



Rachel Iles

1601345

**An Exploration into the Importance of Early
Years Practitioners (EYP) and whether EYP are
perceived as professionals?**

BMPF7010

(Total word count: 15,378)

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List of Abbreviations:

EY – Early Years

EYP - Early Years Practitioner/s

CPD – Continuing Professional Development

OECD - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

EYWC – Early Years Workforce Commission

LA – Local Authority

ALNCo – Additional Learning Needs Coordinator

Key Words:

Early years, early years practitioner, professional, childcare, early years workforce.

Project Proposal

The subsequent research project aims to explore the importance of Early Years Practitioners (EYP) to not only the holistic development of young children but to the sustainability of the early years (EY) sector in driving much needed economic and social renewal, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The research project aims to discover what constitutes a 'professional' and whether EYP are valued and perceived as pivotal and highly regarded professionals within society and if not, why not? Furthermore, the research project aims to determine whether these personal or societal perceptions of EYP have any impact on the quality of care provided within EY education and care. This area of research has been chosen as the researcher is currently employed by The University of Wales Trinity Saint David, as an Early Years Lecturer within The Childhood, Youth and Education Studies Discipline, of The Institute of Education and Humanities.

Background and Rationale:

McGillivray (2008) emphasises that complex constructs such as traditional beliefs, ideology, training, qualifications and assessment, all contribute to the perceived notion of 'professional identity' and that these enduring aspects can influence perceptions. Likewise, Farhadi et al., (2021) discuss 'professional self-concept' as a multidimensional concept which includes aspects such as cognition, personal professional understanding, role development and professional behaviour. On the other hand, Perez (2019) identifies that the idea of 'professionalism' is underpinned by values which guide the skills, knowledge and ethical standards required to execute a job role. Perez (2019) suggests three characteristics that signifies a professional including, specialised training, commitment to the provision of service and recognising the need for standards within practice. Likewise, Collier (2012) highlights the ideas of Wilkinson (2009) who classified professionalism into sub themes including, adherence to ethical principles, effective interactions, reliability and a commitment to continuous professional development. However, Collier (2012) also conveys that 'professionalism' can be viewed as a state of mind as it is essentially an attitude required to undertake a job role. Equally, Perez (2019) recognises that professionalism is attitude based with social and behavioural connotations, meaning that the idea of a 'professional self-

image' is disputable and suggest that becoming a professional is ultimately the responsibility of the individual.

According to Pascal and Bertram at the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (2021: 1) 'The cost of establishing and sustaining a highly qualified early years workforce should be seen as an investment in human capital for future generations.' Pascal and Bertram (2021) highlight that altering the Government and public perceptions of the EY sector from one of a mostly childcare function, to one of a pivotal, essential and highly regarded element of education and development is ambitious, but needed now more than ever, to drive much needed social and economic restoration. However, Ang (2011) portrays that professional status, reflective learning and pay scales are all essential factors that have an impact on EYP; and these factors can ultimately impact professional self-perception and professional practice, and thus the quality of provision provided to young children. Likewise, research by Siraj Blatchford and Manni (2008) revealed the importance of strong leadership and a limited staff turnover, in which practitioners and leaders facilitate a clear shared vision, to effective and high quality EY settings.

Yet still, The Early Years Workforce Commission (EYWC, 2021) state that without immediate intervention, the EY sector is at risk of becoming unsustainable, with the sustainability of the quality of the EY workforce being at risk due to a number of challenges, such as funding and access to continuing professional development (CPD) (EYWC, 2021). The EYWC (2021) recommends an 'awareness campaign' is needed to highlight the critical importance of EY professionals in supporting the holistic development and education of young children within EY settings. The campaign needs to stress that EYP hold a skilled and important job role equivalent to teachers in other educational stages of the curriculum.

Research Project Timeline	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December	January	February	Status
Ethics Form											
Project Proposal											
Introduction											
Literature Review											
Methods											
Findings											
Conclusion											
Recommendations											
Final Submission										9th	
Presentation										10th	

The main outcome of this project is to develop a methodologically sound, work-based project that analyses and critically evaluates relevant data that meet the research question, whilst also taking into consideration any ethical issues; in order to recommend future actions. The learning outcomes of this research project is to discover how EYP perceive their professional identity, how others perceive EYP as professionals and whether these perceptions have any impact on the quality of care provided within EY settings. The intended impact of this research project aims to make possible recommendations on how to ensure EYP feel valued as important and highly regarded professionals of society, in order to give children the best start in life; in keeping with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) and the priorities set out within the Welsh Government's Children and Young People's Plan (2022).

Methodology:

The methodology will follow a subjectivist ontological perspective that focuses on discovery of knowledge that takes into consideration social and external influences (Chowdhury, 2019). Correspondingly, this will entail an interpretivist epistemology in which the researcher aims to interpret gathered data to seek understanding. The overarching strategy of this research project will be a Grounded Theory mixed methodological approach to draw on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Shorten and Smith, 2017). The project will include three different research methods:

In order to begin to understand professional identity within the early years, the first method of data gathering will be secondary data analysis undertaken to provide a wider context and understanding into the current challenges facing the early years workforce and sector. This will include publications by the Welsh Government, the UK Government, the Education Policy Institute, the Early Years Workforce Commission as well as research carried out by The Sutton Trust.

The second will be two different online questionnaires developed via Microsoft Forms. The first questionnaire will be aimed at practitioners working within the early years, including nursery assistants, nursery nurses, nursery leaders, nursery managers, flying start practitioners and play workers. The aim of this questionnaire is to determine how these practitioners perceive themselves in terms of being a

'professional' and whether they feel that the aspects that society perceive as being 'professional' has an impact on their own perceptions. Furthermore, the questionnaire aims to discover whether these perceptions have any impact on the quality of care provided to young children. The second questionnaire will be aimed at the general public with the intention of discovering what they think a professional role constitutes. The questionnaire will seek to determine whether the general public perceive EYP as professionals and important members of society needed for education and the economic development of society.

Finally, interviews with early years managers and leaders will be utilised to corroborate data collected within the questionnaire and provide a qualitative insight into the local and national challenges that face EY settings today; and to gather a more in depth analysis of their professional perceptions. Interviews will either be held via Microsoft Teams, face to face or via telephone to suit the needs of participants.

Ethical considerations:

The research proposal is subject to ethical approval from the Wales Academy for Professional Practice and Applied Research. Ethical considerations such as obtaining informed consent and upholding the principles of confidentiality and anonymity will be adhered to throughout, to protect the privacy of all participants involved in the research project (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2018). The nature of the research project will be clearly explained to participants in both the questionnaire and interviewee groups of participants, to ensure they are fully aware of the aims and objectives of the project. The researcher's contact details will be provided to ensure participants are able to ask any questions they wish to. An environment of trust and respect will be established to ensure that participants feel comfortable sharing information and will not be coerced into divulging any information they are not comfortable sharing. Participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw at any time as well as their right to request data. In keeping with ethical codes of conduct and principles the researcher will act with respect, responsibility, integrity and competence whilst undertaking this study (BPS, 2018). In particular, when discussing the ideas of perceived professionalism and self-perception during interviews, the researcher will act with sensitivity, respect, understanding and compassion.

Introduction:

The following research project aims to explore the importance of Early Years Practitioners (EYP) to not only the holistic development of young children but to the sustainability of the early years (EY) sector in driving much needed economic and social renewal, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The research project aims to discover what constitutes a 'professional' and whether EYP are valued and perceived as pivotal and highly regarded professionals within society and if not, why not? Furthermore, the research project aims to provide recommendations as to how the status and importance of the EY and EYP can be promoted. This area of research has been chosen as the researcher is currently employed by The University of Wales Trinity Saint David, as an Early Years Lecturer within The Childhood, Youth and Education Studies Discipline, of The Institute of Education and Humanities. Outcomes of the following research project will assist in specific module planning as part of the Early Years Education and Care degree programme.

Rationale and Justification:

The Early Years Workforce Commission (EYWC, 2021) state that without immediate intervention, the EY sector is at risk of becoming unsustainable. Likewise, The Early Years Alliance (EYA, 2021) convey the EY sector is at 'breaking point' due to the current challenges faced within the sector, including staff recruitment and retention, with many settings struggling to recruit and retain staff. Therefore, the following research project sought to explore the importance of Early Years Practitioners (EYP) to not only the holistic development of young children, but to the sustainability of the EY sector and society in general, in providing much needed economic and social demands. The research project examines what constitutes a 'professional' and whether EYP are valued and perceived as pivotal and highly regarded professionals within society. Furthermore, the research project questions whether these personal or societal perceptions of EYP have any impact on the provision within EY education and care.

According to Pascal and Bertram at the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (2021: 1) 'The cost of establishing and sustaining a highly qualified early years workforce should be seen as an investment in human capital for future generations.' Pascal and Bertram (2021) highlight that altering the Government and public perceptions of the

EY sector from one of a mostly childcare function, to one of an essential and highly regarded element of education and development, is ambitious, but needed now more than ever, to drive social and economic restoration. However, Ang (2011) portrays that professional status, reflective learning and pay scales are all essential factors that have an impact on EYP; and these factors can ultimately influence professional self-perception and professional practice, and thus the quality of provision provided to young children. Furthermore, The Well-being of Future Generations Act (WBFGA) requires public bodies in Wales, such as Universities to consider the long-term impact of their work and choices, to overcome challenges such as poverty, inequalities and climate change, through seven well-being goals (Welsh Government, 2015). The nature of this research project aims to promote 'a More Equal Wales' by promoting the Early Years sector and workforce, encouraging access to jobs, enabling people to develop the skills and knowledge needed to progress as an EYP. Likewise, the nature of the research facilitates 'a Journey to a Prosperous Wales' by recognising the skill and knowledge of EYP and their importance to employment and the economy.

Intended Impact and Expected Learning Outcomes

The main outcome of this project is to develop a methodologically sound, work-based project that analyses and critically evaluates relevant data to discover whether EYP are perceived as professionals within society and their importance to child development as well as society as a whole. The research will take into regard all ethical considerations to ensure the research is undertaken professionally and to the highest standard, in order to recommend future actions. Consequently, the learning outcomes of this research project is to:

- Identify as to what constitutes a professional
- Discover how EYP perceive their professional identity
- Discover how others perceive EYP as professionals

Therefore the intended impact of this research project aims to make possible recommendations on how to raise the status of EYP and ensure EYP feel valued as important and highly regarded professionals of society, in order to give children the best start in life; in keeping with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) and the priorities set out within the Welsh Government's Children and Young People's Plan (2022).

Literature Review:

The idea of what constitutes, signifies or 'makes' a professional has been debated for many years with differing perceptions and concepts contributing to the perceived notion of a 'professional' (Perez, 2019). McGillivray (2008) emphasises that complex constructs such as traditional beliefs, ideology, training, qualifications and assessment, all contribute to the perceived notion of 'professional identity', and progress or attitudes towards these aspects can influence perceptions. Likewise, Farhadi et al., (2021) discuss 'professional self-concept' as a multidimensional concept which includes aspects such as cognition, personal understanding, role development and professional behaviour. On the other hand, Perez (2019) suggests that the idea of 'professionalism' is underpinned by values which guide the skills, knowledge and ethical standards required to execute a job role. Perez (2019) identifies three value based characteristics that signify a professional, including specialised training, commitment to the provision of service and recognising the need for standards within practice. Likewise, Collier (2012) highlights the ideas of Wilkinson (2009) who classified professionalism into sub themes including, adherence to ethical principles, effective interactions, reliability and a commitment to continuous professional development. However, Collier (2012) also conveys that 'professionalism' can be viewed as a state of mind as it is essentially an attitude required to undertake a job role. Equally, Perez (2019) recognises that professionalism is 'attitude based' with social and behavioural connotations, suggesting that the idea of a 'professional self-image' is disputable and suggests that becoming a professional is ultimately the responsibility of the individual. Finally, Vincent and Braun (2011:77) state that 'the label of professionalism and the source of its appeal rest on societal assumptions of the autonomy, discretion, status and self-regulation' of professional groups; supporting the ideas of Perez (2019).

Gaspar (2015) suggests that in most contexts 'professional' refers to specific expertise and high level qualifications, however in the EY there is much more of an emphasis on qualities and values. Value based, principled practice grounded in ethics, unified with theoretical knowledge and a thorough understanding of the holistic development of young children create the 'optimum professional' (Gaspar, 2015:256); whilst also being dedicated to continuing professional development and best practice. Powell

(2010) identify values such as a genuine interest in child development, effective communication, confidence, patience and a caring nature as pivotal to EY professionalism. Furthermore, Gasper (2015) recognises principles such as valuing contributions from all, a willingness to actively understand other perspectives, being a reflective listener as well as being attentive, non-judgemental and having a strong sense of values that meet the needs of children and families, as characteristics needed to become an EY professional. On the other hand, McGillivray (2008) identifies that terminology used to label the EY workforce can be confusing due to the multiplicity of titles such as nursery nurse, childcare worker, early years practitioner, nursery assistant, child minder or nursery worker. The multiplicity of job role titles could then result in confusion surrounding professional identity especially if there is uncertainty around the roles and responsibilities that underpin these various titles (McGillivray, 2008).

The Importance of the Early Years

The EYWC (2021) as well as The EYA (2021) recommends an 'awareness campaign' is needed to highlight the critical importance of EY professionals in supporting the holistic development and education of young children within EY settings, as the first five years of a child's life are a critical and pivotal time of learning and development (Fonagy, 2020). A great deal of research has been undertaken into the positive impacts of healthy development on future outcomes, including positive attachments and stimulating environments (Berk, 2010., Liable and Thompson, 2000., Sutton, 2019), all of which lie within the responsibilities of an EYP job role. It is beginning to become common knowledge that a child's brain in the first five years of life, develops brain connections faster than at any other time of life (EYWC, 2021:5). As highlighted by Knickmeyer et al (2008) the capacity of a child's brain at age one is already 72% of an adults brain and grows to a further 83% by age two. According to Stiles and Jernigan (2010) the connections forming in a child's brain at age two happen twice as fast as an adults brain. Furthermore, by age three a child's brain activity works twice as fast as an adult's brain, (Brotherson, 2000), and a child's brain utilises twice as much energy as an adult's brain at age five, to facilitate brain development (Kuzawa et al, 2013). During the EY of life, children develop rapidly in all areas including physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development. The first three years of life encompasses the most amount of rapid and dramatic change compared to any

other time; yet this development is diverse with all children developing at different times, requiring specific and specialised knowledge from practitioners (Hyson and Tomlinson, 2014). The first 1000 days (from pregnancy through to age two) provide the foundations for lifelong health and 'are a window of opportunity to enable all children to reach their potential' (1000 days, 2013:1). Hyson and Tomlinson (2014) stress that all children have potential and it is within the EY that the fundamentals for brain development are built, in which new information and skills can be added. The Early Years Alliance (EYA, 2021) argue that although there is a well-established and growing international consensus on the importance of the first five years of life being paramount to effective and positive long term learning and development (UNICEF, 2021., World Health Organisation, 2015., NHS, 2019); EYP who are responsible for supporting this crucial stage are 'underpaid, undervalued and overworked' (EYA, 2021:3).

However, Hyson and Tomlinson (2014) suggest that all professionals that work with children hold specific roles, skills and functions, yet regardless of role, all EYP are essential in supporting children and families. EYP require a specific and in depth knowledge and understanding of early childhood as well as specific skills, dispositions, attitudes and competencies to be successful EY professionals (Hyson and Tomlinson, 2014). EYP are not only responsible for nurturing the healthy and holistic development of children, but are also responsible for developing and maintaining close relationships with children, families and other professionals (Dunhill, Elliot and Shaw, 2009). Likewise, Hyson and Tomlinson (2014) highlight that EYP apply their knowledge and expertise in dynamic, fluid, challenging and often exhausting environments in order to give children the best start in life and ensure that the welfare and best interests of children are kept at the centre of all decisions (Welsh Assembly Government, 2008., Department for Education, 2018., UNCRC, no date).

A study analysing the impact of individuals who hold an Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) in England on child outcomes, discovered encouraging findings in which individuals with EYPS felt they had developed in confidence since gaining the status and felt confident to influence change within settings (Davis and Barry, 2012). Findings from the study highlight the importance of EYP in promoting safeguarding, healthy eating, physical and mental health, as well as increasing opportunities for leisure, outdoor play and parental involvement; whilst also developing beneficial links

with local communities and most importantly empowering children (Davis and Barry, 2012). Furthermore, The EPPE Project - Effective Provision of Preschool Education, (Sylva et al., 2004) a major and influential longitudinal study, discovered that attending high quality preschool settings enhances all round development of children; attending settings was found to be of particular significance to children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The project discovered that attending high quality EY settings can lead to improved intellectual, social and behavioural developments (Sylva et al., 2004). Likewise, quality provision is important within the EY for the holistic development of young children (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002 and Sylva et al., 2004) as provision that is deemed of high quality has a significant positive and enduring impact on a child's future outcomes and experiences (Welsh Government 2013 and 2014). Sylva et al (2004) conveys that quality within EY settings can have a direct influence on improved self-regulation, social communication, as well as academic outcomes including language, mathematical and reading skills. Correspondingly, findings of the Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) report (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) discovered that settings of high quality that had the largest positive impact on children were settings that promote sustained shared thinking, in which practitioners exhibit warm and interactive relationships with children to extend thinking and social skills; further highlighting the importance of EYP to the holistic development of young children. Finally, The Nutbrown Review argues that high quality staff are paramount to high quality provision (Nutbrown, 2012).

As discussed, an abundance of research exists that highlights the critical importance of early childhood education and care to academic outcomes and holistic development. Yet, Pascal and Bertam (2021) emphasise that the EY sector is also vital in attempting to mitigate growing inequalities within society and secure social mobility, which have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, The Centre for Progressive Policy (2021) estimates that if women in the UK were able to work the hours they wanted to without having inaccessible or insufficient childcare options as a barrier to employment, it could generate up to £28.2 billion in economic output per annum, highlighting the economic importance of quality EY provision. Likewise, being employed is considered beneficial to mental health and well-being, as it is a means to develop identity, status and social contacts (Khan and Boardman, 2021). Similarly, Wilson and Finch (2021) discovered that 43% of unemployed people had poor mental

health, yet good mental health has a key and positive influence on employability. Khan and Boardman (2017) estimate the cost of mental illness in England alone is in excess of £105 billion per annum with £30 billion of that being a direct result of loss of work or unemployment. Wilson and Finch (2021) stress that maintaining high employment rates is a crucial factor in Covid-19 recovery planning. This further emphasises the importance of EY provision to the mental and social health of families as well as economic restoration needed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic; as without adequate childcare provision unemployment rates would further increase.

Challenges Faced by the Early Years Sector

The historical context of the EY workforce has been heavily dependent on and influenced by the historical partition between education and care services at National and Local Government levels (Sylva and Pugh, 2005). The Early Years Workforce Commission (EYWC) (2021) stresses that EYP hold a skilled and important job role that should be viewed on the same status level as teachers in other educational stages of the curriculum. Likewise, The Early Years Alliance (EYA) (2021) highlight that despite this growing understanding of the importance of the EY, a major societal misconception still exists in which EYP are not viewed and recognised as educators. So why does this divide still exist? Osgood and Sterling Henward (2021) suggest that public perceptions of EYP as carers and ‘substitute mothers’ contribute towards the partition between the EY and education. Equally, low status, poor working conditions and lower qualifications further fragment any chance of perceived equality between EYP and teachers (Mooney Simmie and Murphey, 2021). Correspondingly, recent research by the Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood, who surveyed 4682 adults in the UK, discovered that 91% of the public agreed that the EY are important, with 70% agreeing that the EY should be made a priority for society as a whole; yet only ‘17% of the public understand the unique importance of the early years relative to other development stages’ (Lawler, 2022:1). In order to position the EY sector as a phase within curriculum and educational journeys as oppose to only being a means to allow parents to work, the EYWC (2021) recommends a shift away from current frequently used ‘childcare’ terminology to terminology such as ‘Early Childhood Educator’. This would align to changes made in other countries such as Australia who have rebranded the roles of child care workers to Early Childhood Educators to reflect the importance of play based learning in the holistic development of young children,

and the role practitioners or educators have in facilitating this learning (Department for Education and Training, 2022). Yet, Cable and Miller (2010) do highlight that the professionalisation of the EY workforce in the UK is on an upward trajectory with increased understanding and professional development made available.

The Every Child Matters document (HM Government, 2005) recognised the crucial importance of the EY workforce to the holistic development of children and young people and ultimately improving outcomes for children and young people. The document set out aims to tackle recruitment and retention challenges within the EY sector and 'make working with children an attractive high status career' (HM Government, 2007:10). Additionally, the development of the Children's Workforce Strategy (HM Government, 2007) outlined four strategic aims to facilitate the Government's vision of developing a 'world class children's workforce' including to recruit more quality staff, to retain quality staff, to strengthen multidisciplinary working and to promote stronger leadership. Furthermore, educational policy changes in England in 2006 created a new status for EYP as Early Years Professionals in an attempt to impose professionalism on the workforce of the EY sector (McGillivray, 2008). In Wales, The Childcare, Play and Early Years Workforce Plan (Welsh Government, 2017: 11) sets out a ten year strategic vision for the EY workforce and highlights that accessible EY provision 'plays an essential role in the expansion of our economy'. The Workforce Plan conveys three ambitious aims including 'attracting high quality recruits, raising standards and skills, and investing in building capacity and capability' (Welsh Government, 2017:12), with an additional objective of working towards a fully integrated education and care system in Wales. It is therefore clear that the importance of the EY workforce and EY sector are essential contributors of society and have been given due regard within previous Government policy, yet current research suggests that not much has changed and the EY sector is still experiencing the same challenges of low retention and limited recruitment in which practitioners are still viewed as child carers as oppose to highly professional and skilled practitioners (Pascal and Bertram, 2021).

Despite a growing number of government initiatives and visions for developing the childcare sector in Wales and the UK, without sufficient funding and resourcing the sector will continue to struggle; however 'it is vital that the capacity for childcare is boosted' in order to overcome these challenges (Centre for Progressive Policy,

2021:1). Yet according to the Centre for Progressive Policy (2021) The UK spends the second least amount of money on childcare amongst advanced OECD economies, with only the Israeli Government spending less than the UK. Furthermore, research by Akhal (2019) suggest policy changes in the past decade have impacted the structure of the EY workforce in an attempt to improve the quality of childcare provision, such as the introduction of the Early Years Professional Status, however these changes have not improved conditions for the workforce. Akhal's (2019) study highlights a number of challenges the EY workforce faces including low pay, low status and limited access to funded Continuing Professional Development (CPD), culminating in a number of EY practitioners leaving the sector to seek work elsewhere. According to the study, one in four childcare workers state 'unsatisfactory pay' as their key reason for leaving the sector, with pay being marginally greater for retail workers compared to childcare workers (Akhal, 2019). Equally research by Clybiau Plant Cymru (2021) and Swindells (2021) discovered that a number of staff were leaving the sector to work in other sectors due to the possibility of earning more pay for less exhausting work, without needing to be qualified. According to the Social Mobility Commission (2020) EYP earn on average £7.42 an hour, falling well below the average £12.57 of the whole population. This begs the question as to why EYP are not 'recognised and rewarded with a level of pay that reflects their essential role' (EYWC, 2021:5). Moreover, according to Clybiau Plant Cymru (2021) since March 2020, 19% of out of school childcare settings have permanently closed. The report highlights challenges such as staff retention, with many staff feeling undervalued and not recognised as key workers. (Clybiau Plant Cymru, 2021). Akin to other research and published documents, such as the EYWC (2021), Clybiau Plant Cymru (2021) recommend grant funding is needed to sustain existing settings, retain suitably qualified staff and support ongoing professional development of staff. The EYWC (2021) stress that Governments should be providing additional funding to not only sustain settings and staff but to ensure quality of provision. As highlighted by Swindells (2021:3) maintaining a setting that gives the time, space, comfort and attention that allows young children to thrive and holistically develop requires more staff than the current minimum standards allow, but undertaking this is currently 'vastly unaffordable'. This is of particular prevalence if settings wish to employ professional, highly qualified and highly motivated staff (Swindells, 2021). However, the EYWC (2021) highlight

another critical factor the EY sector is facing is the significant reduction in the uptake of EY training and teacher courses. This alone is a particular worry as any further decrease of highly qualified staff within settings will only exacerbate the levels of inequality already prevalent across the UK. A reduction in funded CPD and settings lacking the funds to pay for CPD themselves has resulted in a lack of staff having the opportunities to upskill themselves, in order to provide a higher quality provision (EYWC, 2021).

Another challenging impact being the introduction of the 'free childcare offer' which is a Government initiative developed to support working families. However an analysis by Swindells (2021) stresses the main challenge of the free childcare offer is that the funded rate is set by the Government, which does not necessarily meet the rate needed by the setting to provide a quality service. Swindells (2021:2) highlights that 'this shortfall in funding is proving catastrophic for many providers as they struggle to make ends meet.' Likewise The Sutton Trust (2020a) estimates the funding provided by Government to cover the funded 'free hours' is up to 25% less than the cost of actual delivery. In an attempt to overcome this challenge and provide greater sustainability to childcare settings, the Welsh Government have increased the free childcare offer rate from £4.50 to £5.00 (Morgan, 2022). Yet still, due to the lack of sufficient subsidised Government funding, starting salaries for EYP are also significantly less than those employed as teachers in schools and maintained nursery settings. According to the Government's National Career Service (no date) on average the starting salaries for nursery workers is £14,000, with nursery managers starting on £23,000 and £15,000 for play workers, yet an EY teacher's starting salary is currently £25,714. Moreover the Department for Education (2022) have announced a five percent salary increase for teachers, meaning the starting salary for teachers will reach £28,000 during the 2022/23 academic year. Equally, Davis and Barry (2021) note that expectations of salary and actual salary of EYP do not correlate, due to the lack of financial support.

Additionally, The Sutton Trust (Archer and Merrick, 2020) discovered that the number of EY graduates and EY teachers has significantly decreased, with less than half of private non-maintained nursery settings employing a degree qualified or EY teacher. Whereas all maintained nursery settings in schools have access to qualified teaching staff, with cost being cited as the largest barrier to this by private nursery owners. The

report by Archer and Merrick (2020) for The Sutton Trust states that the Early Years Workforce Strategy (Department for Education, 2017) which focused on developing the graduate workforce in disadvantaged areas, has been discarded by Government. Yet Archer and Merrick (2020) argue that the Government should honour and address the long term aspiration to have a degree qualified practitioner in every setting. This again would align with other advanced OECD countries such as Australia who's Education and Care Services National Regulations state that 'all services must engage or have access to an Early Childhood teacher' meaning settings must employ an Early Childhood Teacher for all settings that provide for 25 children or more (Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority, no date). Equally, in order to be able to work in a pre-school setting in Sweden, a three year university degree is required (OECD, 1999). Yet in Wales, as conveyed by Social Care Wales (2017) and The Welsh Government's 'National minimum standards for regulated childcare' (2016) in a full day care environment, 80% of staff must hold a level two qualification with 50% of these holding a level three qualification; and the nursery manager only having to hold 'at least' a level three qualification also.

As part of this literature review several sources of information have been examined, as in order to begin to determine the ideas of 'professionalism' and whether EYP are considered as 'professionals' or 'educators' it has been important to consider the historical and current context in which the EY sector sits. The current challenges facing the EY sector and workforce will disputably, contribute to the perceived notions of professionalism as professional self-worth is often based upon status, pay scales and value (Park, Naragon-Gainey and Ward, 2017). Likewise as is evident within the literature review, it is clear that EYP undertake an important, specialised and demanding job role, that is vital to providing a high quality service in order to nurture and support the holistic development of young children and support the nation's economic growth.

Therefore, the following methodology has been undertaken with the aim of discovering how EYP perceive their professional identity, how others perceive EYP and whether they are considered 'professionals'; and to recognise whether these perceptions have any impact on EYP and the EY sector.

Methodology:

All research has a philosophical basis which is influenced by the way knowledge is viewed within the world (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). According to Mac Naughton, Rolfe and Siraj Blatchford (2010) methodological designs and approaches are underpinned by particular ontologies and epistemologies or theories of knowledge, which reflect the beliefs of the researcher. Ontology is the branch of philosophy that considers the concepts of reality and existence, whereas Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that considers what knowledge is (Mukherji and Albon, 2018).

It is important to consider this research paradigm as according to Hughes (2010) it frames the research focus and influences the way the researcher thinks about the research topic. When considering the ontological foundation of research, including the structure of reality and existence; a subjectivist ontology perspective was followed. A subjectivist or constructivist ontology focuses on discovery, it is believed that reality cannot be understood without social and external influences (Chowdhury, 2019). The following research considers knowledge and research as subjective, with political and social influences, capable of producing many 'truths' (Mac Naughton, Rolfe and Siraj Blatchford, 2010). Unlike a positivist epistemological approach that assumes knowledge or 'truths' can be uncovered through rigid scientific methods, an interpretivist approach assumes that knowledge or 'truths' are varied and are influenced by the perspectives of individuals involved within the research and the context in which the research sits (Mukherji and Albon, 2018). Interpretivists believe that it is our interpretations of the social world that developed knowledge through the interpretation of behaviour, language and meaning (Hughes, 2010). Therefore, an interpretivist epistemology influences the research as it is believed that knowledge is interpreted and understood; in which reality as well as knowledge is socially constructed. (Chowdhury, 2019). Hughes (2010:41) argues that interpretivists make sense of the world 'within a cultural framework of socially constructed and shared meaning' and ultimately our perceptions of the world, that are influenced by gender, race, religion, culture and the socio-economic environment in which we live, influences our behaviour. Likewise, Mukherji and Albon (2018) discusses the notions of 'critical theories' within research that explores the ideas that external factors such as inequality and power within society impact experiences and ways of viewing the world. Research

within an interpretivist paradigm tends to review qualitative methods (Mukherji and Albon, 2018) as it tends to be descriptive in nature using empathy and discourse analysis to seek understanding (Chowdhury, 2019) as oppose to using quantitative methods. However, Robert-Holmes (2014) identifies that both types of researchers (positivist and interpretivist) can utilise a mixed methodology approach using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Moreover, Hughes (2010) conveys that interpretivist research is valid if the true voice of the participant is evident, Hughes (2010) argues that an effective way of ensuring authenticity and validity of responses is to triangulate results. Triangulation combines two or more methods using a mixed method approach to increase credibility and verify evidence (Newby, 2014 and Noble and Heath, 2019). Newby (2014) agrees and suggests the use of triangulation when undertaking social or educational research to overcome limitations and further facilitate reliability and validity.

This research paradigm has been taken into consideration as the researcher seeks to discover how EYP perceive their professional identity as well as how others perceive EYP. The research methodology chosen to carry out this project was planned according to the philosophical research paradigm as well as previous knowledge learnt through undertaking research in a social context, including education. A Grounded Theory mixed methodology approach was chosen to draw on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Shorten and Smith, 2017). As all methods of data gathering harbour limitations, a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies can compensate for the limitations associated with both (Bergman, 2011 and Kelle, 2006). A mixed method design can provide different, yet complimentary attributes to data collection (Kelle, 2006).

Questionnaires were chosen as an appropriate data gathering tool as questionnaires can be distributed to a wider audience of participants quickly and with ease (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Questionnaires also provide anonymity, encouraging honest answers from participants (Marshall, 2006). The online questionnaires were designed to provide structure in order to generate numerical, quantitative data, for ease of analysis in identifying patterns and comparisons (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). The use of closed ended questions allowed the researcher to narrow down responses to specific responses, including a combination of ordinal and nominal generated data, to then quantify answers into prearrange categories (Marshall, 2005).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) highlight some benefits of utilising highly structured questionnaires, such as being able to generate high frequencies of responses, allow statistical comparisons to be made and being much quicker to code when analysing. However, Marshall (2006) argues that closed questions limit data as respondents are restricted to only the range of options available. Yet, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) convey that attempting to obtain information from questionnaires that are long and put strain on the respondent will lead to poor quality responses. Likewise, Denscombe (2017) agrees that lengthy questionnaires that require a lot of concentration can lead to respondent fatigue. It was therefore important to ensure the questionnaire was designed efficiently to ensure authentic results without causing respondent fatigue. To increase data efficiency when using questionnaires that use a majority of closed ended questions, Punto (2015) advocates for a mixed method approach. As the research aims to elicit open and honest responses from participants, a number of open-ended questions were also used within the questionnaire allowing respondents to comment or answer freely (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). This provided respondents with an opportunity to reveal information or issues that may have been missed within the closed questions, in order to generate rich and honest data (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

Two questionnaires were developed and distributed via Microsoft Forms. The first questionnaire was aimed at and distributed to practitioners working within the early years, including nursery assistants, nursery nurses, nursery leaders, nursery managers, flying start practitioners and play workers. The aim of this questionnaire was to determine how these practitioners perceive themselves in terms of being a 'professional' and whether they feel that the aspects that society perceive as being 'professional' has an impact on their own perceptions. Furthermore, the questionnaire aimed to discover whether these perceptions have any impact on the quality of care provided to young children. The second questionnaire was aimed at and distributed to members of the general public with the intention of discovering what they think a professional role constitutes. The questionnaire sought to determine whether the general public perceive EYP as professionals that are integral to education and the economic development of society. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) convey that the appearance, layout, wording and content order of questionnaires are all important factors to consider when designing questionnaires. Therefore Microsoft Forms was

chosen as an appropriate software due to its simplicity and appealing design themes. Likewise, the content of the questionnaire were arranged specifically to first introduce respondents to their opinions on professionalism, leading onto their opinions on EYP as professionals (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Furthermore, the use of online questionnaires were chosen intentionally over paper based options for convenience, ease of responses, full anonymity and the design flexibility that software's such as Microsoft Forms can offer (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

To corroborate data collected within the questionnaire and provide a further qualitative insight into the perceptions, opinions and experiences of EYP, interviews were facilitated as part of that data gathering process. Interviews with early years managers and leaders were chosen specifically to provide a greater insight into the current challenges facing EY settings today and to gather a more in depth analysis of their professional perceptions. Due to Covid cautions and restrictions still in place in many settings, interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams or held over the phone to suit the needs of participants. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) identify interviews as a social, interpersonal encounter, in which knowledge is generated through conversation. Interviews allow participants to discuss and explore their interpretations and opinions on the topic of professional status, value and ideas. This provides benefits as data collected incorporates emotions, beliefs, culture and personal characteristics; it allows individuals to reflect and answer honestly as the interview progresses (Bell and Waters, 2018). Although interviews are time consuming in which the process can be complicated with unanticipated results produced (Bell and Waters, 2018), providing a qualitative understanding of the topic was important to this study. A semi structured approach was used to allow the researcher to compare and contrast data collected across interviews using a set of pre-written questions; yet also allow participants the flexibility to expand on their points to give rise to any additional information that may be important (Dawson, 2009).

An inductive approach to thematic analysis was used to analyse and identify emerging themes from the qualitative data generated from the interviews and thus allow the researcher to develop theories from the feedback (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2018). Maguire and Delahunt (2017) identify that the variety of different approaches to thematic analysis can cause confusion and subsequently suggests the use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step model. Therefore, the qualitative data gathered within the

project has been analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic framework due to its clear and usable approach. Moreover, Braun and Clarke (2006) identify two levels of effective thematic analysis: Semantic and Latent. Semantic includes analysing the surface meaning of what has been explicitly conveyed, whereas the latent level interprets deeper meanings from the qualitative data by identifying underlying assumptions, meanings and ideas (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017) which became apparent as the gathered data was analysed.

Furthermore, as part of the methodology involved for this project, secondary data analysis was undertaken to provide a wider context and delve deeper into the current context in which the EY sector exists as well as the current challenges faced by the EY sector and workforce. Palaiologou, Needham and Male, (2016:48) highlight that although secondary data analysis 'costs little in terms of money and time' it is important to consider the appropriateness and quality of data used. Therefore the secondary research analysed is data and statistics that has been collected, examined and published by or commissioned by the Welsh Government.

Ethical considerations:

The research proposal was subject to and approved by the Wales Academy for Professional Practice and Applied Research. Ethical considerations such as obtaining informed consent and upholding the principles of confidentiality and anonymity were adhered to throughout, to protect the privacy of all participants involved in the research project (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2018). The nature of the research project was clearly explained to participants in both the questionnaire and interviewee groups of participants, to ensure participants were fully aware of the aims and objectives of the project. The researcher's contact details were provided to ensure participants were able to ask any questions that arose throughout the duration of the project. An environment of trust and respect was established to ensure that participants felt comfortable sharing information and were not coerced into divulging any information they were not comfortable sharing. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any time as well as their right to request data. In keeping with ethical codes of conduct and principles the researcher acted with respect, responsibility, integrity and competence whilst undertaking this study (BPS, 2018). In particular, when discussing the ideas of perceived professionalism and self-perception during

interviews, the researcher acted with sensitivity, respect, understanding and compassion.

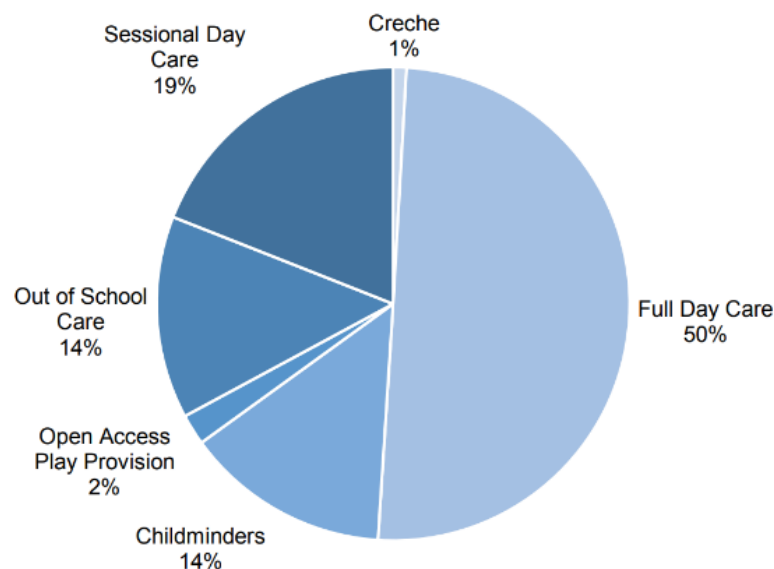
Limitations:

As mentioned previously, secondary data gathered by others can be perceived as a limitation, however it was important for the researcher to convey an interpretation of the context of the EY sector, both currently and historically, as well as the challenges associated with this. Therefore, a combination of both secondary and primary data analysis was examined in an attempt to understand this. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) recommend a minimum sample size of 30 when evaluating quantitative data to enable reliability of statistics. However, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) also acknowledge that sample sizes are likely to be much smaller for qualitative research. As this research project used a mixed method approach utilising both qualitative and quantitative research methods, an aim of obtaining 25 to 30 survey responses, for each questionnaire, as well as three interviews was deemed appropriate due to the time constraints and deadlines associated with the project. However, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) highlight that with any qualitative and quantitative data, the sample produced must represent the population in which the research depicts. Yet according to Welsh Government (2018) approximately 17,300 people work within the early years sector in Wales, meaning a sample size of only 30, represents 0.17% of the overall population. Although the background to this research focuses on Wales as a whole, the settings and practitioners who took part in the project are all situated in Carmarthenshire, which narrows down the demographic. Nonetheless, a major limitation of this research is the small sample sizes, in which results cannot be generalised to the whole population (Bell and Waters, 2018). However this study could act as a pilot study to further investigate the perceptions of EYP in regard to their professional identity, self-value and how others view EYP.

Findings:

4:1 Secondary data analysis: A Wales wide context:

In Wales, approximately 2220,000 parents or carers of 0-19 year olds make use of some form of paid or formal childcare (Welsh Government, 2018). The EY workforce, including childminders and those that work in Foundation Phase classrooms account for approximately 1.7% of the workforce in Wales (Welsh Government, 2018). The following chart displays the percentage of EYP by setting type, with 50% being employed within a full day care setting:



(Source: Welsh Government, 2018:29)

According to Welsh Government (2018) the 'childcare' sector is vital in Wales for economic and social development as it is a means that allows parents and carers to work; which therefore facilitates economic growth and poverty reduction. In Wales early childhood services or settings are predominantly framed as services that allow parents to work. The developmental and educational needs of children only became a priority to Government when children reach part time nursery age and become eligible for 'early education' (National Assembly for Wales, 2019). However, the National Assembly for Wales (2019:6) stress that 'even for this age-group, childcare is presented primarily as a service for working parents rather than a developmental tool for children.' Furthermore, the childcare offer for Wales is framed as an initiative to allow parents to work (Welsh Government, no date) and not a fundamental time of learning and development for young children. This suggests that the importance of EY

settings as learning organisations that carefully nurture the rapid developmental change that occurs within the EY, is not valued by the Welsh Government and instead are predominantly perceived as ‘childcare’ settings that allow parents to work. Moreover, children of parents who qualify for the Childcare Offer in Wales are entitled to ten hours of ‘early education’ and 20 hours of ‘childcare’ (Welsh Government, no date). Promoting a disparity between ‘early education’ and ‘childcare’ further widens the status gap between EYP and ‘educational’ practitioners. As the terminology suggests that ‘childcare’ settings are not able to offer ‘early education’ experiences and learning opportunities, potentially impacting an EYP professional identity.

The National Assembly for Wales (2019) and Welsh Government (2018) convey that pay is low for EYP with pay within the sector decreasing between 2004 and 2015. Likewise, qualifications within the EY sector are below average compared to other developed countries (National Assembly for Wales, 2019). Based upon 2016 SASS data, The Welsh Government (2018) produced the following table displaying the number of staff within EY that hold NVQ qualifications.

Qualification level	Estimated number of staff holding each qualification level	Percentage of staff holding each qualification level
NVQ Level 1	100	1%
NVQ Level 2	1,700	10%
NVQ Level 3	10,000	58%
NVQ Level 4	700	4%
NVQ Level 5	1,600	9%
NVQ Level 6	750	4%
NVQ Level 7	170	1%
NVQ Level 8	*	0%
Not specified	1,800	11%
None	400	2%

(Source: Welsh Government, 2018: 31)

As can be seen from the table, the majority of EYP hold a level three qualification, with very few holding a level six or above.

In regard to retention and retainment, The Welsh Government (2018) convey that a large number of EYP who leave the sector, leave to seek work within an alternate

sector, with many seeking work in educational settings. Reasons for leaving or factors that contribute to a decision to leave included 'salary rates, working hours and a perceived status gap between the education and childcare sectors' (Welsh Government, 2018: 35). The report highlights that status disparity between EYP and education practitioners still exists despite a growing awareness of increased qualifications and professionalism of the EY workforce (Welsh Government, 2018). Moreover, another challenge identified by survey respondents to Welsh Government (2018) is the inability to recruit suitably qualified level two and three staff, to meet National Minimum Standards.

4:2 Questionnaire analysis:

The first questionnaire was disseminated to a number of different people of varying ages and job roles, 32 responses were received. The majority of respondents (66%) were aged between 21 and 40, with the remaining 34% aged over 41 years of age. Respondents were from a number of different job roles including roles within healthcare, finance, local government, education, engineering, hospitality and law; 22% of respondents are teachers and a further 22% are in positions of management. For the purposes of the analysis, this survey is referred to as the non-practitioner survey (NPS). The second questionnaire was distributed to a variety of EYP who work within different roles within the early years; 23 responses were received from various age ranges. Respondent job roles include nursery nurses', early years lecturers, nursery practitioners, deputy managers, managers, room leaders and nursery assistants. For the purposes of the analysis, this survey is referred to as the practitioner survey (PS).

The questionnaire asked respondents to briefly define what they thought makes someone a professional. A total of 60 Qualitative responses to this question were received, responses were varied with nine themes identified.

Table1 : Defining a professional

Code	Theme	Theme definition	Percentage of respondents who mentioned this theme	Number of respondents who mentioned this theme (NPS)	Number of respondents who mentioned this theme (PS)
1	Value based principles	Theme includes acknowledgement of fairness, trust, respect, dignity,	47%	15	13

		dedication, motivation, a moral or ethical code, work ethic, having high standards, being committed, being reliable, being considerate and having a passion for their sector.			
2	Knowledge and experience	Having an in depth knowledge and understanding within their chosen field including a depth, breadth and wealth of knowledge and expertise.	43%	12	14
3	Training and qualifications	Being suitably qualified with recognised qualifications and ongoing professional development.	33%	10	10
4	Specific skills	This theme includes acknowledgment of specific skills including communication, time keeping, effective dialogue, organisation, confidence, team work, being able to develop good relationships, being punctual as well as being evaluative and reflective.	25%	9	6
5	Being competent	Respondents mentioned being competent, capable and an expert or 'the best' in their sector of work.	12%	6	1
6	Policies and procedures	Respondents mention the importance of standards of	12%	5	2

		conduct, confidentiality, following protocol and adhering to principles, policies and procedures.			
7	Responsibility	Acting responsibly but also being responsible for others.	8%	4	1
8	Accountability	Being accountable to a governing body in which actions have consequences and being accountable for actions.	7%	4	0
9	Leadership skills	Having appropriate leadership skills and being able to engage and challenge colleagues to benefit the team, whilst also being open to new ideas, research and innovation.	7%	2	2

As is evident within table 1, value based principles along with having an in-depth knowledge and understanding within a chosen field of expertise are regarded very highly as aspects that define someone as a 'professional'. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (no date) values act as the foundations for principles, therefore values can be described as the morals that guide our behaviour as a person and professional. Powell (2010) highlights a number of important values that are essential to early years professionalism including patience, commitment, a caring nature, being understanding and having a genuine liking and passion for early childhood development; all of which have been identified by respondents.

Results for this question align with answers obtained by the NPS when asked to identify which aspects respondents associate with being a 'professional' from a set of pre-made choices. All options received recognition with the highest chosen answer being 'in depth knowledge and understanding', aligning to theme two above, with 88% of respondents choosing this response. Followed by 'ethical principles', aligning to

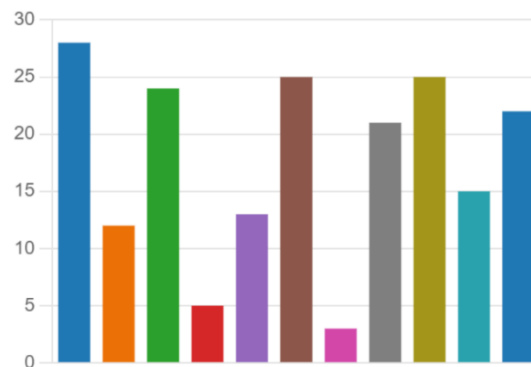
theme one above, and 'effective communication' each obtaining equal weighting with 78% of respondents choosing these answers. Interestingly, societal status is still associated with being a professional, with 9% of respondents choosing this option. These respondents were all of different ages and job roles, so no correlation could be theorised here. Similarly, 16% of respondents chose 'high salary' as an association with being a professional. Results can be seen in graph 1:1 below:

Graph 1:1 NPS

What aspects do you associate with being a 'professional' (Click all that apply)

[More Details](#)

In depth knowledge and unders...	28
High level qualifications	12
Commitment to raising standards	24
High salary	5
Leadership skills	13
Ethical principles	25
Societal status	3
Commitment to CPD (Continuin...	21
Effective communication	25
Confidence	15
Job role experience	22



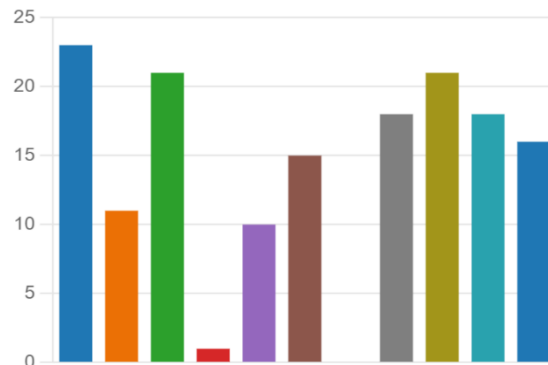
Results obtained from the practitioner survey (PS) in regard to the perceptions of what constitutes a professional were similar, with in depth knowledge and understanding being the highest rated aspect of being a professional, with 100% of respondents mentioning this. This was followed by a commitment to raising standards (91%) and effective communication (91%). None of the respondents of the PS regarded 'societal status' as an aspect of being professional, and 'high salary' was only chosen by one respondent. Although perceptions are similar, these results suggest that those working within the field of EY do not consider societal status and pay grades to be an indication of professionalism and instead focus more on raising standards and having an in depth knowledge and understanding of one's job role; as can be seen in the graph below:

Graph 1:1 PS

6. What aspects do you associate with being a 'professional' (Click all that apply)

[More Details](#)

In depth knowledge and unders...	23
High level qualifications	11
Commitment to raising standards	21
High salary	1
Leadership skills	10
Ethical principles	15
Societal status	0
Commitment to CPD (Continuin...	18
Effective communication	21
Confidence	18
Job role experience	16



Delving further into this topic respondents from both surveys were asked to identify their three most important aspects of being a professional from the options provided. Again, the most important aspects identified by respondents from both surveys were:

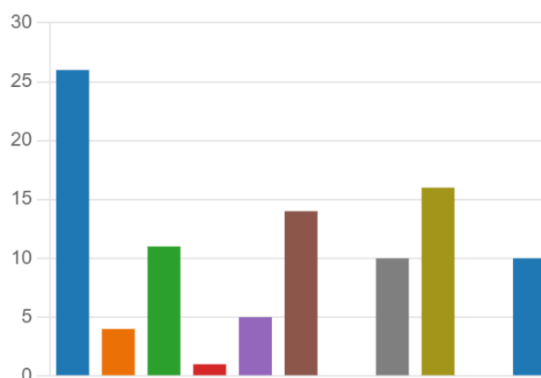
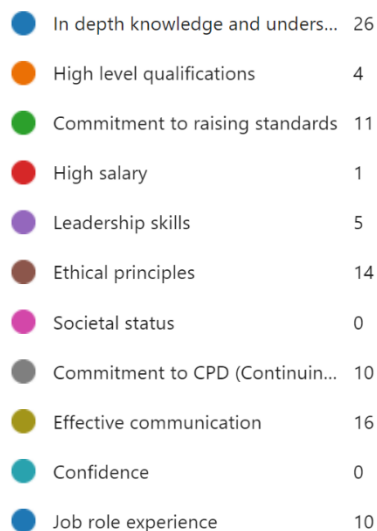
- *'in depth knowledge and understanding'* with 91% of people opting for this in the PS and 81% within the NPS,
- *'effective communication'* with 52% within the PS and 50% within the NPS choosing this
- and *'ethical principles'* with 43% within the PS and 44% within the NPS making this choice.

A *'commitment to raising standards'* was also highly regarded within the PS with 43% of respondents opting for this, equal to *'ethical principles'*. Interestingly, high salary was chosen by one respondent within the NPS as one of their most important aspects of being a professional. Results can be seen in graph 1:2 below:

Graph 1:2 NPS

Which do you feel are the **three** most important aspects to being a 'professional', please only click three options:

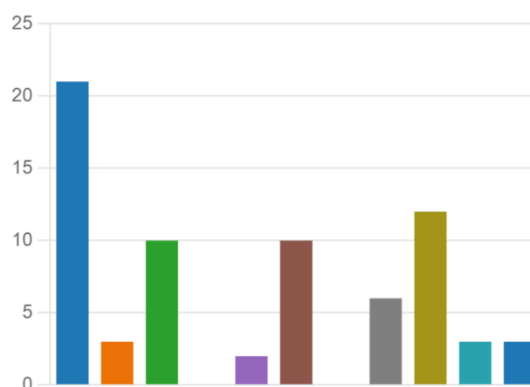
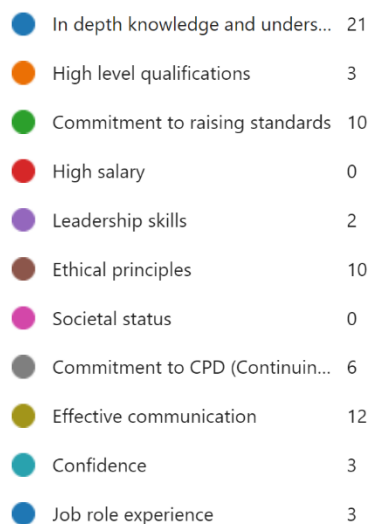
[More Details](#)



Graph 1:2 PS

7. Which do you feel are the **three** most important aspects to being a 'professional', please only click three options:

[More Details](#)



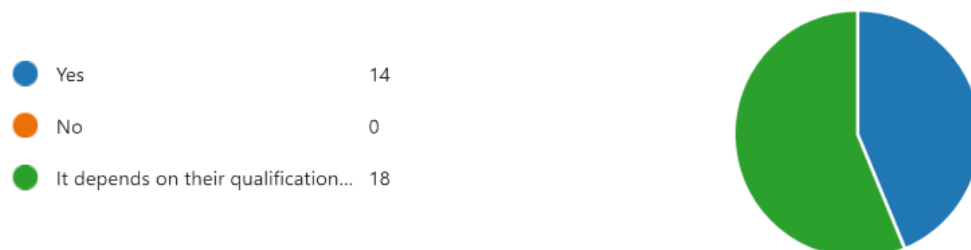
Interestingly, effective communication was ranked as one of the highest options for respondents when given the multiple choice options in both surveys, yet communication was only mentioned by 8% of respondents (four within the NPS and

one within the PS), in their written definitions. This highlights the importance of combining both qualitative and quantitative data gathering methods to improve the reliability and validity of data analysis.

From the data gathered around the ideas of what constitutes a professional, including previous research as discussed within the literature review, it is therefore possible to define a professional person as: ***someone who holds an in-depth knowledge and understanding within their chosen field, who is driven by ethically informed values and principles and is committed to raising standards.***

Based upon these considerations, NPS respondents were asked whether they perceive those that work within EY to be ‘professionals’ of EY; almost half of respondents (44%) perceive EYP to be professionals within their field, with the remaining 56% stating that perceptions were dependant on qualifications and experience.

Graph 1:3 NPS - Do you consider individuals that work within the EY to be Professionals?



This suggests that apprentices in training and newly qualified practitioners with limited experience are not considered as professionals. Consequently this raises the subjective question: at what point does one become a professional within EY?

Likewise, respondents of the PS were asked whether they considered themselves as professionals with 87% of respondents considering themselves as EY professionals, as can be seen in the following graph:

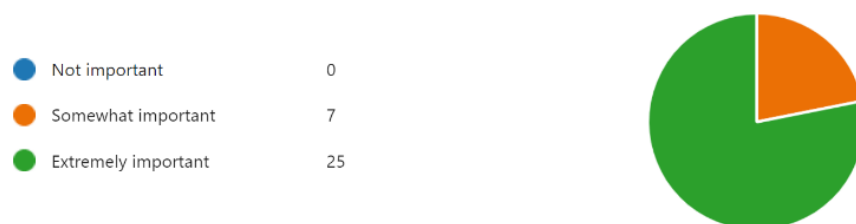
Graph 1:4 PS – Do you consider yourself an Early Years Professional?



Results for why respondents considered themselves as professionals included acknowledgment of qualifications, experience, engagement with CPD, knowledge and understanding of child development, skill development and research. For those who do not consider themselves as Early Years Professionals, lack of qualifications and not being in direct contact with children due to now being in lecturing positions, were the reasons provided.

All respondents understand the importance of the EY to overall development and future outcomes with 100% of respondents from both surveys acknowledging the importance of the EY. However 22% of the NPS respondents were unaware of the significant importance of positive and effective early childhood development and interestingly 17% of PS respondents are also unaware of the critical importance of the EY, as can be seen in the following graphs:

Graph 2:1 NPS - How important is the EY to overall development and future outcomes?



Graph 2:1 PS - How important is the EY to overall development and future outcomes?

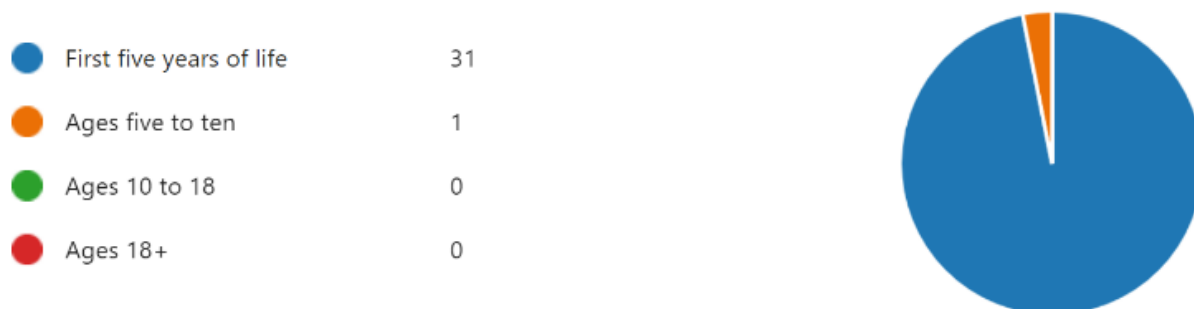


This suggests further campaigning is needed to highlight the critical importance of the EY to the holistic health, development and future outcomes of young people as also recommended by The EYWC (2021) and The EYA (2021). This awareness and understanding campaign also needs to be promoted to those working within the EY currently as well as to those who do not work within the EY, in order to have a beneficial impact. Moreover, these results imply that more CPD and training is needed for those

working within the EY currently to ensure that all practitioners fully understand the importance of early childhood development.

Likewise, as Fonagy (2020) conveys, the first five years of a child's life are a critical and pivotal time of learning and development. Understanding of this was apparent as 97% of respondents from both surveys understand that the first five years of life are the most important time for brain development, as can be seen in the graph below:

Graph 2:2 NPS - When is the most important time for brain development?



Results obtained from the PS highlight that more CPD, training and opportunities to undertake qualifications are needed within the EY sector to ensure that all EYP understand the fundamental significance of the EY including the rapid changes in brain development that occur within the first five years of life.

Furthermore 100% of NPS respondents agree that EY education, nought to five years of age, should be viewed with the same importance as other school curriculum levels, such as key stages two, three, four and beyond; in which 13% feel that EY education is actually more important than other key stages. It is reassuring to discover that none of the respondents regarded EY education as less important than other levels of curriculum, as can be seen in graph below:

Graph 2:3 NPS - Should EY education be viewed with the same importance?

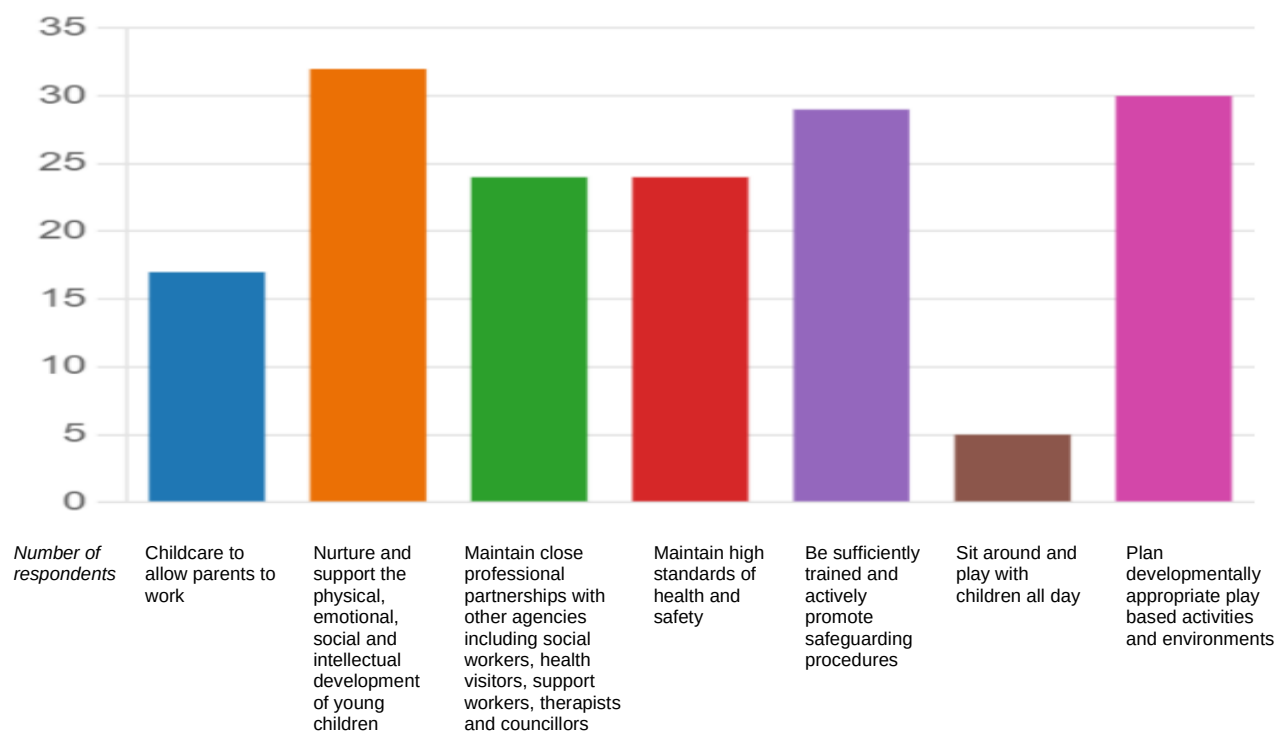


Results obtained within the PS were similar but with 39% of respondents identifying that EY education is more important than other educational stages.

Data gathered on the topic of the importance of the EY displays encouraging results. The majority of people are aware of the importance of the first five years of life to holistic and brain development. Likewise, from the data gathered it can be surmised that society in general view early childhood education with the same importance as other educational levels. If these insights are authentic, it raises the question as to why EYP and the EY workforce are not recognised with the status and pay akin to qualified teachers in other curriculum levels of education and why the perceived notion of 'status disparity' still exists for the workforce (Welsh Government, 2018), when the educational importance is viewed as equal. Unfortunately as Learner (2020) highlights private settings do not have the funds to pay graduates, with qualifying degrees akin to teachers, a graduate wage.

Additionally, the general public seem to understand some of the aspects of an EYP job role with 100% of respondents agreeing that EYP 'nurture and support the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of young children' as part of their role, with 94% of respondents agreeing that EYP 'plan developmentally appropriate play based activities and environments' as part of their role, and 91% understand that EYP need to be 'sufficiently trained and actively promote safeguarding procedures'.

Graph 3:1 NPS – Which of the following are aspects of an EYP job role?

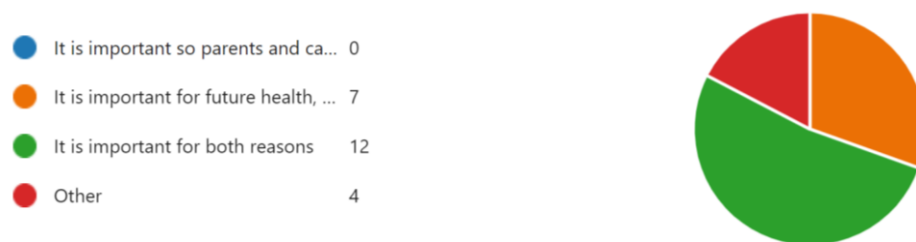


As can be seen from graph 3:1, people are not aware of the full scope of an EYP job role, with some respondents believing that EYP are responsible for only supporting the holistic development of young children, through the planning of developmentally appropriate play based activities. Although this is one of the most important aspects of an EYP's role, EYP are also responsible for maintaining high standards of health and safety, as well as maintaining close professional partnerships with multi agency workers in addition to having a thorough understanding of all safeguarding procedures and EY pedagogies. Again, this further highlights the need for an awareness campaign to promote the specific roles, responsibilities, skills, dispositions and competencies needed by EYP in order to do their job effectively and efficiently, as conveyed by Hyson and Tomlinson (2014).

Encouragingly, 94% of NPS respondents felt that the most important reason for EY education and care settings is for the future health, development and academic outcomes of children, with 77% of that agreeing that it is important for both future outcomes and allowing parents and carers to go to work. The remaining two respondents answered 'other' to this question and included the idea of foundations for

children as well as having fun within their answers on the most important reason for EY education and care. Likewise, 100% of PS respondents feel that EY education and care is important for future health, development and academic outcomes, with 52% agreeing that it is also important for allowing parents and carers to work, as can be seen below:

Graph 4:1 PS: What is the most important reason for EY education and care?



The respondents who opted to enter their own responses (other) also advocated for the importance of the EY to future holistic development, however also included statements such as:

- *'to provide high quality experiences and environments for young children to develop and thrive',*
- *'it is the most important aspect of child development and children's futures',*
- *'it gives a strong basis for further learning, development and growth'*
- the outside support EY settings can offer including *'someone to talk to, to know that you're not the only parent struggling and for the child too, a fun place away from home that's safe and filled with opportunities'.*

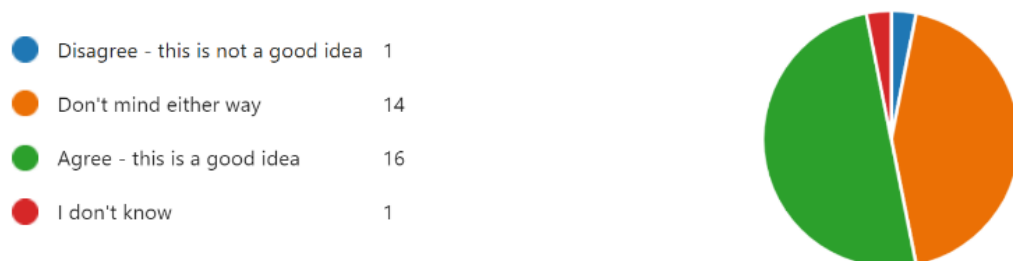
Similarly, when asked as to whether NPS respondents view EY settings as childcare or educational settings, 88% of respondents view EY settings as both educational and childcare settings. Three respondents view EY settings as only childcare settings without any educational gains. These respondents were all aged over 31 years of age, two of which are in managerial positions and one being a primary school teacher. On the other hand one respondent views EY settings as wholly educational. These results are positive as the majority of people view EY settings as educational settings that are important for future health, development and outcomes, whilst also being a means to allow parents and carers to work. Therefore promoting the importance of the EY sector

to not only the holistic development of young children, but highlighting it as economically important to society and the UK.

Another aspect to consider when exploring the perceptions of professionalism is job role titles and terminology. As identified by McGillivray (2008), the terminology of EYP can be confusing due to the multiplicity of job role titles. Likewise, The EYA (2021) highlight that despite the growing understanding of the importance of the EY, a major societal misconception still exists in which EYP are not viewed and recognised as educators. The EYWC (2021) recommends a shift away from current frequently used 'childcare' terminology to terminology such as 'Early Child Educator' to align with other OECD countries.

Participants were therefore asked how they would feel if the terminology of EY job titles were rebranded to Early Years Professional or Early Years Educator. Half of NPS respondents felt it was a good idea, with 44% not minding either way, one not sure and only one person disagreeing with idea. Results can be seen in Graph 4:1 below:

Graph 4:1 - How would you feel if the terminology of Early Years job titles were rebranded to Early Years Professional or Early Years Educator from Nursery assistant, Nursery nurse etc?

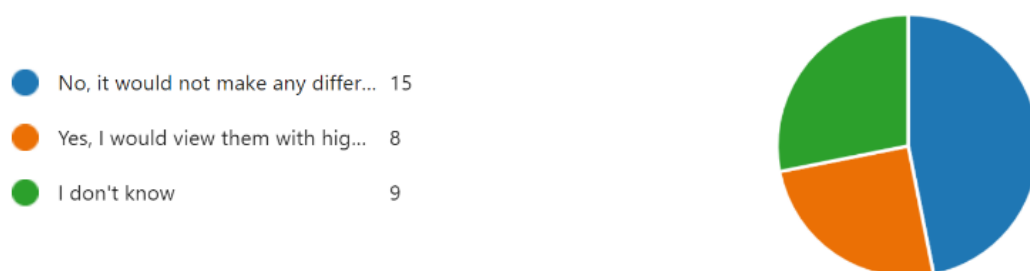


Results were similar within the PS with 57% of respondents agreeing that a re-branding of terminology would be a good idea and the remaining 43% not minding either way. On reflection of this chosen question, it would have been beneficial to ask participants why they answered in the way they did, to discover why respondents consider rebranding a good idea or why they didn't mind either way. Based upon data gathered within the interviews, it can be theorised that some EYP do not mind whether the EY is rebranded, as they feel it will not make any difference to the current perceptions that are already ingrained within society. This is also supported by 13% of PS respondents stating the rebranding would not have any impact on current

perceptions of EYP. 52% were unsure and stated 'maybe, rebranding might raise the status of EY'. However, 36% feel strongly that rebranding would raise the importance of EYP and therefore impact on current perceptions. Likewise, 34% of NPS respondents felt that rebranding would raise the status and importance of the EY job role and a further 59% agreeing that it *might* raise the status of EYP. Only one respondent (a teacher in the 41-50 age bracket) felt that rebranding would not make any difference to the perception of EYP.

These results are optimistic, suggesting an EY rebranding that moves away 'childcare' terminology and is replaced with terminology such as Early Years Educator, Early Childhood Educator or Early Years Professional could have a positive and motivating impact on the EY sector. However, when asked as to whether rebranding EY terminology would have any impact on the way NPS respondents personally view EYP, results conveyed were conflicting to previous responses. 47% of respondents felt that rebranding would not make any difference to their current views of EYP, with 28% unsure as to whether rebranding would impact their views; yet 25% felt that they would view EYP with higher regard if job titles were rebranded; as can be seen in the following graph:

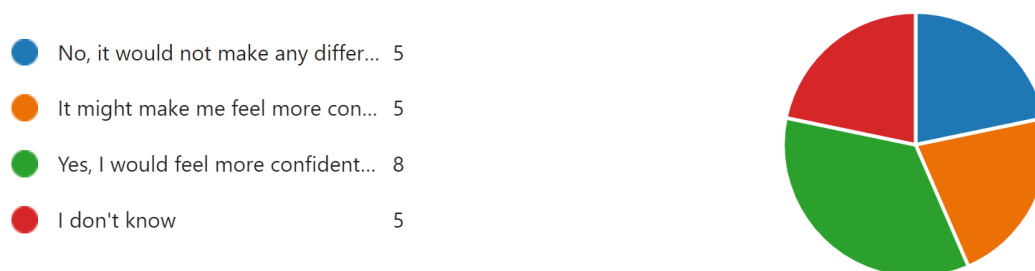
Graph 4:2 - Do you feel that rebranding EY terminology to EY Professional or EY Educator would have any impact on the way you view Early Years Practitioners?



Answers to this question are subjective, as it is difficult to decipher how participants currently view EYP. Would views remain unchanged because respondents already view EYP with high regard and importance, or because respondents simply feel that rebranding is a wasted exercise. Again, on reflection of this chosen questions, it would have been beneficial to ask participants why they answered in the way they did to generate further analysis.

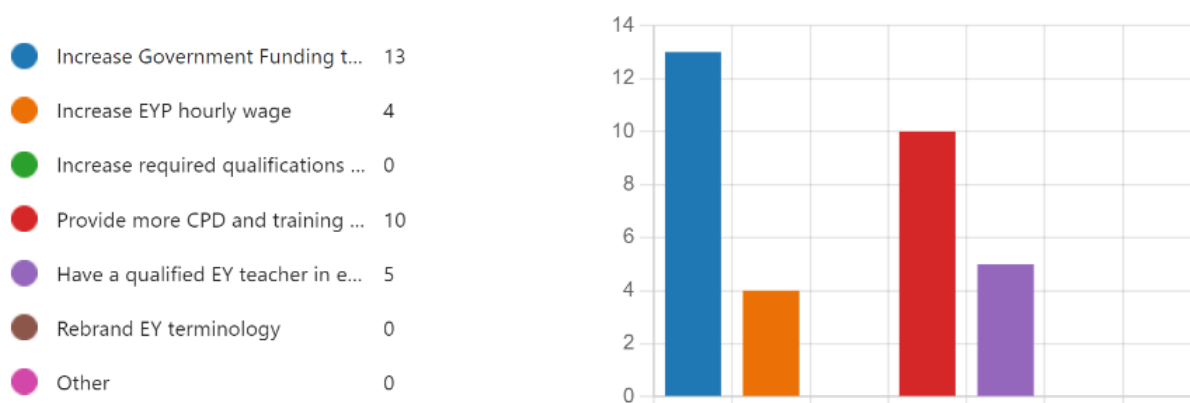
Responses gathered from the PS in regard to whether rebranding would have any impact on personal professional identity were varied with only 36% of respondents feeling that rebranding would make them feel more confident and self-assured in their job role. 22% felt that rebranding would not make any difference to their current professional identity, a further 22% felt that rebranding 'might' make them feel more assured in their job role and a further 22% did not know, as can be seen in the following graph:

***Graph 4:3** - Do you feel that rebranding EY terminology to EY Professional or EY Educator would have any impact on your professional identity?*

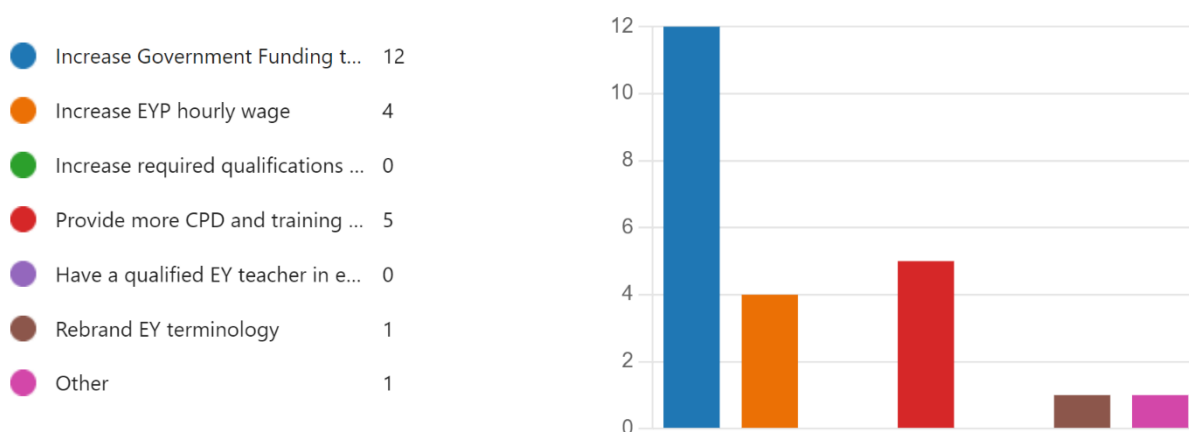


Correspondingly, when asked what could be done to raise the status and quality of EY settings, answers within both the PS and NPS included; increase Government funding to support the sustainability and quality of settings, increase EYP hourly wage, increase required qualifications for setting managers, provide more CPD and training opportunities for new and current EYP, have a qualified EY teacher in every setting and rebrand EY terminology were all mentioned. Data gathered within the PS also included an additional response of 'share a greater understanding of the role so that society understands the hard work that is involved within the role of EYP'; a valid recommendation that supports the endorsement of a nationwide awareness campaign.

Delving deeper to determine what people think would be the most effective way of raising the status and quality of EY settings, the most popular response with 41% of NPS respondents felt increasing government funding would be the most beneficial way, with 31% opting for more CPD and training opportunities, 16% feel that having a qualified teacher is most important to raising status and quality of EY, and finally 13% of respondents felt that increasing EYP wage is most important to raising the status and quality of EY settings; as can be seen in the graph below:

Graph 5:1 NPS

Likewise PS respondents felt strongly that an increase in government funding to support the sustainability and quality of settings was the most effective way of raising the status and quality of settings with 52% choosing this. This was again followed by more CPD and training opportunities with 22%, and an increase in hourly wage with 17%. One respondent felt rebranding would be the most effective way of raising the status and one respondent put forth their own recommendation of having a balance between more funding to be able to offer more training and CPD as well as time for this training, and be able to increase practitioner wages. This respondent also suggested that there also needs to be an emphasis on setting manager qualifications and training on how best to utilise provided funding.

Graph 5:2 PS

When considering the quality of settings and the quality of provision provided to children and families, practitioners were asked whether perceived professional identity had any impact on the quality of care they provided to young children. Data gathered facilitates the theory that perceived professional identity has an influence on job role

productivity as 22% of respondents feel that their professional identity has an impact on the quality of care they provide. Although, 65% feel that their professional identity has no impact on the quality of care they provide, it is an important concern to acknowledge when exploring the impacts of perceived professional identity and how to maintain and promote quality within the EY.

When asked specifically what participants from both surveys thought could be done to improve the quality of EY settings, 42 qualitative responses were received across both questionnaires, with eight themes identified:

Code	Themes	Theme Definition	% of respondents who mentioned this theme.	Number of respondents who mentioned this theme
1:1	Training and CPD	Provide more CPD as well as educational and training opportunities for staff to develop. Ensure settings specialising in early years have opportunities for career progression.	52%	22
2:1	Funding	Allocate more government funding/ subsidise funding in order to improve pay for practitioners and support the sustainability and quality of settings. It was also suggested that more funding is needed to encourage more younger children to attend settings, to meet the needs of working parents.	50%	21
3:1	Support and recognition	Promote a greater understanding of the importance of the early years, provide more support and recognises the early	21%	9

		years in line with other educational levels. To promote the early years as an attractive career in line with other educational careers. Society needs to be made aware of the significance of getting things right within the first five years of life.		
4:1	Operational suggestions	Quality equipment and resources, smaller ratios and smaller settings. More time is needed for planning and observation write ups. It was suggested that the demands of EYP need simplifying to ensure planning, paperwork and observations are undertaken using simple yet effective methods.	12%	5
5:1	Increased knowledge and understanding	Ensure practitioners have an in depth knowledge and understanding of early childhood development as well as early years curricula, including the importance of play and experiential learning.	12%	5
6:1	Professional status	Create a professional status for EYPs and recognise and value them as professionals ensuring EYP responsible for supporting play based learning are valued as highly as other education sectors.	5%	2

7:1	More family involvement	More interaction and active involvement with parents and families.	2%	1
8:1	An integrated equity model	Create a society in which the whole of society work together to provide opportunities and experiences that promote equity as a foundation for learning and development.	2%	1

The most popular suggestion with just over half of respondents recommending this, was to have access to more CPD opportunities as well as educational and training opportunities and to also make allowances to ensure settings specialising in early years have opportunities for career progression. CPD opportunities are vital within the EY in order for EYP to keep up to date with the latest research, policy and best practice within the sector, to increase knowledge, understanding and improve performance, and to continue to improve standards within the sector (Social Care Wales, 2016). Subsequently, regular and effective CPD is essential in raising quality and standards within settings and improving outcomes for young children by providing high quality early years education and care (Pacey, 2022). Furthermore, CPD can contribute to personal growth including increased confidence, self-awareness and employment opportunities (Social Care Wales, 2016). However, in order for settings to be able to offer relevant CPD to staff and teams, funding and sufficient finances is needed.

Consequently, subsidised or more funding from Government is also one of the most prevalent suggestion, with 50% of respondents highlighting this, on how to improve not only the quality of EY settings but also raising the status of the EY and EYP. If settings had access to additional supported finances this would inevitably impact on the other suggestions offered such as being able to provide more training and CPD opportunities, being able to increase staff salaries, having enough staff to be able to offer smaller ratios, as well as having more time or available staff to work more closely with families. Furthermore, additional funding can be used to update resources and equipment to ensure young children have access to the highest quality provisions. On

the other hand, the suggestions in relation to promoting understanding, awareness, value and altering the ingrained perceptions of society to one of equity are complicated and will require comprehensive consideration and further research.

Finally some further comments were provided to the questionnaire which included quotes such as:

'The impact of Early Years education is undervalued in a busy society. It is important that research work (like this) is undertaken and results in evidence for changes in perceptions and support of EY practice.'

'I believe Early years settings and staff are highly important and beneficial to our communities. I feel it is a job that is undervalued and if payment for staff was higher there wouldn't be such a strain on the provisions.'

'It is a bout time the early years workforce gains some recognition for their work.'

'Higher pay would bring in more workers, which will improve quality of early years practitioners'

'Changing public and government perceptions of the role of early years educators will take considerable time and effort by those working within the field'

'I think 'rebranding' can help to improve perception and performance of EYP but obviously this must be supported by tangibles like fair wages for the huge responsibility of developing young children and CPD to provide the academic and theoretical skills and knowledge to provide the most effective and engaging experiences'

'I think it is critical that the importance of the EY is raised, including the role of EYP.'

'Although I do not feel that the view of early years professionals does affect the way in which I work, the effects of not feeling perceived as professional are definitely felt. This subject has been discussed within my setting be all members of staff on multiple occasions.'

'I believe that early years practitioners are seen to just play with the children all day however it is much more than that.'

‘There is a huge decline of interest in the sector presently, it is very difficult to attract qualified EYP back to the Sector since COVID 19 and now we face the new challenge of the cost-of-living crisis. I do feel very apprehensive for the survival of the sector, whilst I am very passionate about the EY and fully support the needs of working parents it is a huge challenge and commitment.’

These additional responses further highlight the need for more support, more recognition, more CPD and higher pay for the EY workforce to reduce the strain on the sector and improve the quality and sustainability of the sector.

4:3 Interview Findings

Interviews were carried out with three different EYP within senior leadership positions in EY settings. For the purposes of confidentiality, codes to represent these individuals have been used for this research (University of Nevada 2021).

M1 has been in a managing position for ten years having previously managed for two different private non maintained nursery settings before becoming the managing director of their own private non maintained setting. M2 has been in a managing position for 18 months and was previously in a position of leadership within two different non maintained nursery settings. M3 has been the business owner and registered person in charge of their own private non maintained setting for eight years.

Thematic analysis was used to evaluate the qualitative data provided, with six themes used.

Theme 1	Current Challenges
Theme 2	Personal Professional Perceptions
Theme 3	Feeling valued
Theme 4	Societal Perceptions
Theme 5	Impact of Perceptions
Theme 6	Recommendations

Current Challenges

M2 *‘Getting good, knowledgeable, qualified staff, I’d say is the main issue at the minute we put out job advertisements and we get applicants who are not qualified or have no experiences’* This was a challenge echoed by M1 who stated a main

challenge of getting *'Qualified staff..... As a new business it is difficult to train and support my staff, whilst trying to run the business and manage the nursery.....cost to support this is an issue too, especially with the cost of living currently.'*

Furthermore M1 highlights *'I have more people apply for apprenticeship roles than the qualified roles. The challenge with the current qualification system is that it takes at least 18 months before you have a qualified member of staff and then they are only at level 2 if they have started from an apprenticeship – there is no way of fast tracking it.'* The challenge of qualifications was also echoed by M3 who stated *'The new NVQ is far more difficult than it used to be, there are exams now, there needs to be more of a focus on the practical element, theory is important but they need to know the trade!'*

As well as recruitment M1 identified retainment as a challenge; *'Staff retainment has been difficult lately due to the cost of living.....in the past year I have had six members of staff leave, two have left to do agency work in schools as it offers more money and flexibility. One has left to work in a different industry as found working with children too demanding, another left to find higher paid work and two are still working in childcare but have left to find work closer to home as can no longer afford to travel.'*

The challenge of hiring staff was evident in all nurseries, however M3 conveys that retainment is not an issue in their setting *'Hiring good staff is a big challenge at the minute, we can't find staff. But once we get staff, our retainment is good'* Likewise M2 states that *'retainment isn't an issues as our girls have been with us a long time but finding relief staff is difficult for those going off on maternity'*

Another challenge identified is the sustainability of the business with M3 conveying that *'trying to sustain the business and maintain the minimum ratios and additional learning support required for our children is very difficult.... I find that the LA are not in a hurry to provide financial support even when we are entitled to it, so finances are a challenge but we do what's best for the child, we work additional hours unpaid in order to facilitate this.'* Similarly, in regard to finances M2 states that they *'have had to increase prices to cover the increase in the cost of things, which has also been a challenge for parents who have had to reduce days due to the increase in cost'*

Personal Professional Perceptions

M1 *'I consider myself a professional of early years due to the fact of how I was trained years ago.....back then when you qualified, you were recognised and you were paid for that recognition and I think a bit of that has been lost through the years, maybe through the changes in qualifications'*

Likewise M2 considers themselves a professional of early years as *'I've done the apprenticeship, my level 2 and 3, play work 3 and now working on play work level 5..... I feel like I've got the knowledge and I've been in the nursery sector with early years for such a long time'*

On the other hand M3 feels that *'I am a professional because I own the business, I enjoy working with the children and am passionate about it but I'm less hands on now so feel that I'm not so much a professional of early years now.....It's all about paperwork now and it's not right, I want to be with the children.'* This echoes results gathered within the questionnaires.

In regard to staff M1 states *'I consider my staff to be professionals of early years but I want for them to recognise that. I encourage them to live and breathe early years and that we are always learning..... Confidence is a challenge to how some of them perceive themselves, the less experienced ones, it's something I need to instil in my apprentices'*

Likewise M3 feels that all staff within the setting are professionals *'Everyone is very professional here they know what they are doing, with apprentices we guide them into being a professional, what is right and not right. We are always learning new things, attending new courses (if finances allow) to improve our professionalism and keep up to date as everything is always changing in EY'*

Furthermore M2 feel that all staff within the setting are professionals as *'they've all worked up their NVQ levels or done the degree and everyone's got loads of experience behind them and the knowledge needed, so I would say they are all professionals or working towards becoming a professional if they are just starting out and I think that my staff view themselves as professionals'*

Feeling valued

Interestingly, all interviewees felt valued within their role but in different ways:

M1 highlighted feeling valued by the LA and CIW stating *'I personally feel valued by the local authority and CIW, I feel like I get a lot of support from them and I feel that my staff value me, it's just difficult because there isn't a load of money behind me to provide them with what they want, such as training'*

Likewise M3 highlighted feeling valued by some professionals within the LA but not all stating *'Social worker thanks us and appreciates us, we do get a lot of thanks from other professionals, it's a lovely feeling. We work closely with the ALNCos from county council and feel valued by them.....however when we work with other professionals we feel they don't appreciate us as they are so busy and it's then difficult to collaborate effectively, making us feel less valued'*

Whereas M2 highlighted feeling valued by the director and team within the setting stating *'I have a really good relationships with all the staff and the director so feel valued by them, the director recognises my hard work and appreciates it'*

Societal Perceptions

M1 reported a positive societal perception in regard to the role to EYP conveying *'I love what I do and love being with the children and feel that it is an important job role to society.... I have never met anyone who has been disrespectful in regard to my job role, I think it's perceived as hard working role as most say 'I could never do that', people tend to be interested in what I do'*. Furthermore M1 emphasises that *'Over the years, I think parents attitudes have changed towards us and they do class us as more professional now..... and the parents see that I'm genuine and do this job because I love it, not for the money, so they appreciate the setting.'*

On the other hand M3 feels the EY job role is not perceived as important suggesting that *'people think we are just babysitters that play toys all day, people think childcare is easy and it is not. People don't understand that our job role is very similar to teachers but we are not valued the same. Even health visitors who have degrees and things, they see us as just childcare'*. This perception was echoed by M2 who expressed that *'you often hear people say "so you just sit around and play all day" which is obviously not what we do. People don't understand that you have to be*

qualified to work here, you need to be a certain type of person to deal with the challenges of working with very young children and babies, it's a demanding job role'

Nonetheless, M3 did acknowledge that *'our parents are really appreciative of what we do and the additional support we offer'*

Impact of Perceptions

In regard to how society perceives the EY sector M3 highlights that *'Some girls get fed up of negative perceptions when they have been working really hard, this can have an impact on wellbeing'*

However M2's viewpoint differs and expresses that *'societal perceptions don't really have an impact here, the girls know the high standards we expect, they hit them above and beyond and the parents recognise this and thank us for this'*

Recommendations

Interviewees were asked how they think the status and importance of the EY sector can be enhanced. Responses received correlate to responses received within the questionnaires, with the following recommendations provided:

- *'We need to get the interest back, I don't know if that means changing the title of our job role, more advertising or more money from Government..... more recognition is needed, the impact needs to be beyond the early years bubble'*
- *'I feel like society has changed and people don't like to go the extra mile anymore, everything needs to be simplified, I feel like there is something missing.... Have we made it too complicated over the years with inspections and paperwork that has put people off'*
- *'More respect from other professionals, more support and cooperation from the LA, we don't get any educational support. More collaboration between private settings and schools to make transitions better.....We are the starting point of education, so we should be working more in line with LAs and schools. The schools don't view us as important, we are often brushed off by schools, we need to be valued with equal importance to teachers in schools'*
- *'More training is needed but more funding is needed to facilitate this, as setting's can't afford the cost of additional training on top of the day to day running costs of a setting'*

- *'More funding directed at the setting, that can be reflected in the wages as the current pay for early years workers is not good, so more funding is needed to raise staff wages'*

Recommendations and Conclusion:

From the data analysed around the ideas of what constitutes a professional, it is possible to define a professional person as *someone who holds an in-depth knowledge and understanding within their chosen field, who is driven by ethically informed values and principles and is committed to raising standards.*

Based upon the evidence gathered and the data analysed within this research, in conjunction with previous research, it can be deduced that EYP are viewed with varying degrees of value and professionalism. Most EYP consider themselves as professionals due to their knowledge, experiences, qualifications and core values. Correspondingly, all respondents agree that the EY should be viewed with the same importance as other educational levels, and professional perceptions should therefore reflect this. Moreover, most people seem to understand the significant importance of the EY to future health, development and academic outcomes and professional perceptions of those working with children within this critical stage should also reflect this. However, this research has highlighted that societal judgements still exist in which EYP are not valued with equivalent importance to other professionals, such as teachers. Although pinpointing why these conceptions exist is complex as the division between education and 'childcare' has been ingrained within society for many years. Low pay, required qualifications and limited awareness are some of the reasons offered as to why EYP are perceived with a lower professional standing compared to other 'professionals'. Although a greater understanding of the importance and value of the EY is becoming more prevalent within general society, the notion of EYP being '*babysitters*' who '*sit around and play all day*' is still evident; which is a disappointment considering the wealth of research, that exists to highlight the critical importance of the EY and the EY sector.

The EY sector face a number of different challenges including staff recruitment, staff retainment, rates of pay, societal misconceptions, funding, training and low status, all of which consequently have an impact on the sustainability of the sector. This research

therefore offers three recommendations to promote the importance and status of EYP and therefore the sustainability of the EY sector:

1. A nationwide awareness campaign to include a rebrand of EY terminology. An awareness campaign is needed to bring more recognition to the EY sector, highlighting the critical importance of the EY, as well as respect and interest in the sector as an important and highly regarded professional job role.
2. More effective collaboration between EY settings and partnerships agencies including schools, the NHS, and professionals within the LA such as ALNCoS, speech and language therapists, health visitors, social workers and educational psychologists. Continued effective multi-agency working between all professionals involved with children will not only offer children and families the correct and most time efficient support; but will also allow professionals to share best practise and gain a better understanding of the importance and professional job role of others.
3. More funding needs to be allocated to the EY sector to ensure its sustainability. More funding provided by local and national governments can then be used to increase staff wages and provide more CPD opportunities to staff and families. More funding would also allow more children to attend settings if settings are in a financial position that allows them to reduce their daily prices to better support families, this would allow more parents and carers to return to work and therefore contribute to the economic growth of the country.

Investing in the EY workforce should be viewed as a principal agenda to not only provide children with the best start in life and thus future health and outcomes but to also promote the economic growth of a country struggling with the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and current cost of living crisis.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. A researcher may not be covered by the University's insurance if ethical approval has not been obtained prior to commencement.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".

Ethical approval is not required for routine audits, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing within normal educational requirements, and literary or artistic criticism.

Please read the notes for guidance before completing ALL sections of the form.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity. Please see Checklist for details of process for different categories of application.

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:	Rachel Iles			
2	Tick all boxes that apply:	Member of staff:	☐	Honorary research fellow:	☐
	Undergraduate Student	☐	Taught Postgraduate Student	☒	Postgraduate Research Student

3	Institute/Academic Discipline/Centre:	UWTSD: Institute of Education and Humanities: Childhood, Youth and Education.
4	Campus:	Carmarthen
5	E-mail address:	r.iles@uwtsd.ac.uk

6	Contact Telephone Number:	07828784860
<i>For students:</i>		
7	Student Number:	161345
8	Programme of Study:	MA professional practise
9	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Lowri Harris

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

1	Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)	YES	☒	NO	☐
				Date	
2	If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known): Approval in principle must be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval	Research Degrees Committee	☐		
		Institute Research Committee	☐		
		Other (write in) Line Manager: Nichola Welton PD1 form approved.	☒	27 th April	

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

	Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.	
1	UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice	☒
2	UWTSD Research Data Management Policy	☒
3	[List any other relevant documents here]	☐

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity

If there are external collaborators then you should gain consent from the contact persons to share their personal data with the university. If there are no external collaborators then leave this section blank and continue to section E.

1	Institution					
2	Contact person name					
3	Contact person e-mail address					
4	Is your research externally funded?	YES	☐	NO	☐	
5	Are you in receipt of a KESS scholarship?	YES	☐	NO	☐	
6	Are you specifically employed to undertake this research in either a paid or voluntary capacity?	Voluntary	YES	☐	NO	☐
7		Employed	YES	☐	NO	☐
8	Is the research being undertaken within an existing UWTSD Athrofa Professional Learning Partnership (APLP)?	If YES then the permission question below does not need to be answered.	YES	☐	NO	☐
9	Has permission to undertake the research has been provided by the partner organisation?	(If YES attach copy) If NO the application cannot continue	YES	☐	NO	☐

Where research activity is carried out in collaboration with an external organisation

10	Does this organisation have its own ethics approval system?	YES	☐	NO	☐
	If Yes, please attach a copy of any final approval (or interim approval) from the organisation (this may be a copy of an email if appropriate).				

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	An Exploration into the Importance of Early Years Practitioners (EYP) and whether EYP are perceived as professionals?		
2	Proposed start date:	July 2022	Proposed end date:	December 2022
	Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words per section) Ensure that you write for a Non-Specialist Audience when outlining your response to the points below: • Purpose of Research Activity • Proposed Research Question • Aims of Research Activity • Objectives of Research Activity Demonstrate, briefly, how Existing Research has informed the proposed activity and explain • What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge • How it addresses an area of importance.			
3	Purpose of Research Activity The purpose of this research is to investigate into whether Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) are valued as 'professionals' within society, this will include how EYPs perceive themselves, how society perceive them and do these perceptions impact on the quality of care provided to children. I have chosen to research into this topic as the Covid-19 pandemic has placed a lot of pressure on the EYs sector, including a reduction in staff retention, with staff shortages preventing a challenge across Wales. I would like to discover whether the conditions of what constitutes an EYP as a professional has impacted this. Likewise, as a lecturer of future EYPs, I want to empower and motivate EYPs and ensure they feel valued as pivotal members of society who hold vitally responsible job roles. There is currently limited cohesive research into this specific area, that draws upon not only the personal perceptions of practitioners as well as the societal perceptions of EYPs, but also the ways in which the early years (EY) sector is funded and EYPs are trained and qualified in Wales. (this box should expand as you type)			
4	Research Question An exploration into the importance of Early Years Practitioners (EYPs): What are the perceptions of a 'professional' in relation to Early Years Practitioners/ Are EYP viewed as professionals?			

	(this box should expand as you type)
5	Aims of Research Activity The aim of the research is to explore the perceptions of Early Years Practitioners (EYPs) as professionals, why these perceptions exist and whether these perceptions have any impact on the quality of services provided to young children and their families. The research aims to make possible recommendations on how to ensure EYPs feel valued as important professionals of society in order to give children the best start in life; in keeping with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) and the priorities set out within the Welsh Government's Children and young people's plan. (this box should expand as you type)
6	Objectives of Research Activity The main outcome of this project is to develop a methodologically sound, work-based project that analyses and critically evaluates relevant data that meet the research question, whilst also taking into consideration any ethical issues; in order to recommend future actions. The intended impact of this research project is to discover how EYPs perceive their professionalism, how others perceive EYPs as professionals and whether these perceptions have any impact. The findings of this research project could potentially be used to inform future strategic planning in regard to how the EYs sector is funded and reviewed within Wales. (this box should expand as you type)
	Proposed methods (maximum 600 words) Provide a brief summary of all the methods that may be used in the research activity, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed. You do not need to justify the methods here, but should instead describe how you intend to collect the data necessary for you to complete your project.
7	The methodology will follow a subjectivist ontological perspective, correspondingly, this will entail an interpretivist epistemology. The overarching strategy of this research project will be a Grounded Theory mixed methodological approach to draw on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The following methods will be used to meet the research question: - Practitioner questionnaire designed via Microsoft Forms using a combination of both closed and open ended questions. - A further questionnaire to be distributed to non EYPs designed via Microsoft Forms. - Semi-structured practitioner interviews held via Microsoft Teams, face to face or on the phone. - Government and Local Authority document analysis. (this box should expand as you type)
	Location of research activity

	Identify all locations where research activity will take place.
8	All research will take place from my campus or home based office, with questionnaires designed via Microsoft Forms and interview discussions held via Microsoft teams or by telephone. (this box should expand as you type)
	Research activity outside of the UK If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions required). Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural and/or legal sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants. If you live in the country where you will do the research then please state this.
9	N/A (this box should expand as you type)

10	Use of documentation not in the public domain: Are any documents <u>NOT</u> publicly available?	NO	☒
		YES	☐
11	If Yes, please provide details here of how you will gain access to specific documentation that is not in the public domain and that this is in accordance with the current data protection law of the country in question and that of England and Wales. (this box should expand as you type)		

	Does your research relate to one or more of the seven aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?	YES	NO
12	A prosperous Wales	☒	☐
13	A resilient Wales	☐	☒
14	A healthier Wales	☐	☒
15	A more equal Wales	☒	☐
16	A Wales of cohesive communities	☐	☒
17	A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	☐	☒
18	A globally responsible Wales	☐	☒
19	If YES to any of the above, please give details:		
	EYPs are vital in working towards a more prosperous Wales which aims to 'develop a skilled and well-educated population in an economy which generates wealth and provides employment opportunities, allowing people to take advantage of the wealth generated through securing decent work.' (Welsh Government, 2015). Quality EYs provision with staff who are valued as important professionals of society not		

	only provide care for children to ensure families have the means to gain employment, but also inspire a love of lifelong learning within children and young people. This research will be looking into whether the perceptions of professionalism have any impact on this. Likewise, providing young children with quality EY provision can be effective in reducing the attainment gap between our most disadvantaged and more advantaged children, as well as reducing inequalities. This research will be looking into whether perceptions of professionalism have any impact on the quality of care provided to young children. (this box should expand as you type)
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SECTION F: Scope of Research Activity

	Will the research activity include:	YES	NO
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☒	☐
2	Use of interviews?	☒	☐
3	Use of focus groups?	☐	☒
4	Use of participant diaries?	☐	☒
5	Use of video or audio recording?	☒	☐
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	☒	☐
7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☒
8	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☒
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☒
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☐	☒
11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	☒
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☒
13	Use of procedures that involve deception?	☐	☒
14	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	☒
15	Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	☒
16	Procedures that may have a negative impact on the environment?	☐	☒
17	Other primary data collection methods. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) below.	☐	☒
	Details of any other primary data collection method: (this box should expand as you type)		

If NO to every question, then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and **may** be exempt from **some** of the following sections (please refer to Guidance Notes).

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION G: Intended Participants

If there are no participants then do not complete this section, but go directly to section H.

	Who are the intended participants:	YES	NO
1	Students or staff at the University?	☒	☐
2	Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	☒	☐
3	Vulnerable adults?	☐	☒
4	Children and Young People under the age of 18? (Consent from Parent, Carer or Guardian will be required)	☐	☒
5	Prisoners?	☐	☒
6	Young offenders?	☐	☒
7	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	☐	☒
8	People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	☒
9	Others. Please indicate the participants below, and specifically any group who may be unable to give consent.		
	Details of any other participant groups:	☐	☒
	(this box should expand as you type)		

	Participant numbers and source Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?	
10	How many participants are expected?	Aim to gather at least 50 questionnaire responses from each questionnaire. Aim to interview approximately 10 EYPs from different settings and roles. (this box should expand as you type)
11	Who will the participants be?	Participants will be adults who: a) Work with children within the EY such as, nursery assistants, nursery nurses, nursery leaders, nursery managers, teaching assistants and EY lecturers. b) Do not work with children (this box should expand as you type)
12	How will you identify the participants?	a) Participants will be identified for convenience and samples will be sourced from local settings. b) Participants who do not work with children will be sourced using a 'snowball' sampling technique from individuals within Wales, to reach as many individuals as possible. (this box should expand as you type)

	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
13	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☒	☐	☐
14	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☒	☐	☐
15	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☒	☐	☐
16	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☒	☐	☐
17	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☐	☐	☒
18	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☒	☐	☐
19	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	☒	☐	☐
20	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	☒	☐	☐
21	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	☒	☐	☐
22	If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			

	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
24	Will participants be paid?	☐	☒	☐
25	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☐	☒	☐
26	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	☒	☐
27	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	☒	☐
28	If YES to any question, please provide full details			
	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			

SECTION H: Anticipated Risks

	Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them. If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.		
1	Full risk assessment completed and appended?	Yes	☐
		No	☒
2	Risks to participants For example: sector-specific health & safety, emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information		
	Risk to participants:	How you will mitigate the risk to participants:	

	Disclosing information about a negative past experience. Discussions around value and professionalism could evoke negative feeling of self-worth if that is the way participants perceive themselves. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	Informing participants that the interview can stop at any time and offer them direction to relevant well-being service if needed. The aim of this research project is to empower EYP and highlight to them their worth and value, therefore if negative feelings arise I will ensure to listen to, support and seek to empower participants, as well as Informing participants that the interview can stop at any time and offer them direction to relevant well-being service if needed.
3	If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities	
	No issues are anticipated, and any arising will be dealt with in accordance with the universities policies and codes of practice. If participants voluntarily disclose sensitive information, a planned response will be developed in which the researcher reassures participants, ensures they are ok and directs them to the relevant channels of support. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	
4	Risks to the investigator For example: personal health & safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest	
	Risk to the investigator: Emotional distress – if participants disclose any personal or sensitive information it could cause emotional distress for the researcher. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	<i>How you will mitigate the risk to the investigator:</i> Follow all ethical procedures and ensure everyone involved in the research are aware of the aims and objectives of the research, with sufficient support systems in place. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
5	University/institutional risks For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection	
	Risk to the University: Failure to act professionally and ethically - a reputational risk <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	<i>How you will mitigate the risk to the University:</i> Follow all ethical procedures and codes of practice acting professionally and appropriately at all times, listening carefully and respecting the opinions of all participants. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
6	Environmental risks For example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems	
	Risk to the environment:	<i>How you will mitigate the risk to environment:</i>

	No risks anticipated <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
	Disclosure and Barring Service			
	If the research activity involves children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate must be obtained before any contact with such participants.	YES	NO	N/A
7	Does your research require you to hold a current DBS Certificate?	☐	☒	☐
8	If YES, please give the certificate number. If the certificate number is not available please write "Pending"; in this case any ethical approval will be subject to providing the appropriate certificate number.			

SECTION I: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

1	Feedback What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when?
	The aims and objectives will be explained to all participants in which participants will be thanked for their input into the research. A summary of a participants responses can be provided upon request, they will be made aware of this. Likewise, participants will be provided with contact details of the researcher if they wish to ask any questions and will be made aware that they can withdraw at any time. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
2	Informed consent Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation.
	The purpose of the research will be explained verbally to interviewees with a digital document explaining the aims and objectives of the research made available for participants to sign their agreed consent. For participants completing the online surveys the purpose of the research will be explained to participants in the introductory page of the survey. Participants will be made aware that participation is voluntary and they have the rights to withdraw at any time. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
3	Confidentiality / Anonymity Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.
	Analysis of data will be anonymised through the use of codes, including names of any settings and names of participants. A key to the codes will be saved on a password protected and authenticator protected university laptop. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>

SECTION J: Data Protection and Storage

	Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 “GDPR” and the Data Protection Act 2018 “DPA”)?	YES	NO
1	“Personal data” means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (‘data subject’). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants is considered to be personal data.	☐	☐ NO
	If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
2	(this box should expand as you type)		
	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	YES	NO
3	“Special category data” means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects’ – (a) racial or ethnic origin, (b) political opinions, (c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature, (d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992), (e) physical or mental health or condition, (f) sexual life, (g) genetics, (h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes),	☐	☐ NO
	If YES, provide a description of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
4	(this box should expand as you type)		

	Will data from the research activity (collected data, drafts of the thesis, or materials for publication) be stored in any of the following ways?	YES	NO
5	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	☐	☒
6	University computers?	☒	☐
7	Private company computers?	☐	☒
8	Home or other personal computers?	☐	☒
9	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☐	☒
10	“Cloud” storage or websites?	☐	☒
11	Other – specify:	☐	☒
12	For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of backup procedures, password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:		
	Analysis of data will be anonymised through the use of codes, including names of settings and names of participants. A key to the codes will be saved on a password and authenticator protected university laptop.		

	Paper copies of notes will be converted to a digital format and saved as a word document on my university laptop, paper copies will then be destroyed. Data received from the online survey will be saved as a spreadsheet on my university laptop that is password and authenticator protected. Interviews taking place via Microsoft Teams will be saved on the laptop as a transcription. Likewise digital copies of consent forms will be saved. All documents and data saved in relation to the research will be saved within a password protected folder on my password and authenticator protected laptop. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>
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	Data Protection		
	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	YES	NO
13	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	☒	☐
14	Sharing of data with others at the University outside of the immediate research team?	☐	☒
15	Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	☒
16	Export of data outside the UK or importing of data from outside the UK?	☐	☒
17	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☐	☒
18	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	☒
19	Use of data management system?	☐	☒
20	Data archiving?	☐	☒
21	If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) (and any international equivalents, where appropriate):		
	Any interviews taking place online, will require consent forms to be signed electronically and e-mailed to my university e-mail address. Consent forms will then be saved to my laptop, and deleted from my outlook account. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
22	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:		
	Rachel Iles – The researcher Lowri Harries – WAPPAR MA tutors <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
23	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity:		
	Rachel Iles – The researcher <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
24	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not.		
	Research data generated will be stored on a password and authenticator protected university laptop within a password protected document folder, in the relevant Microsoft formats. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
25	Please indicate if your data will be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository (see https://researchdata.uwtsd.ac.uk/). If so please explain. <i>(Most relevant to academic staff)</i>		

	If accepted for publication, the research project will be stored in the UWTSD research data repository for use by others. The outcomes of this research project will be of particular interest to students studying the Early Years Education and Care degree programmes. <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
26	Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)	YES	☒
27	Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	YES	☒

SECTION K: Declaration

	The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants. In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/		
1	Signature of applicant:	R.Iles	Date: 14/06/2022

For STUDENT Submissions:

2	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Lowri Harris	Date: 17.06.2022
3	Signature:	<i>Lowri Harris</i>	

For STAFF Submissions:

4	Academic Director/ Assistant Dean:		Date:
5	Signature:		

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

☒	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
☒	I have completed ALL RELEVANT sections of the form in full.
☒	I confirm that the research activity has received approval in principle
☐	I have attached a copy of final/interim approval from external organisation (where appropriate)
☐	I have attached a full risk assessment (where appropriate) ONLY TICK IF YOU HAVE ATTACHED A FULL RISK ASSESSMENT
☒	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.
☒	I understand that before commencing data collection all documents aimed at respondents (including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules etc.) must be confirmed by the DoS/Supervisor, module tutor or Academic Director.

RESEARCH STUDENTS AND STAFF ONLY

All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk, with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name. You will be informed of the outcome of your claim by email; therefore it is important that you check your University and personal email accounts regularly.

STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.

This form is available electronically from the Academic Office web pages:
<https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/academic-office/appendices-and-forms/>