

# Respect

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# The Sector

The Early Years Reputation Report 2022



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# Key findings

## Reputation

- **95%** of respondents don't feel respected by politicians and policymakers.
- A further **70%** feel they lack respect from wider society.
- More than **half** believe Early Years has a reputation problem (57%).

## Challenges

- The biggest challenge facing Early Years is now unequivocally staffing - **86%** felt this was an issue. **Funding & economic policy (69%)** and **respect from wider society (69%)** came second.
- **64%** feel that "**the pandemic** made it more difficult to build relationships with families."
- While **22%** felt the pandemic had a positive impact on people's opinions of EY, **34%** feel like it's made it worse. Almost half have noticed no change.

## Families

- While **almost all** (98%) think close relationships with families matter for delivering high-quality education, **30%** don't feel as connected to families as they'd like to.
- The **three** main issues preventing connections with families are: Mismatched expectations, lack of interest in collaborating, and lack of respect for the educator's role.

## Motivation

- Only **39%** of respondents currently feel positive about working in EY. **41%** have mixed feelings.
- **More than ¾** of respondents consider working in the Early Years rewarding
- But **75%** consider it stressful and taking third place - '**tiring**' (**70%**).
- More than **71%** **agreed** that "most people in the sector are in it for the children" and only **8%** believe this is **not true** or there are other factors to it.

# 2022: The year the 'invisible workforce' were heard.



**Matt Arnerich**

Director of Brand & Comms, Family

A lethal mixture of overstretched staff, ballooning expectations, and inadequate funding have left the Early Years workforce on their knees.

The common culprit is a lack of respect, and the solution has to be more engagement with families and wider society to get rid of those deep-rooted negative stereotypes that are holding us back.

## “This is nothing new, Matt.”

After we closed the survey for this report, the first of its kind on the state of EY reputation in the UK, we quickly compiled the early results and sent them off to a number of operators and experts.

If there was one common thread in all their responses, it would be...the lack of surprise. ‘Unsurprising’. ‘Nothing new’. ‘This is sad to read’, they told me.

They’re right of course. Those in the know won’t find anything revolutionary in these pages. The familiar stereotypes that early education is ‘just playing with toys all day’. That educators do not feel respected by politicians or the public. That the recruitment crisis in the sector grows by the hour.

But what we must stand by, is to keep telling this old story to new people. We have to open the windows, and shout out onto the street “Early childhood matters”. Walk out of our own room, shake a stranger and tell them “Early Educators are not babysitters”.

The way we explain this to new employees at Family

HQ, is that if we wait until children are out of nappies, we have waited too long. We know that by the age of five, our brains are 90% of their adult weight. We also know that by five almost half the gap between rich and poor children that’s present at 16 has already emerged. And we know that across the OECD, early years gets 40% of the funding of its later educational counterparts - all for an educational stage that we know is uniquely important for later development.

But this is not just another report calling for more funding. While we stand on the shoulders of many great reports, plenty of them referenced here, I feel that too many of them have tiptoed around the edges of the fundamental problem.

Negative stereotypes breed a lack of respect. That lack of respect prevents grown-up conversations about funding, stalls recruitment, makes people without proper EY expertise think they can shift early years policy. And that all just leads to a workforce further maligned and disrespected.

This is what we want to address with this report each year, with the hope to expand internationally in

years to come. It’s time to stop the false equivalence that early years settings cannot juggle the parallel objectives of getting more women back to work and delivering high-quality early education at its most important phase. Other countries do it, and it is time the UK finds its way.

As you’ll see in our recommendations, the results of this report have sharpened our thinking around what we might be able to do to help. I hope you find plenty of ideas too.

I was recently at the Early Years Alliance annual conference, where Neil Leitch stood on the Zoom stage, and quoted the audience a famous Mandela quote. “The curve of morality is long, but it bends towards justice.” While the revelations of this report are damning, I am certain we find ourselves somewhere on that long slow bend. Let’s do what we can to wrestle control of the steering wheel.

“I want to be clear to those who work in early education. You are our people. This is another step in our mission to make you **heard and seen** through our campaigns, and through making it easier for families to connect with your hard, never ceasing, **endlessly** passionate work.”



**Anders Laustsen**  
CEO, Family

### Methodology

The data was collected from 740 respondents via online survey between 1st-13th June 2022

Comprised 38% Managers, 30% Educators, 19% Owners. 69% were Family users.

For more information on respondent split including type of setting, full methodology, and full results, please see the separate appendix.

Report findings

# Where we are, why we got there, and how we get out

Chapter 01

Early Educators are undervalued

Chapter 02

Are things getting better...or worse?

Chapter 03

Do we take advantage of educators' goodwill?

Chapter 04

Can family partnerships unlock more understanding?

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Solution time - How do we drive change?

# Early Educators are undervalued



# Early Educators are undervalued

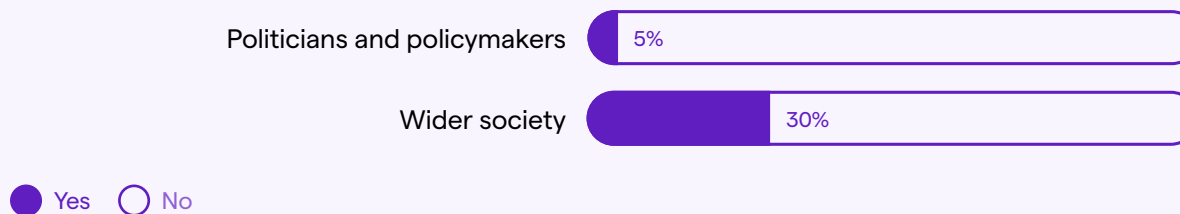
The Early Years sector is undervalued. It would be impossible to read through the deeply sad responses to this survey without coming to that conclusion.

The stand-out figure from the answers of almost 750 Early Years professionals, is that 95% of them no longer feel they have the respect of politicians and policymakers. 70% feel wider society doesn't get it either.

And it's clear to see why. "[We're] classed as baby-sitters who get children ready for school," said one respondent, a common concern raised throughout the survey. "We are the last thought," said another, "schools get a lot of help and we are treated differently."

What's even more worrying, is that this lack of respect is having a knock-on effect on people's motivation and desire to remain in the sector.

## Do EY staff feel respected by...



### Mixed feelings

Only 39% said they were feeling positive overall about working in EY, with just 12% saying they are very positive. The majority, over 41%, have mixed feelings about their work.

And this tension between a vocation they love and a job that is becoming increasingly demanding, was clear in the responses. "Whilst I love what I do," one person said, "at the moment it feels so negative always."

As we'll go on to see in Chapter 3, it's clear that many educators feel passionately that they are in it for the children, but we have to ask - how long can this last? There is an expectation that EY staff have an endless pool of care and love to draw from, but can you

## How does it feel to work in the Early Years right now?

41%

Have mixed feelings

39%

Feel positive

imagine how draining it must be to bring your energetic best self to work each day for the children when fundamentally you feel tired and stressed?

“I think we’re an invisible workforce. Everyone **knows** we are there but don’t **fully understand** what goes into being a quality educator and providing so many opportunities and **experiences** for children in a week.”

Pre-school Educator  
Anonymous

### Putting words to it

The adjectives most people associated with their work, also showed quite how tough it is treading this line.

The most popular adjective was 'rewarding', with 77%. It seems this is an area that we should keep showcasing when we tell the world about how wonderful working in the Early Years can be.

But echoing the [Early Years Alliance's Minds Matter report](#), the adjective in close second was 'stressful', chosen by exactly three-quarters of the respondents. Having worked through a pandemic and now a cost of living crisis in one of the UK's most poorly paid sectors, it's really no surprise. In 2018, the Minds Matter report found that 25% of staff were considering leaving the Early Years sector due to stress or mental health difficulties. You only have to wonder how much higher that number may have crept now.

## Which words best describe how it is to work in Early Years?



“When **95%** of the respondents in this report say that ‘they do not feel respected by politicians’ it is **timely** to listen to and acknowledge what the workforce is **repeatedly** saying about working with the youngest in society”



Dr Sharon Colilles  
Senior Lecturer

**Frustrating and fun**

Continuing the story, the adjectives in third, fourth and fifth, were ‘tiring’ ‘frustrating’ and ‘fun’, but many also chose ‘exciting’, ‘motivating’ and ‘positively challenging’, showing there is plenty in the fundamentals of this vital profession to be proud of.

We also allowed respondents to chose their own adjectives, and the trend here was overwhelmingly negative. ‘Undervalued’, ‘Underpaid’, and ‘ignored’ were common, and one damning response went further.

“**[Working in the Early Years is] soul-destroying; I have earned minimum wage for 8 years.**”

**Under the microscope**

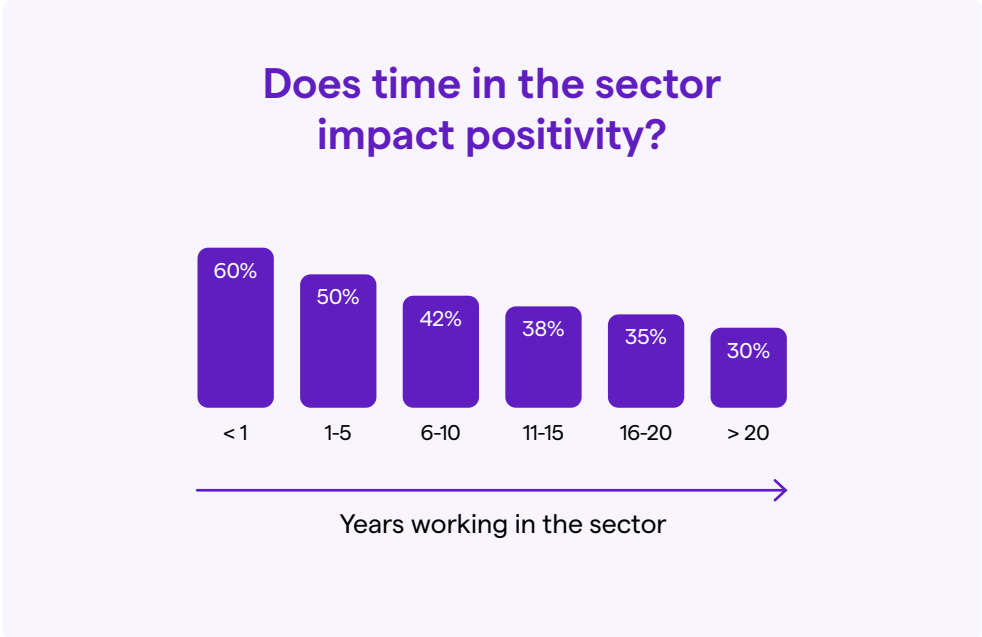
Looking deeper into the demographics, 60% of respondents who have worked in the sector for less than a year felt positive about it. The same goes for those in their first half-decade in the sector, which was still at 50%.

But shift to the EY veterans and the positive answers dropped dramatically into the 30s.

Experienced professionals were also more likely to not feel the respect of politicians, and society, although there was a slight rise in positive responses from those who had worked in the sector the longest.

In many ways, it’s no wonder that those who have faced decades of underappreciation are less likely to be more positive. But it’s also a sign that perhaps fresh eyes may be able to help take the huge steps needed to make a change.

One final unsurprising finding was that managers were more likely to describe working in the sector as ‘lonely’ - 16% compared to just 5% of practitioners. Handling the operational challenges, being more exposed to the staffing crisis, and facing all the same problems of respect clearly take their toll.



“It is fundamental that as a society we care for and **properly reward** the educators working with our youngest children, for the work is both complex and challenging.”

 **Dr Stella Louis**  
Author, trainer, consultant

# Are things getting better or worse?

## Are things getting better or worse?

It's clear from the results that the Early Years sector's reputation is in ill health. But is it getting worse?

In 2018, the Early Years Alliance Minds Matter report also asked how positive Early Years professionals feel about working in the sector, and the comparison gives us a mixed picture.

In our survey, people were 5% less likely to say they're feeling positive. But the number of people who feel negative is significantly lower - down 19%.

While we have to be careful about making assumptions across different questions with different wording, it is relevant to consider that many more people seem to have mixed feelings about working in the sector, compared to more extreme views (particularly negative) in the past.

"[During the pandemic] you had to wait for the finer details to be **confirmed by the government** before finding out how certain decisions impacted us. Such examples of a **lack of respect** and importance being placed on early years by the government, further exacerbated the problem **already** faced by the sector."



Adam Marycz  
Early years teacher, editor and writer

### The pandemic impact

In the midst of the pandemic, it was hoped that the reality for parents of juggling early education and work, was going to increase the wider respect and understanding of Early Years. And it seemed to be the case, with Ofsted quoting in their [Annual Report in 2020](#) that "there was an increased appreciation of the importance of Early Years and many felt honoured to be working to support children during this time."

A few years on, our survey revealed a more mixed picture. In fact, while 22% felt the pandemic had a positive impact on people's opinions about EY, 34% actually felt like it made it worse and almost half have noticed no change.

This could be the result of the widespread feeling that the pandemic exacerbated many issues, including more colleagues leaving the sector and children

## Has the pandemic changed people's opinion about EY?

# 45%

No, didn't have any effect

# 33%

Yes, it's got worse

# 22%

Yes, it's improved

returning with an even greater need for support. "Covid has caused a massive backlog for children needing support for educational needs," one respondent said, "children's development has been delayed and we are playing catch up."

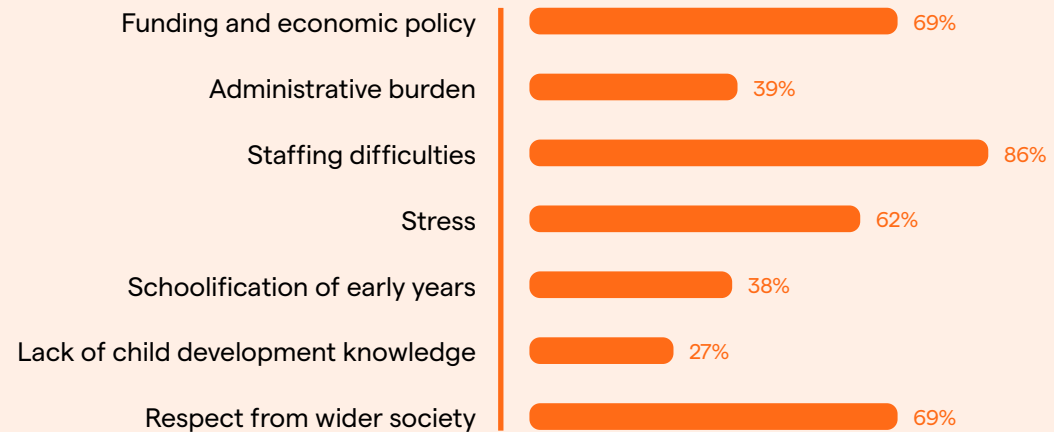
It's clear that something has got lost in translation between the admiration and respect that was apparent during the height of the pandemic for staff

labelled 'essential workers', and what has happened since. We need to find ways to capitalise on that appreciation of early education as more than just 'care'.

### What is changing?

Staffing difficulties (86%), funding (69%), respect itself (69%), and stress (62%), were the four most common answers chosen for our question about the 'big problems' facing early education.

### What are the challenges facing early years?



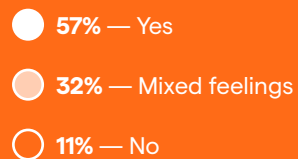


“It’s hard to reflect on the **impact** that comments about how ‘childcare is too expensive’ must have on people working for **minimum wage**. They clearly feel that the work they do is undervalued.”



Sue Cowley  
Early Years Author

## Does Early Years have a reputation problem?



This goes to highlight quite how drastic the current recruitment and retention issue in the Early Years sector is, with staffing challenges overtaking what has long been seen as the fundamental issue facing the sector: funding. But we can't forget that these issues are all closely linked, with one respondent noting "We are staff-short, which was not the case before the

brexit vote and underpayment for funded hours". Indeed, by far the biggest common denominator when asked to expand on this was answers mentioning pay, funding, and wages. When asked about these fundamental challenges, one respondent simply answered "The pay is horrendous. No one wants to do this job for pennies."

### Does Early Years have a reputation problem?

Whether it be struggling to recruit staff, difficulty in arguing for fairer funding, or a workforce pushed to breaking point with increased expectations and top-down pressures, it seems at the root of it all is respect.

More than every second respondent agreed that 'Early years has a reputation problem' (57%), and less than 10% actively disagreed.

At the same time, other reporting shows us that the challenges go even deeper. The Duchess of Cambridge's [Royal Foundation recently reported](#) that while nine in ten of their survey respondents recognise the importance of early childhood, just 17% see the time where a child's brain develops more than at any other point as uniquely important.

**"Whilst I love what I do, at the moment it feels so negative always"**

— Nursery Manager

# Do we take advantage of educators' goodwill?

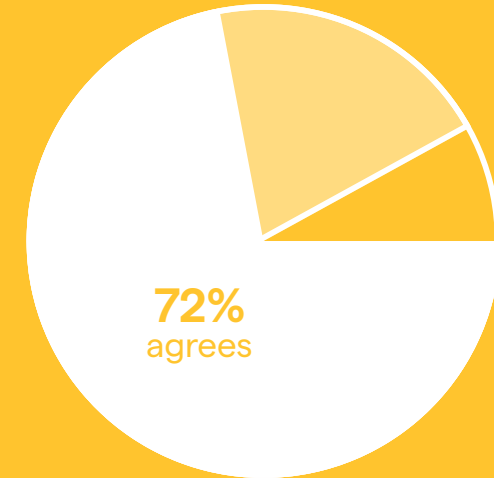
## Is early educator goodwill exploited?

When asked if they agreed with the statement ‘Most people in this sector are in it for the children’, more than 71% said they did. But is it this dedication that has led to so many educators stuck between a rock and a hard place?

“The government understand that we do our jobs because we care about the children,” one respondent said, “and are taking advantage of that kindness by dealing us the short end of every stick. They know most of us won’t walk away even when it becomes hard or impossible to do our jobs effectively.”

### Are most people in the sector for the children?

- 72% — Agrees
- 20% — Neither agrees/disagrees
- 8% — Disagrees



“The general public (and maybe politicians) tend to view the sector as glorified babysitting,” said another. Unfortunately, it’s an old story. Sectors that involve the care and support of others, typically those with a predominantly female workforce such as nursing or elder care, often find themselves left behind.

When choosing between their own self-interest in terms of higher pay, better support and resources, or the vulnerable people they support, self-interest rarely wins out.

As one respondent put it, “[There is a] stigmatised role of women in child care, therefore a lack of understanding or will to understand what it takes to be in Early Years as a professional.”

Many people in the survey raised that it is exactly this catch-22 that people in positions of power take advantage of. The sector will not crumble, because the people in it would not allow that to happen. At the same time, we have to ask if that prevents the necessary drastic action from being taken.

“We are told we are professionals with professional knowledge - the 1st line of the EYFS says we have the **most important** job in the country and yet the wages are **less** than that of a factory worker.”

Nursery Manager  
Anonymous

“The fact that 71% agreed that ‘most people in the sector are in it for the children’ is **evidence** of a loving pedagogy in practice. Sometimes we stay for **love of the children**. Although adopting a loving pedagogy should underpin our practice, it feels like our goodwill and love is being exploited through politicians and the wider society **not respecting**, valuing and funding our sector.”



Tamsin Grimmer

Early Years Consultant and author

### Harmful stereotypes

One of the more challenging reads in the survey was the negative comments people had been told about their work in their daily lives.

‘Just babysitting’, ‘all you do is play/play with toys all day’ and ‘why is it so expensive when it’s not skilled’ came up time and time again. One educator was told “People don’t need qualifications for that job. Anyone could do it”, another that “It’s a low-skilled job. You’re bottom-wipers. It requires no skill.”

What’s worse, is the assumption that because it is ‘just babysitting’, the low wages are justified. Putting to one side the idea that keeping our youngest children safe and healthy is somehow unimportant, it clearly shows that increased understanding of early child development may ultimately help to cut through the wage debate.

But when this stereotype is combined with the feeling that childcare is unaffordable, it puts educators in a headlock. “Our pay grade is so low,” one said, “why would anyone take us seriously or even be interested in the sector?”

Another common comparison was to teachers, and not positively. Respondents felt like compared to their primary and secondary counterparts, they were not seen as a key part of the education of children,

“We must address pay in the sector, it is a very challenging circle to square, but a REAL living wage that brings dignity to colleague’s own living arrangements is fundamental to a working sector.”



Jennie Johnson

Founder, Kids Allowed. CEO My First Five Years

and not given the same respect. “You’re not a real teacher, you just want the holidays,” one respondent was told.

### The cost of childcare

The issue of the cost of childcare is also a very real threat to the sector. [A New Statesman report](#) found that 60% of people find childcare unaffordable. Worrying enough during a cost of living crisis, but the survey also found that 70% say that this cost is the main reason why mothers decide to be stay at home parents.

And they’re not wrong. The UK’s early education settings are the [third most expensive in the OECD](#), despite the government investing more than ever in the sector.

“Passion and creativity are wonderful traits for EY professionals but also can work against them when not accompanied by critical awareness and candour, followed by the courage to act against the misgivings all around them. Even if it means putting themselves first sometimes.”



Lewis Fogarty

Nursery Director and EY Lecturer

However, it’s vital we don’t lay this at the feet of Early Years professionals. One respondent told us they’d been told “You’re just out to make money off hardworking parents. You must be making a fortune out of this job, the amount we pay.”

But of course, when a small minimum wage rise genuinely threatens the sector, as recognised by the [Low Pay Commission in 2019](#), it’s clearly not early educators who are benefiting. We have to make sure we educate people on the true cost of delivering early education and make sure we continue to tell the positive stories of why delivering that early education with quality, matters.



# What is Early Years really about?

Positive stories from the front lines



“One of the staff noticed a child who was **withdrawn and barely concentrating** on different tasks. They suggested to parents that the child needs to be seen by the doctor, and it turns out the little one had a breathing problem and needed major medical intervention. The child’s development milestones **got impacted** positively and immediately.”

“We have some children from Afghanistan who came to us traumatised and are now settled and feel safe. Their parents are so pleased with their **development** in such a short time. Amazing feedback from everyone involved.”

“A child lacked confidence because he wore an eye patch for a squint and was very conscious about wearing it. **The parent shared this with me** so I immediately planned a circle time & asked them if they could provide patches so the other children could wear them. The patch soon became the must-have ‘fashion accessory’ for the teddies / dolls and the child felt like a super star and **confidence and self-esteem blossomed**.”

“A parent had suffered the bereavement of their own parent and we noticed a change in behaviour of the child in pre-school and that they had become uninterested in learning. I spoke with the parent who opened up.

**Through careful conversation** I informed them that this might be why we are seeing a change in behaviour at pre-school. They were very surprised, but I explained how children feed off of feelings... that their child **could sense** that something was upsetting from the parent but didn't know or understand why.

I offered support to have a difficult conversation with the child and sign posted the parent to **grief counselling**. After a short period of time the child's behaviour began to improve and they began accessing learning successfully once again.”

"A parental break up led to major behavioural difficulties at home and nursery but working together and **sharing** problems led to a much happier child."

"I **supported** a child who was blind to prepare him for Primary school, by working in partnership with his parents, we were able to effectively put all measures in place for him to attend a mainstream school with 1:1 support. This **would not** have happened, had we not worked collaboratively with the family."

"We have a young parent who has a child with additional needs. Before coming to us and **building a relationship** and listening to her with respect she felt judged by other professionals due to her age. Building that relationship allowed her to **open up** about the struggles and get her and the child the support she needed while not feeling judged."

"When a child with **severe allergic** reactions had a fit at nursery we had to give life-saving medical attention."

**“We currently have a preschool child who was diagnosed with cancer last summer.**

The child was **unable to attend**, due to chemotherapy, so we organised ‘socially distanced’ doorstep visits from the child’s peers, taking activities with us, as well as sending other activities online.

We also arranged ‘get togethers’ with the peer group in our local park, whenever the child was well enough.

**The child is now back at our day nursery full time** and we’ve absolved the parents from paying fees as soon as the diagnosis was made, only claiming the 15 hours grant, as they have enough to worry about!

The child is currently thriving at nursery, with no ‘gaps’ in knowledge - and loving being back with friends.”

# Can family partnerships unlock more understanding?

## Can family partnerships unlock more understanding?

Although almost all (98%) Early Years staff agreed that close relationships with families matter, still more than 30% don't feel as connected to families as they'd like.

It's fantastic that so many educators have a close relationship with the families of the child they're nurturing together. It's even better, that so many recognise it's important. When problems do arise, the most common reasons were 'mismatched expectations', 'lack of interest in collaborating', and 'Lack of respect for the educator role'.

### How connected are we with families?

98%

Believe that **close relationships with families matter** for delivering high-quality education

30%

Don't feel as **connected to families** as they'd like

It seems clear that addressing this 30% of more fractured parent relationships should be a priority. Some of the operators we discussed the results with questioned whether in some cases, leaders weren't giving staff the freedom to develop those close 1-1 bonds with families themselves, and whether they need to be more careful about gatekeeping those parent relationships.

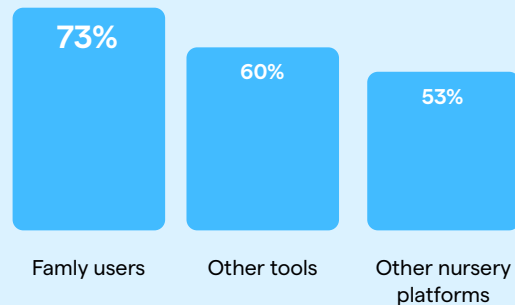
"We've been told that 'our family will never forget these years here and how well you've taken care of my children'"

— Assistant staff in after-school care

## Can Family help?

We wanted to gather information on whether Family can have an impact on this.

### Are Family users more connected with families?



73% of Family users say they're 'very connected' with families, compared to other nursery platforms (52%) and tools like Whatsapp or Facebook (60%).

### Can Family help?

We can't pretend we're not biased on this one. As an early childhood platform, we've always wanted family and educator partnership at the centre of Family.

So we did some work in the survey to understand if Family users noticed a different impact. As you can see, Family users were 25% more likely to feel connected to families (73%) compared to other nursery

platforms (48%) and also more than informal solutions like WhatsApp and Facebook (62%).

In fact, one manager told us with Family "all staff can post messages, making it more of a personal chat/experience for families. Ideas are shared and parents value staff as individuals rather than one group."

"Family has made our service so much more efficient. It is a **huge selling point** for our nursery when introduced to parents as it provides them with a clear collaborative approach to their child's day, our parents love the system and say it makes us appear professional and **supports** our working relationship with our parents."

Nursery Manager  
Anonymous

Parents have shown friends and Family their children in the app and can share the experiences, this helps with the **positive reputation** of the nursery, others seeing first hand that the children are happy and some of the activities they **take part in”**

Monica Deacon

Manager in Little Cedars Montessori Ltd

### **What about the pandemic?**

We also found Family users more likely to feel ‘very positive’ about working in EY, and more likely to think the pandemic had improved people’s opinion of Early Years.

One educator told us “With the impact of the pandemic and parents not being able to come into the setting Family has been a barrier breaker. It has allowed us to learn more about the families we serve and connect via parent observations and daily posts. This had been a two way street and so many families have commented on how they make time in the evenings to look at the day’s activities and talk about them with their children who would have told them they had done nothing, spoken to no one and not eaten a thing!”

The point is not to blow our own trumpet (OK, maybe a little bit). Whatever you choose to use to communicate with families, it’s clear from our survey that building those close relationships have an impact on children’s progress, and helping to show off our skilled early educators.



“I once received a **thank you note** from a parent when her son gained a place at **university**, which she attributed to the start he got in nursery; by sharing what we were doing and why when he was **3 - 4 years old**, she understood how his experiences were **building** his future.”



Nancy Stewart  
Early Years Expert

# Solution time: How do we drive change?

## Solution time: How do we drive change?

We intended this report to give a voice to 'the invisible workforce' and that goes for the solutions too. You'll find our recommendations in a few pages time, but we want to round off the main report by giving a voice to just some of the solutions proposed by the respondents.

Many rightfully pointed to raising awareness. A lot of people wanted more visibility about what the role involves, suggesting videos or other content about what a 'day in the life' really looks like. Many also suggested getting more politicians to visit nurseries, and more closely profiling what the work involves on social media.

"Educate the population on what we do," said one respondent, "Some days we are counsellors, doctors, therapists, safeguarding, parenting the parents - we are there for our families with so many different hats."

EY staff came up with

# 400+

Creative solutions

Top 5 topics mentioned

**Funding**  
**Awareness**  
**Collaboration**  
**Administration**  
**EY importance**

"The **tragedy** is that the work we do is fundamental to multiple aspects of society and, ultimately, is **respected** by everyone when it is considered seriously."



Jan Dubiel  
Director of Early Years Principal, Adviser

“**Childcare** is expensive to provide, but essential for working families. If the government want to relieve this **burden** they need to work with the sector, not just dictate how they think things **should** be.”

Nursery Owner/Director  
Anonymous

But the solutions didn't just focus on raising awareness for the sector. In line with the Royal Foundation's efforts to educate the public on the unique importance of the Early Years, many suggested more digestible information for all. “More information regarding children's development and the importance of nurturing their young brain,” said one respondent.

More politically, many respondents wanted underfunding properly addressed, and paycales introduced as with primary and secondary teachers. Equally, there was a growing number favouring more radical

action, including more union involvement in the Early Years, marches and protests, and even general strike action to demand better funding.

Finally, a number of respondents spoke about the pressure and challenges of paperwork and inspectorates like Ofsted. The English education inspectorate was mentioned more than 30 times by respondents, with many feeling concerned about the lack of oversight, pressured by ongoing inspections, and worried about the power that the inspection process still holds on a nursery's reputation.

“The government have called us ‘**childcare**’ throughout the pandemic but Ofsted inspect us on our ‘**quality of education**’ - this is a huge problem”

Nursery Manager  
Anonymous

“These findings present opportunities for handing as much **power** as possible to the sector and supporting them to recognise they have **autonomy** and a voice and a role in turning it all around. Of course effort from all areas is needed but it has to start within the sector”



Lewis Fogarty  
Nursery Director and EY lecturer



**What are we going  
to do about it?**

The [Coram Childcare Survey 2022](#) said it best:

“It is a false binary to present childcare as **either** supporting maternal employment or children’s development. It is, should be, and can be **both**”.

Right now, it’s clear from our results that people understand ‘childcare’ more than they understand ‘early education’.

Those who work in the early years need to consider how we can use the widely understood place as a key part of the infrastructure of society, allowing parents (particularly mothers) back to work, to raise the profile of the less well understood bit - the part where their Early Years are known to be the [most important phase of a child’s education](#).

# What can Family do?

- Family will shift focus on some of our **campaigns and content initiatives**, towards making the **positive case for early education** and tackling negative stereotypes, in order to improve respect and bring more people to the sector.
- Over the next two years, Family wants to develop learning and training for educators and families as one of our four key strategic priorities - focusing on more and better child development awareness. This includes a fundamental understanding of child development for all parents and families.
- Continue to improve the educator and family partnership experience of our app, to make it even easier for educators to form those close relationships with families. This is one route towards **getting more people to understand early educators' talent** and that great early childhood happens together.
- **We have set up an eternal suggestions box**, for your ideas on how we can meaningfully shift the public narrative about the Early Years. It's important that as a company, we combine ideas and initiatives that come from within the sector, with our own ability to execute.
- We'll soon be bringing our Early Years blog content into our app, to make it easier for educators to **share ideas** around child development and good practice with parents and each other.



# What can policymakers do?

- Funding rates in every part of the UK should as a minimum **cover the cost of delivering those funded places**. Right now, that means significant investment is needed right away, and a yearly review process that ensures **rates still meet rising costs** (minimum wage, business rates etc.). The places should not be called 'free', but 'funded' by all government official communication. We cannot solve anything until more money is available to pay staff more.
- Public campaigns should be launched to **back and support the primacy of the Early Years** as the crucial stage in a child's development, and the early educators who look after it. More research needs to be made into why this isn't more widely understood now.
- A clearer structure for Early Years qualifications, that will give people at all levels an **opportunity to get into Early Years** needs to be established, and very **clearly communicated** to the sector and the country. Work needs to begin on the reputation of the existing qualifications and apprenticeships.
- Immediate budget should be allocated for a recruitment drive **that brings more staff** into or back to the early years, in order to ease the existential **recruitment crisis** the sector is currently facing.

# What can we all do?

- **Start using** the term Educator or Teacher in early years settings. We also believe the use of 'childcare' should be **minimised**, and **replaced** with early education or Early Years. This takes discipline, but just as we see in long struggles to degender terms like 'firemen', it can be done and language matters.
- **More work** with careers services nationally and at schools to address the positive impact of early education. **Destigmatised** the idea that early education is a **career for girls**, and make a concerted effort around publicising the many opportunities like **T-Levels and Apprenticeships**.

Nurseries should consider working with schools to offer week-long placements as part of work experience for 16-year-olds.

- Close the gap between educators and families by making sure all educators have direct contact with home. **Spreading the word** about great education starts with those 1-1 relationships, and operators can't afford to gatekeep those conversations.
- Be ready with vital facts about the **unique importance** of Early Years for daily conversations. The Royal Foundation's Big Change Starts Small

has some essential figures on the importance of Early Education. **A five-year-olds brain is 90% of its adult weight**. Young children develop more than a million synapses a second. 40% of the disadvantage gap at age 16 is already there at age 5. **Spread the word**.

- Major sector organisations need to come together and have a **grown up conversation** about how we can **leverage the crucial infrastructure** of early years. Early years staff feel powerless yet are in a role that is vital for running the country - and in a time of crisis, no actions should be off the table.

# Thank you for reading

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