

# CHILDREN'S WORKFORCE

## Guide to Qualifications and Training



With enduring challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, *Charlotte Goddard* identifies entry-level requirements and ongoing professional development for the children and young people's workforce

**T**he Covid-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on the children's workforce, disrupting service provision and training, and creating issues and challenges for children and young people that professionals will be tackling for years to come. The childcare sector has been particularly hard hit, with a 35 per cent increase in nursery closures in 2020/21.

However, the pandemic has also shone a spotlight on the vital work carried out by the children's sector, which is already having positive effects. The Fostering Network reports a rise in interest in fostering, as people have been re-evaluating their priorities under lockdown. The National Youth Agency (NYA) says the pandemic has driven interest in youth

work as a career, as youth workers were given key worker status in Covid legislation. There has been a surge of interest in entering health professions, with a significant rise in recruitment for entry-level paediatrics positions and a record rise in nursing applications.

New qualifications and training programmes have been introduced across the sector, including apprenticeships in youth justice and playwork. The government has made more than 400 free Level 3 courses available as part of its Plan for Jobs, including qualifications in childcare and early years, play and residential childcare.

In the youth sector, the government is funding 400 bursaries to support youth workers through training courses. The pandemic has also driven investment in the education sector, including a £253 million

expansion of teacher training – although the overall spend was only a tenth of that called for by the government's education recovery commissioner.

Equality and inclusion is a key theme. Sector bodies like Social Work England are collecting data on diversity to help tackle challenges facing professionals from minority ethnic backgrounds, while The Staff College and the NYA are expanding efforts to boost diversity and inclusivity in leadership roles.

Strong and inspirational leadership is vital during difficult times. Charity Frontline has launched the Headline programme, aimed at heads of service within local authority children's services. Meanwhile, the Department for Education-funded Upon programme aims to create a cohort of strong future children's services leaders.

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