

2021

What does the early years sec

Leading figures and professionals in the early years reflect on an incredibly challenging year



Robert Halfon MP, chair of the Education Select Committee

‘Everything I’ve learnt shows that investment in the early years of a child’s life pays off in the long run. Our Education Select Committee’s report, *Tackling disadvantage in the early years*, demonstrated the importance of early intervention. It highlighted the work of Manchester City Council, which assesses development eight times between birth to five years old and intervenes as needed.

‘The Government’s Spending Review commitment to the continuation of £60 million in funding for maintained nurseries in the next financial year is welcome, but they are the gold standard of early provision and need long-term financial support. The Government should also reform the 30 hours free childcare offer so that it is also given to parents out of work. A helping hand for parents is key. Rolling out family hubs around the country would support them in building stronger relationships.

‘Let 2021 be the year when the vital role of early intervention and early years support gets the recognition and investment it deserves so we can tackle social injustice early on and give all children the very best start in life.’



Tulip Siddiq MP, shadow minister for children and early years

‘I want to wish everyone in the early years sector a happy new year and say a big thank you for the inspiring work they have done to keep supporting children and working families in what has been an incredibly tough year.



‘Coronavirus has dealt a hammer blow to fantastic nurseries, childminders and pre-schools all over the country, which were already struggling due to chronic underfunding, and I know many are now sadly threatened with closure. Early years providers have been asked to provide a fourth emergency childcare service during this crisis, yet they have not been given anything like the support they need to do it.

‘I pay tribute to those who have soldiered on despite these challenges to keep working to support families and our economy. I can only hope that 2021 will be better, and I will always be here fighting your corner in Parliament for the support you need and deserve.’



Dr Julian Grenier, head teacher, Sheringham Nursery School and

Children’s Centre, and lead on the revised *Development Matters*

‘My hope for the year ahead is that practitioners will continue to engage positively with the revised *Development Matters* as we prepare for the new EYFS Framework in September 2021.

‘While there have been concerns from the sector, the many practitioners I’ve been working with directly have been enthusiastic about the changes. The Early Adopters group on Facebook has thousands of members who have collaborated and supported each other really

well. They are already seeing the benefits of reduced workload, so that they are spending more time playing, chatting and helping their children to learn.

‘Looking beyond the EYFS changes, it’s been a truly grim year for the community around Sheringham Nursery School, with the highest death rate in England during the first lockdown. I hope we can campaign together to tackle child poverty, poor housing and the systemic racism that’s led to this appalling tragedy, as we rebuild for a post-Covid world.’



Shaddai Tembo, writer and speaker in early years and lecturer at Perth College UHI

‘To have hope for the future is to feel that our aims for the kind of society we wish for have not been recognised in the present. Black and minoritised people have always hoped: we have hoped that our voices will be listened to, we have hoped that we will have a voice at the table and, most importantly, we have hoped that the ordinary and structural racism we continue to face will come to an end.

‘The early years has a critical role to play here, where we might begin to sow the seeds for a generation of children who are taught about and equipped to deal with the effects of racism before they have to confront it themselves in the real world, where we might teach children what it means to have a racial

identity rather than leaving them to work it out for themselves. This is what I hope for, nothing less.’



Nancy Stewart, project lead, Birth to Five Matters

‘My first big wish for 2021 is what must be on all of our minds – that the pandemic will be over, and that as a society we support everyone suffering the after-effects, whether physical, emotional or economic. Families and early years settings will have a big transition ahead and I hope that Birth to Five Matters will be part of the support for moving forward together.

‘Birth to Five Matters will be launched this year, and it truly is “by the sector, for the sector”. This optional, non-statutory guidance is for everyone implementing the EYFS, and I hope practitioners will find that it gives them what they have been asking for, and more. The core document and the wealth of online resources will draw on sound principles and expert knowledge to meet statutory requirements in a way that reflects what researchers and practitioners say best meets the needs of young children.’



Dr Alice Haynes, deputy head of early years, Anna Freud

National Centre for Children and Families

‘At last there seems to be an increasing understanding about the extent to which the early years shape children’s development. The report from the Royal Foundation really helped by making that message public.

‘But unfortunately this understanding isn’t reflected in

What do you want for the coming year?

and share their wishes for a better 2021 with Annette Rawstrone

the way we value staff in the early years sector. I would like to see much greater respect and support for the role that early years practitioners play in shaping our children's futures.

'Our hope for 2021 is for greater recognition of this critical work through increased funding, resources and access to training. As the saying goes, you can't pour from an empty cup, and early years practitioners need support to give babies and young children the love and nurture they need, now more than ever.'



Pauline Scott,
director of
Lullaby Lane
Nurseries,
Glasgow

'It is my hope for 2021 that our early years workforce reflects on the crucial role that they have played in 2020, to act as emotional buffers for our children and many families. I hope that as leaders, we prioritise the well-being of our teams, so that they feel valued and psychologically safe.'

'I have a vision for a confident, self-believing sector that understands the impact that they have on our children's lives, now, and as they continue to grow and develop through life. I want our workforce to be given fully-funded training in the science of attachment. This clearly shows us that the relationships our children are experiencing in their most formative years will be shaping their bodies and brains, and helping our children to make sense of their relationships with themselves and others.'

'I hope that the early years sector is given the professional recognition and remuneration it so deserves. After all, prevention is better than cure – socially, emotionally, relationally; and if that does not drive a change with some leaders, then most certainly, economically.'



Millie Colwey,
childminder
in Bristol
and
specialist
leader of education

'It's a time to reflect deeply on the year we leave behind and to dream up aspirations for the year ahead. 2020 has brought unprecedented challenges and has forced us to look critically at society and our role within it as educators.'

'The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed huge disparity between the most advantaged and disadvantaged people in the UK. For many, 2020 was a wake-up call to the urgent importance of environmental, socio-cultural and economic sustainability. It is my hope that 2021 will be a year of action in the early years sector.'

'The wheels have been in motion for some time, with ever more settings becoming aware of sustainability and the vital role we must take. Sustainability is multifaceted, but I hope 2021 will be the year that "nature-connection" takes centre stage in early childhood provision. May all children have opportunities to play in nature and build an image of themselves as part of the natural world!'



Amelia Joyner,
pre-school
leader,
Cullompton
Pre-school

'Following a challenging year, we look forward to 2021 so that we can start to spread our wings, go on local visits again and welcome visitors back into our setting. We have loved our wonderful Forest School and our dream is to offer sessions throughout the year.'

'We prioritise vulnerable two-year-olds, but aspirations are high for our cohort. Many of our children need additional support and referrals so we hope that the

services they need will be in place before they leave us for school.'

'We worry about our pre-school being sustainable; we are a charity and face a large deficit in our budget. How can we address this when funding doesn't even cover wages? This is the biggest challenge that we will face.'

'We also worry for those who missed pre-school during lockdown, but we are looking back over 2020 feeling proud of being fully open every day.'



Lianne Moseley,
director of
Bonitots
Bilingual
Nursery and
Pre-school in London

'We have seen with sobering clarity that there are plenty of genuine threats to the human race without us manufacturing more. If we are going to have any hope of fighting the multiple existential threats we will face over coming generations – from pandemics to climate change – we must do so together. There is a burgeoning understanding that prejudice is innate, and that being passive isn't enough: we have to be actively anti-racist. Failure to do so perpetuates the problem and leaves the world an uglier, weaker place.'

'My hope for 2021 is that the momentum built continues to grow, and that parents and educators commit to making the simple changes necessary to raise anti-racist children. We have the power to transform race relations in the next generation – to cure an age-old problem and, in so doing, build a safer, happier, fairer world.'



Sarah Steel,
CEO, The Old
Station
Nursery
Group
'2020 has been a
really tough year for us all. We

have really shown how we are the "fourth emergency service" and deserve some recognition. I hope the team at the Department for Education and HMRC realise this and support us better.'

'We know there isn't any more money, but we'd like to see it better shared out – by revisiting how the funded hours are allocated and looking at a lot of things "that have always been that way", including space ratios, outdoor space counting in ratio, and – dare I say it – staff ratios. We have the worst-paid workforce and yet childcare is expensive. Just throw better availability of Level 3s into the mix too, and I'll be happy!'



Linda Baston-Pitt,
chief
executive of
Purple Bee
Learning and
co-founder of the
PANCo health and
well-being qualification

'My hope is that we continue to stand together and take forward what we've learnt from this pandemic that keeps the health and well-being of children, families and early years teams at the centre of all we do.'

'Times of change are opportunities to change things for the better. My dream is that early years professionals are recognised and valued for the vital role that they have played in supporting children and families despite the challenges, and that the Government supports this dedication and excellence in real terms.'

'I also dream that the PANCo becomes a mandatory role in all settings funded through the Government's Lifetime Skills, so that we can begin to turn our early years working environments into places of promise and possibility and a place where we are not merely surviving, but thriving!'