



UK UPDATES

EARLY YEARS PROFESSIONAL STATUS

123 My Experiences as Project Manager for EYPS Phase 1

By Maureen O'Hagan

This edition of OMEP UK Updates focuses on Early Years Professional Status awarded by CWDC. It describes the experiences of 2 providers in Phases 1 and 2



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In August 2006, I was asked to be the project manager for the EYPS Phase 1 pilot phase being run by Middlesex University and CACHE. At the time, I was a senior manager at CACHE but was retiring at the end of August 2006. It therefore seemed an interesting and viable proposition.

The timetable for the project was August 2006-January 2007 and, therefore, we were all on a fast learning curve. I was very fortunate to have Julie Vaggers as Lead Assessor as her long standing association with the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL) meant that she had a strong network of people who could be approached to act as assessors. Julie was also head of a Children's Centre and this enables us to use the training room there for meetings.

Formation Training were the consultants responsible for devising and organising the candidates' assessment and their first task was train all the participating providers so that we in turn could train the assessors. Due to the short timescale, it meant that we would be trained and then a couple of days later we would have to deliver the training to the assessors and/or candidates.

The first hurdle for the candidates was to produce original copies of their GCE/GCSE Certificates and degrees. Whilst most people had no problem producing degree certificates, it was a different matter when it came to GCEs from examining boards which had closed down long ago. This situation led to a drop in candidate numbers. Candidates also had either to be working with babies 0-2½ years or to have worked with this age group within the last 5 years. A number of people worked in situations where they did not have babies and this led to another loss of candidates.

As Project Manager, I had the unenviable task of trying to organise the Needs Assessment (now called Gateway Reviews) which was the first hurdle for candidates to get over in order to proceed to





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the final assessment. This required me to find a venue which had 8 rooms plus another room suitable for the assessors and others to use between assessments. I also had to find two actors who would support the role play which formed part of the assessment. I had to do all this within a fairly small budget. I was fortunate that one local authority we were dealing with had a vacant building which we were able to use at a low cost. I discovered that the agencies that dealt with professional actors charged a huge amount of money, so I decided to approach some of the people who had previously worked via CACHE as external verifiers. This worked very well as they, unlike actors, understood the early years field and were able to play the role with a large element of authenticity. Also, their fees were less than the acting agencies would have charged. Once candidates had passed the Needs Assessment, they were assessed in their workplaces by a visit from their assessor. I accompanied some of these visits to check the processes being used. The final part of the assessment procedure involved the internal and external moderation processes. Internal moderation was

carried out by the assessors, Julie Vaggers and myself with a member of Formation Training in attendance to answer queries and check our procedures. External moderation was carried out by two representatives from each of the providers involved in the EYPS Pilot.

Overall, it was a very rushed phase and candidates needed a great deal of support from us and their peer group. The assessment system appeared to be overly bureaucratic both paperwise and with the recording of candidates' interviews/role plays, etc. having to be recorded by the assessor using hand written verbatim notes. It was difficult to understand why tape recorders, video recorders, webcams and other modern recording equipment was not allowed to be used, and hand written verbatim notes meant that the body language of candidate could not be recorded. Finally, we were all very pleased to have 14/15 successful candidates who were each deserving of the qualification they had gained. I look forward to hearing about the future work of the Early Years Professionals in terms of the improvements they have made in raising the level of practice in their settings. □

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The Pros and Cons of being a Lead Assessor

By Julie Vaggers

In August of 2006, I was approached by Middlesex University to be a lead assessor for the validation route of the pilot Early Years Professional Status. This entailed working with the project manager from Cache - Maureen O'Hagan - and seeing potential candidates through the process

from start to finish by December 2006.

In my role as lead assessor, I contacted interested candidates and arranged training sessions to introduce them to the new national standards for early year's professionals. To begin with, I was trained by CDWC and our

consultants, Formation Training, and then I developed and led the training sessions for the candidates. I also helped the candidates prepare to be assessed, initially at an assessment centre and, subsequently, in their own setting. I trained a group of assessors in the standards, the assessment process and in the moderation process. I was also responsible for coordinating the initial assessment days which are now known as “gateway reviews”. I timetabled the setting visits and made sure that each assessor received the candidate’s documentation prior to each setting visit.

The Challenges

This was a very short term project in which a great deal needed to happen. My time was limited as I had other work commitments and was also attempting to complete my master’s dissertation. When I look back at what was achieved and the deadlines that were met, I am quite amazed. I think this was due to the huge commitment made by everyone involved and also the sheer dogged determination of the candidates to complete the journey. When I was told that I needed to arrange training for a second cohort of candidates, the only days I had left were Saturdays! However, this was actually quite well received by a group of candidates, who would have found it difficult to leave their setting during the week. Candidates and their witnesses had to suffer setting visits right up to the Christmas break, which was not ideal but this deadline had to be completed in order for moderation to occur in January.

Because this was a new qualification, there was some confusion about who could apply and

what would count as eligible experience. Potential candidates needed to have a degree and experience in working with children across the ages from 0-5 years.

I learnt quickly that, at the start of each training session, I needed to check if there were people in the room who were not eligible to continue. This caused some consternation and perplexity both on my part and theirs. It was hard to keep one step ahead of the process before having to relay it to the candidates. I had to wait to be trained (with materials that were still being written) before I could explain the next step of the assessment process. However, the candidates already had to prepare for their initial assessments. I had to be very honest about my ignorance and contain their anxieties. It was an emotionally testing experience for everyone and this needed to be brought out in the open and acknowledged. Pilot candidates were taking a risk; they were the guinea pigs and were testing out the process. However, they were also in a position where they could influence future developments and become involved in subsequent routes.

Professionally, I had some concerns about the draft pilot materials and the written examples, which were produced as good practice. I had over twenty five years of experience of working with young children and had developed my own beliefs and values about children and how they were active leaders of their own learning. I struggled with negative descriptions of young children being used such as “aggressive”, “disruptive” and “uncooperative”. I was assured that the materials were being trialled and would develop over time.

“I had to balance my professional beliefs in slow leadership with a desire to see the status of the profession raised”



I also knew that changing and influencing colleagues practice took time and a lot of trust. I believed that practitioners leading practice needed to develop on-going dialogues with their peers about each other's personal parenting beliefs and values, beliefs about children and family traditions of bringing up children in order to develop new shared values and beliefs. This early year's approach of collaborative inquiry seemed at odds with the assessment approach. This insisted upon candidates using "I" in what I saw as an outdated superhero leader mentality. I would have preferred a more developmental approach to assessment with an initial assessment visit resulting in a plan of leadership actions which were then assessed following a period of reflection and study.

So I had to balance my professional beliefs in slow leadership with a desire to see the status of the profession raised and acknowledged via the fast paced EYPS validation route.

The Positives

Early Year's professionals are meant to lead practice and be agents of change. This was affirmed for me during a training session, when two candidates told me that, as a result of the training they had received and the new networks they had made, they would be changing their practice with the children in their care. I thought *"if this makes a difference*

to these children and their families it will have been worth it."

The two groups of candidates which I trained were almost thrown together in the face of adversity and, as a result, developed very strong bonds. We used a learning contract when we met in order to develop a culture of trust and respect. It encouraged candidates to take risks and share their stories about their settings in a safe and confidential way. I saw adults become invigorated and inspired to learn more about working with children.

The quality of the assessors was critical to the success of this process. I was fortunate to be able to recruit very experienced leaders and practitioners. I felt safe working with them knowing that they would always hold the best practice in mind. The heads of settings involved found it an excellent way of understanding what the EYP Status was all about.

Several of those receiving EYP validation have gone on to mentor and assess new candidates. This has been a positive opportunity for career progression. Finally, I think that holding the training sessions in a Children's Centre, as we did, was ideal as we could go out and look and see and feel what real life practice was all about. We could hear children in the background as we worked and hold them in mind whilst we all tried to hold on to the roller coaster ride of EYP Validation. ◻

“Changing and influencing colleagues practice took time and a lot of trust”



125 Early Years Professional Status – As Experienced By Two Assessors

By Hazel Locke and Sue Cook

As early years' advisers working in Local Authorities, practitioners frequently ask us about new initiatives and the EYPS was no exception. To find out more, we researched the website and soon found ourselves on the list of prospective assessors for the Middlesex University and CACHE pilot.

As is often the case with pilots, the timescale for the process was tight and, in order to meet deadlines, we found ourselves in a chain of action – our trainers undertook training, they then trained us and, shortly afterwards, we supported them in the training of the candidates. Having made space in our diaries for the training, this speedy turn around, whilst exhausting, actually supported the process well; we quickly became familiar with the complete assessment procedure.

Our training took us through the candidates preparation from the initial discussions, through the needs assessment and, finally, to the setting visit. It was intense, fast, thorough and fun. We bonded well as a team as we began to think and act as assessors, questioning, clarifying and refining the process.

We took part in the Needs Assessment of the candidates. This was a packed day where we moved from activity to activity, interviewing and noting candidates' responses in set tasks. The timetable was full and timings for each candidate were strictly adhered to in order to ensure that everyone had the same opportunities to promote themselves as experienced practitioners.

The full day visit to the setting was the most interesting and rewarding part of the process. Shortly before the visit, we received our candidates' task grid which we cross-referenced to the standards, to ensure that they were met fully and that sufficient evidence would be available at the visit. This part of the process was time-consuming and laborious; we found that it took at least three hours to complete the pre-visit paperwork for each can-

didate.

We both found the setting visits very rewarding. Each candidate had the opportunity to walk their assessor around the environment, demonstrating where they had influenced practice and led change. As assessors, we also examined evidence which had been identified by the candidate on their task grid. Interviewing witnesses gave us additional information about them and candidates had the opportunity to discuss how they met standards in their two short interviews.

Finally, at the end of the very busy five hour visits to the settings, we made our judgement as to whether the candidate met the standards for the status of an Early Years Professional.

“We feel privileged to have been in at the start of a process, which recognises excellent practitioners”

This was the end of the process for the candidate but not for us. Each assessment in this pilot was internally moderated by other members of the assessment team and a selected number were also sent to CACHE for external moderation.

So what do we feel about the process, what are the pluses and the minuses? Like many new initiatives, the process is not perfect but we find it to be fair, open and transparent. As assessors, we entered the process very well prepared; spending time looking closely at the candidate's evidence sheet meant that we were able to go on the setting visit with a good understanding of their background and experience. The candidates and the witnesses were equally well prepared; evidence was well presented and referenced to the standards. The opportunity to see the candidate in their setting is very important. It is refreshing to hear candidates talk about their work, celebrating their successes and proudly showing areas where they have influenced practice. Early years practitioners are



excellent team workers; we noted that some candidates had difficulty talking in the singular.

Putting together the whole process, the combination of the visit to the setting, the interviews and the scrutiny of evidence gives a holistic picture on which to make secure judgements.

The downside is the difficulty of recording the interviews verbatim and the time-consuming activity of transferring evidence to a grid – not once but twice - on the pre-visit scrutiny of evidence and during the visit. The five hour timed

visits to the settings are so busy that we found it exhausting and it was made even more tiring in settings which did not have space for us to work.

However, these are minor details and should not detract from the success of the pilot which gave us the opportunity to see some really effective practice. We feel privileged to have been in at the start of a process, which recognises excellent practitioners and which ultimately will lead to better outcomes for children. □

126 My Experiences As An EYPS Candidate On The Phase 1 Pilot

By Sharon Goate

I don't know that I was really aware of what I was taking on when I embarked on the process of becoming an EYP via the pilot scheme. So much of the process felt unknown not only by myself but also by those I asked questions of. I felt that as a qualified teacher who had been working with young children for over 25 years that I was already an EYP and gaining this status would be an-

“I realised that the skills that were necessary were those that I used in my everyday practice”

other way of recognising this. I also wanted to contribute to raising standards across the sector and felt that I had a great deal of experience and expertise to offer.

I established and have run First Class Day Nursery School in Benfleet for more than 18 years. The nursery caters for 100 pupils aged 0-5 years and has won many awards for the service that it provides to the local community and I wanted to find a way of sharing and building on this experience in the future.

It was for these reasons that when Essex County Council began the search for its first cohort to embark on this process that I put myself forward.

The first stage of the experience was to find a suitable mentor to advise and support me through the process. However, as no-one had any idea of what this might entail, this seemed impossible. Eventually, my business partner bravely agreed to perform this task despite not knowing what it might entail. In fact, this was a really important role as it provided me with support and somewhere to discuss anxieties and concerns that I had over the coming weeks, which were incredibly arduous.

I think one of the most difficult aspects of being one of the first to go through this process was living with the 'not knowing'. As candidates, we didn't know what we would be required to do, demonstrate or experience next, or even where we might expect to be, as venues and targets were identified only days before we were due to attend. This gave rise to lots of anxiety, which was also reflected by the assessors and trainers who were helping us through the process and who were also pretty much working in the dark and on very tight frame time schedules. On a positive note, we were encouraged to be very open and share our concerns, as were the assessors and trainers, and the spirit of camaraderie amongst the cohort definitely helped to get me through what often felt like a very chaotic period.

Getting to know and understand the standards felt like an uphill struggle to begin with but, on a positive note, the more I began to understand what was required of me, the more I realised that the skills that were necessary were those that I used in my everyday practice

Realising this felt like a huge

relief as I didn't need to produce lots of extra paperwork in order to meet the requirements. I could use existing policies, procedures, plans, notes, displays, etc., select examples of these and collect them in a concise manner and annotate them as evidence for the assessor. As Christmas was fast approaching, with all the extra workload that means in a setting, this realisation was probably key to my continuing with the process as I did not have a great deal of spare time.

The support and enthusiasm of my mentor and work colleagues were also key to my continuing commitment to the process. When I began to flag, they really did keep me focused and on track. They were also willing to help with my existing workload and provide support in a creative, reflective environment in which to enable me to identify ways of meeting the criteria necessary. I felt very much at this stage that I was pursuing the EYPS as much for the setting as I was for myself and this really did help to spur me on.

Seeing a drop out rate of more than 50% of the first cohort was really difficult and raised a great deal of anxiety, but it also made me appreciate how fortunate I was to have the support of my family and work colleagues to help me through.

The gateway assessment process itself was again an opportunity to demonstrate a response to a variety of situations which may be encountered in everyday working life, albeit in a high pressure situation requiring an immediate response with little opportunity for reflection. Whilst I found this part of the process demanding, I also enjoyed the challenge of the various exercises.

The final part of the assess-

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ment process was also fraught with anxiety. An hour before my assessment was due, I received a telephone call to cancel as the assessor was ill. Despite the disappointment of this, when the assessment was able to go ahead, I greatly enjoyed the opportunity to show the assessor round the setting and to enable her to see all of the exciting and creative things that were going on.

Receiving the final award of EYPS a few months later felt like a real validation of everything that I had experienced. Despite all the difficulties I en-

“I found the whole process challenging and yet incredibly rewarding”

countered, I found the whole process challenging and yet incredibly rewarding. EYPS is definitely a process worth considering if you have the support of those around you.

I have gone on to attend further training to mentor and assess others through the process and I am looking forward to seeing a future where EY professionals can begin to make a real difference to raising the quality of childcare provision across all sectors. ☐

Coming soon!
A competition open to all Early Years students to design the new OMEP (UK) greetings card

127 Specialist Teacher or ‘Social Pedagogue’? A review of EYPS by Clair Stevens

Following successful completion of my BA Hons in Early Years at Canterbury Christ Church University, it seemed a natural progression to apply for the new Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) beginning in January 2007. The development of the EYPS, as a Government initiative, seeks to ensure that all young children receive consistently high quality care and education by establishing a ‘world class’ children’s workforce as part of the Government’s plans for reforming childcare, children’s social work and foster care.

After reading an article by Jane Haywood, Chief Executive of the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC), I recognised that gaining the new Status would improve

both the outcomes and standards in my setting as well as raising the status of early year’s practitioners. Director of EYPS at Canterbury Christ Church University, Liz Hryniewicz, agrees:

“The first five years of life are critical in children’s development. High quality early years provision can help children achieve potential and can support parents and families. This requires a well-trained and highly motivated workforce. The introduction of EYPS will give practitioners an exciting opportunity to enhance their workplace practice, offer career opportunities and increase their skills and employability in the childcare and education sector.”

Early Years Professionals are now seen as key to raising the quality of early years provision in the UK, with the Government's aim to have an EYP in all children's centres by 2010 and in all full day care settings by 2015. This strategy, concentrating on the early years, is aimed at strengthening the children's workforce and raising the image of poorly qualified staff, who learn their skills on the job. For years, early education has been undervalued, underpaid and underfunded, making it an unattractive proposition for graduates. Evidence, however, from the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE), shows that improving the quality of early years provision is directly linked to well qualified leaders, working along side and supporting less qualified staff. The EYPs will act as change agents leading, supporting and mentoring others by modelling the skills and behaviours that safeguard and promote positive outcomes for all young children.

Within the past twenty five years, the UK has seen knowledge firmly positioned as a socio-economic commodity, resulting in educational philosophy being diluted and turning 'progressivism' into a negative term within society (May et al, 2006). However, principles influenced by early years thinkers, Dewey, Isacs and Froebel, now seem to be re-emerging as important building blocks within curriculum and pedagogy. These ideas, extended by social constructivists, Bruner and Vygotsky, now form the underpinning of an holistic child-centred ethos within early years settings. It must be recognised that the quality of an early years setting is, above all, determined by the way in which the learning and developmental

needs of the children are met.

Social constructivists stress the active role of the learner in developing their own thinking. Bruner linked reasoning to the organization of experiences, the development of schemata (thought patterns) and thought formation closely linked with language acquisition. Getting the right balance of adult/child initiated play requires early years professionals with an in depth knowledge of child development, a desire to reflect on practice and an ability to observe and 'tune in' to a child's current level of thinking and understanding (Hirst, 1998).

It is clear then that the way in which any early years programme is planned and organised reflects practitioners' beliefs about what degree of responsibility to allow children. Settings can often be too controlling, with practitioners firmly in charge of all decision making. In such a climate, children often only have access to pre-selected materials and activities and children thus become dependent on the adults for their learning. As we understand and respond to the need for children

to be actively engaged in their own learning and thinking, settings need to become more informal, offering opportunities for children to make decisions, self select and become independent learners.

Obtaining the new status as a top up on my early years degree enabled me to be assessed against the thirty nine standards, and allowed me to reflect on my leadership role in developing best practice. In order to gain entry, students were assessed and placed on individual learning pathways. Following my assessment the University allocated me to the Validation Pathway which would run over three



months. This route was offered to candidates who could demonstrate and evidence continued work with babies, toddlers and young children. My current job as senior practitioner in a day care setting gave me plenty of opportunities to work across the age groups, enabling me to fully undertake the written tasks required. I had a secure working knowledge of both the Birth to Three Framework and the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage.

Each student had to undertake a centre based assessment process (Gateway Review), which allowed tutors to assess and provide written feedback on individual candidate's professional leadership skills, communication and decision making. This process allowed me to reflect on areas of strength as well as focusing attention on areas for development. Validation involved various stages of assessment against a set of standards which related to knowledge and understanding, effective practice, working with other professionals and parents/carers and focused upon skills and abilities in professional leadership when working with babies, toddlers and young children. I attended University for five one day sessions, which in-

“Recognising parents as their child’s first and most important educator allows me to build solid two way open communication”

cluded group work and practical sessions. I found these extremely beneficial as we could talk over difficult situations that might arise in our day to day work with staff, children and families. In order to lead my team effectively, I would need to draw on my wealth of practical experience and lead by example, motivating and engaging individual team members.

Achieving EYPS was a challenging but rewarding experience. I look forward to demonstrating the standards in my day-to-day practice, supporting others in developing their skills and knowledge. Recognising parents as their child’s first and most important educator allows me to build solid two way open communication, benefiting all children within the setting. I am delighted to be one of the first practitioners in Kent to achieve EYPS, and strongly believe that this will be key to improving the value and quality of early years provision nationally, as well as giving early years practitioners the professional recognition they deserve.

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128 EYPS Mentor

by Alison Walker

I became a mentor for the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) candidates in February 2007. The Childhood Studies team at Canterbury Christ Church University contacted me, as I had been fortunate enough to have been an active candidate in Phase One of the EYPS programme. They believed, as a successful candidate and now holder of Early Years Professional Status, that my knowledge and experience of the programme could be helpful to other candidates now following the EYPS programme. I was given the opportunity to attend mentor training, through Canterbury Christ Church University, which I have found to be invaluable.

My role as a mentor is to foster a supportive and positive relationship with candidates (mentees). I aim to be a critical friend, offering encouragement and help to guide the mentee

in finding strategies and solutions to any difficulties they may encounter within the programme. Mentoring is based upon a mutual respect and trust between professionals. As I have shared similar experiences as the mentees, I am able to empathise and guide them towards the right strategy or solution they seek.

My role as a mentor is not to be confused with that of a tutor: it is not my role to assess the mentee or evaluate their performance. My role is to encourage the mentee to manage their own learning independently through enhancing their confidence and asking them to think about possible options and strategies available to them and the course of action they would consider most appropriate.

I receive notification of the candidates I am to mentor via e-mail. I am given details such as their name, contact telephone

numbers, e-mail addresses and details of the settings where they work. It is then my responsibility to contact the mentees to introduce myself and arrange a meeting. These meetings are held at a mutually agreeable venue, not at the workplace. Prior to our first meeting, the mentee sets an agenda for our meeting outlining any areas of the programme which are causing concern or need clarification. They also e-mail a pen-picture of themselves and their role within their setting to enable me to build up a picture of their situation or support networks already available to them and any difficulties they are experiencing.

So far I have attended meetings in coffee shops and garden centres as well as shopping outlets. As Kent is such a large county it can involve some travelling, but I feel it is important to interact face to face. It is much more difficult for me personally to build up a relationship through telephone calls or e-mails, although I have found these methods a useful addition to our meetings. The first meeting is always interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, we have no idea what each other look like, so there is a great deal of wandering around smiling in the hope that the mentee has something with them I might recognise - so far the CWDC handbook has proved to be the clue I use; I wander about clutching my version and hope to be recognised or scan table tops looking for the familiar cover page. The main difficulties that students wish to discuss are a lack of confidence surrounding a particular aspect of the standard criteria. For example, they may not feel they are as confident working with babies. We discuss strategies to raise their confidence, such as possibly spending time working within

a baby unit to refresh their skills. Other students find the Gateway assessment process intimidating; this is generally just a natural fear of the unknown. We discuss the Gateway process in general terms and review the students working experiences and skills. This is often all that is necessary to alleviate any apprehension they may be experiencing. Some students are quietly confident and just need to discuss strategies they have already put into practice. The need varies greatly from individual to individual.

I have found the experience to be very enjoyable. We discuss any difficulties the mentee is having and consider strategies to solve these. I have worked in Early Years for over 24 years now, I feel I am able to empathise with the mentee as I may have experienced similar difficulties. Many of the mentees I have spoken with find it unusual to be in a position where they must analyse and reflect upon their personal skills. I believe this is possibly due to the nature of our role, where we are always part of a team and value a strong team work ethic. Having to analyse and audit one's own skills can be uncomfortable, as we tend not to enjoy "blowing our own trumpet". After each mentoring session, I complete a short report on our meeting, what was discussed, any areas to be actioned and agreed strategies. If necessary, we agree a date and venue for a subsequent meeting.

I have benefited greatly by this experience, it has encouraged me to consider alternative ways of managing difficult or challenging situations and I hope made me more open to considering alternative views or ideas.



This has encouraged me to reflect upon my own practice and motivated me to continue my own personal development. I have met some wonderful people, working in a variety of settings, who are passionate about the experiences we offer our youngest children. I feel the implementation of Early Years Professional Status will finally raise the status and

acknowledge the professionalism and commitment of those striving to raise the quality of care and education we are offering our young children. My personal experience of both gaining Early Years Professional Status and mentoring others to gain the same recognition has been extremely positive. I have found the whole process to be thoroughly enjoyable. ☐

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