areas such as children's rights.

Level 5 early years foundation degrees supported by professional body Sector Endorsed Foundation Degrees in Early Years are also available. These can be topped up to a full degree.

A Level 5 Early Years Lead Practitioner Apprenticeship offers early years career progression through practice leadership. It is the equivalent of a foundation degree.

WORKFORCE CONCERNS



of local authorities feel workforce issues will affect expansion of 30-hour childcare

Source: Childcare survey 2024, Coram Family and Childcare

PLAY

Playwork training is at "crisis point" and the sector is affected by a lack of regulation and support, according to education consortium Playwork England, which was set up earlier this year to better co-ordinate training. It meets four times a year.

City & Guilds offers a Level 2 award, certificate and diploma in playwork. Meanwhile, charity training provider NCFE is reviewing its Level 3 award, certificate and diploma in playwork. Current qualifications are being withdrawn and are set to be replaced with new versions, which "will not greatly differ from the current versions", it says.

Training Qualifications UK (TQUK) offers a Level 2 Diploma for the Playwork Practitioner that covers issues such as diversity and risk.

In Wales, out of school and holiday provision needs to ensure an "appropriate proportion of staff are suitably qualified". For those working in Wales who are looking to develop their skills, NCFE offers a Level 5 Diploma in Advanced Playwork. Trainees must be aged at least 19, have a Level 3 qualification and already be working unsupervised in play settings.

A BA (Hons) in Childhood Development and Playwork is available from Leeds Beckett University. A range of courses are also on offer through the University of Gloucestershire's Playwork Partnerships initiative.

Post-qualifying training

An 18-month National Professional Qualification for Early Years Leadership aimed at managers is available.

Further professional development is available through Early Years Stronger Practice Hubs, which are supported by the Education Endowment Foundation and the National Children's Bureau. This is being funded until late 2024.

SEND

Early years practitioners wanting to focus on supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) can apply for a DfE-accredited and funded Level 3 Early Years Senco qualification.

This has been designed to meet requirements in the EYFS to identify and support children with SEND and promote equality of opportunity for children in their care.

It is being delivered by the Best Practice Network which has been allocated 7,000 funded places.

HEALTH

Children's health professionals are mainly employed by the NHS but an increasing number work in multi-agency teams. The new government has pledged to improve services through greater use of artificial intelligence, incentivising staff to carry out additional work and encouraging health trusts to pool resources.

Nurses and midwives

A record 372,411 nurses and midwives now work in the NHS in England, 20,000 more than the previous year, according to official figures.

The latest Nursing and Midwifery Council registration data for the whole of the UK shows an increase in numbers. As of November 2023, there were 808,488 nurses, midwives and nursing associates eligible to practise in the UK – up 19,857 on the previous six months and 114,874 more than in September 2018.

However, University and Colleges Admission Service figures for January 2024 show falls of 7% and 13% respectively for undergraduate nursing and midwifery courses.

An estimated 2,500 midwives are needed to meet demand in England, according to the Royal College of Midwives, which wants to see student midwives have fees paid for them on top of an annual, non-refundable £10,000 bursary.

Last year's long-term NHS workforce plan pledged to double doctor and nurse training places by 2031 and improve staff retention. Funding for 160 new midwife posts over the next three years was promised through a £35mn investment announced in March.



Meet the practitioner

Karen Goodwin, specialist public health nurse

Karen Goodwin is a specialist public health nurse working across secondary and primary schools in Aberdeen.

In Scotland, school nurses' work is underpinned by the Scottish government's "Getting it right for every child" strategy.

"This sees school nurses play a key role in prevention, early intervention, reducing inequalities and providing support using strength-based approaches," says Goodwin.

"A large part of the school nurse role is safeguarding, child protection and working with care experienced young people to improve their health and wellbeing."

She trained as an adult nurse and went on to do a Specialist Public Health Nursing degree. She has also completed a postgraduate diploma in advanced nursing practice. Halfway through this course she was diagnosed as dyslexic. She now receives extra support from her university and hopes to complete a full MSc by next year.

"Working with children, young people and their families is a privilege," she says.

The Labour administration promises to trial neighbourhood health centres to bring district nurses, GPs, care workers and mental health specialists among others "under one roof".

School nurses

School nurse numbers in England have fallen by a third since 2009 and in some council areas school nursing is no longer commissioned. The NHS workforce plan pledged to double the number of school nurse training places to 662 by 2031. A report by the Queen's Nursing Institute, College of Medicine and the School and Public Health Nurses Association published in March called for a school nurse in every school in England.

Health visitors

The NHS long-term workforce plan also promised to increase health visitor training places in England, from 768 in 2022 to 1,339 by 2031. The Institute of Health Visiting (IHV) says numbers in England have fallen by 40% since 2015 and warns of a 5,000 shortage of health visitors.

Four in five health visitors report numbers are falling in their area, according to a 2023 IHV survey. Seven in 10 say work-related stress has increased and two in five want to leave their role within five years.

Mental health

Almost a quarter of a million children are waiting for mental health support despite being referred to services in 2022/23, found a report by Children's Commissioner for England Rachel de Souza.

It calls for increased early intervention through school counsellors, mental health support teams (MHSTs) in school and early support hubs. Early support hubs are drop-in services designed to improve young people's access to mental health interventions. In October 2023, the government announced £4.92mn funding to enable 10 hubs to expand their services and employ new staff like counsellors and youth workers. In May this year, an additional £3mn was announced to cover 24 hubs.

Mental health support teams work with schools and colleges to deliver interventions, help school leaders develop strategies and advise staff. They are made up of a new workforce of education mental health practitioners who complete an NHS-funded year-long training course – either a postgraduate or graduate diploma.

The Labour government has pledged to recruit 8,500 more staff to support young people's mental health, likely to be delivered through its planned Young Futures hubs.

Sexual health

Earlier this year, the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee called for urgent investment in sexual health services amid a surge in sexually transmitted infections among young people and other high-risk groups.



Meet the practitioner

Susie Scales, school nursing clinical lead, Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

"I am proud to call myself a nurse and even prouder to be a school nurse," says Susie Scales who started her career in healthcare more than 30 years ago.

After qualifying as a registered general nurse in 1991 she initially worked on adult hospital wards before moving to work with children in special schools, then working in mainstream schools as a community staff nurse.

After completing a specialist community public health nursing (SCPHN) degree she went on to lead school nursing teams in London before moving to the East Midlands.

She has also completed a practice teacher qualification which enables her to oversee SCPHN students.

She says her general nurse training gave her a good grounding in supporting people before specialising in working with young people.

As a practice teacher she says she takes pride in "developing the school nurses of the future".



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YOUTH JUSTICE

Leaving rates among prison and probation staff remain high with between one in seven and one in 12 looking to quit, depending on their experience and role, according to HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) figures.

Steph Roberts-Bibby, chief executive of the Youth Justice Board (YJB), the public body that oversees youth justice, told *CYP Now* earlier this year that “people leaving the workforce is one of the biggest risks” the sector faces.

A fresh workforce development strategy for 2025 onwards has yet to be released. The YJB’s current strategy for 2023 to 2025 includes developing apprenticeship training with a Level 5 qualification available for trainees.

Secure estate

HMPPS’s Youth Custody Service offers roles in young offender institutions and other secure settings. Band 3 youth justice worker pay ranges from £32,851 to £38,530 for a 39-hour week. Trainees start on a 37 hour a week contract.

Where there are no local vacancies at a secure setting, trainees can work away for 23 months through HMPPS’s Prison and Youth Justice Futures Training Scheme and gain an additional £1,500 annual pay for two years plus financial help with travel and accommodation costs.

Qualifications include the newly developed Level 5 Youth Justice Apprenticeship, and Foundation Degree in Youth Justice. This is offered by three training providers: South Devon College, Intelligencia Training and Unitas.

Students can progress to take a Level 6 BA (Hons) in Youth Justice.

The two-year Unlocked Graduates scheme places graduate trainee prison officers in young offender institutions. These trainees work towards a master’s degree, are assigned an experienced prison officer mentor and undertake a two-week work placement in their second year.

Currently, there is only one secure training centre, Oakhill, for children aged 12 to 17.

Oasis Restore, the UK’s first secure school to cater for this age group, opened in June with a greater focus on improving children’s education and mental health.

Community

Training for youth justice specialists in multi-agency youth offending teams (YOTs) includes in-service courses, a Youth Justice Effective Practice Certificate and youth justice degree.

The Association of YOT Managers (AYM) runs Level 5 and Level 7 leadership courses with local government leadership body Solace Enterprises.

The Youth Justice Sector Improvement Partnership, involving the AYM, Youth Justice Board and senior youth justice leaders offers training for managers on carrying out peer reviews of YOTs and team leader training. It also offers operational manager training, coaching, and mentoring for YOT managers and supervisors.

The Youth Justice Institute runs free courses on child and adolescent development and an introduction to youth justice for new practitioners. It also runs paid-for five-week Effective Practice Award courses covering areas such as trauma-informed practice and strength-based approaches to tackling offending.

LEADERS

Turnover among directors of children’s services (DCSs) is at its highest level for six years, according to figures released by the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) in May. Of 21 permanent postholders appointed during the year, all but two were assistant directors promoted from the same council or another local authority. “It’s good to see succession planning bearing fruit,” says ADCS president Andy Smith. There was a decline in “twin hat” roles covering children’s and adult services to just 13.

The ADCS’s annual survey of DCSs and children’s trust chief executives continues to show a lack of diversity in leadership. Of 115 leaders who responded to the 2023 survey, 103 identified as white, five as multiple or mixed ethnicity, four as Asian and two as black.

Leadership programmes

The DfE-backed Upon scheme offers leadership training to new and aspiring DCSs delivered by The Staff College, Oxford Brookes University’s Institute of Public Care (IPC), Skills for Care and public services firm GatenbySanderson.

The Staff College programmes for children’s services leaders include its Black and Asian Leadership Initiative. This three-day programme for up to 25 participants in 2024, includes sessions on tackling racism. The Staff College also runs a one-day Inspiring Women into Leadership course for those looking to move into a leadership role and a two-day Women in Leadership residential programme. Children’s services leaders can also access its Associate Coaching and Mentoring Pool, where experienced leaders offer individual and group coaching.

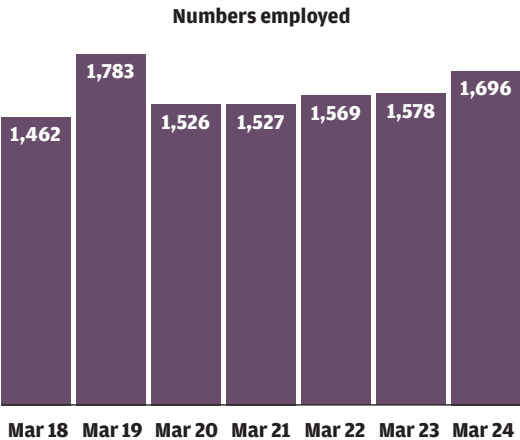
The National Development Team for Inclusion and The Staff College run a Leading Change in SEND/AP programme for special educational needs and alternative provision leaders. Sessions take place this autumn and winter and include a two-day residential.

IPC runs an online course for children’s services commissioners. It comprises a series of half-day sessions in October and November and involves independent study. Optional accreditation based on a work-based commissioning project is available to gain a postgraduate certificate in commissioning and purchasing worth 20 master’s-level transferrable credits.

Councillors

The Local Government Association runs a course for councillors with a children’s services role. The two-day course runs during autumn 2024 in Coventry and involves guest speakers and networking opportunities.

YOUTH CUSTODY SERVICE WORKFORCE IN ENGLAND AND WALES



Source: HM Prison and Probation Service workforce quarterly: March 2024

