



## **Meeting the Workforce Challenge Executive Summary**

**Dr Sue Jeffels  
2005**

One of the founding principles of the Pre-school Learning Alliance is that parental involvement in pre-schools is positive for both a child's and a parent's learning and development. The Alliance is a leader in the field of equal opportunities and believes that pre-schools offer parents numerous opportunities to engage in training and access new careers. Earlier this year research was undertaken at the behalf of the Alliance into the inclusion of BME and other marginalised groups into childcare training and the childcare workforce.

Findings from that research suggested the necessity for further investigation, in particular vis-à-vis the disparity between student applications for training and the offer of a place. In light of the principles and objectives of the charity and the current Government's drives on inclusion, quality training and workforce-related issues, the Alliance commissioned research on the subject of why the demand for training is greater than the number of places available.

This project then builds on the objectives contained within the Charity's drive to meet the workforce challenge. It is widely recognised that the early years and childcare sector has a dedicated and experienced workforce, committed to high quality education and childcare. However, recent predictions suggest that the shortfall of childcare workers furthers the requirement to recruit, train and retain a considerably larger qualified, integrated workforce one of the biggest challenges emerging from the Green Paper. The Alliance believes that the Government must consider and support all options to make this workforce vision a reality. It is anticipated that the current project will give a greater indication of the national picture with regard to both inclusion issues and to the accessibility of childcare training and careers for BME groups.

Over the past five years, the charity has been offering parents the opportunity to access childcare training via the Getting Started course. Parents volunteering in pre-schools, parents that want to help their children develop cognitively and socially/behaviourally and newly appointed unqualified workers in pre-school settings primarily constitute the course's target group. The course represents the first step in the progression route leading to the awards laid down in the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's Framework for the CPP and DPP. An evaluation of the course between January and July 2003 illustrated that the vast majority of students accessing the Getting Started course were white females of British origin.

This project then represents the charity's objective of promoting training in childcare as the first step towards a career in the sector as an option for parents from BME groups. It hopes to discover

the specific support structures that are needed to include these groups into childcare careers and redress the balance between parents from the dominant ethnic group and those from other ethnic groups in childcare training and the childcare workforce. This appears all the more relevant given that a significant percentage of children (10%) are from black and ethnic minority communities and that these groups constitute a significant number (56%) of those that live in the 44 most disadvantaged local authorities.<sup>1</sup> This project offers further evidence in support of the Government strategy of ensuring the recruitment of ethnic minorities, men, people with disabilities and people aged 40 or over into the childcare workforce.

The aim of the current project is to discover the extent of missed or delayed opportunities in training in childcare and to recommend strategies that might best remedy the situation. The principle objectives of the project are, therefore, as follows:

- To identify localities where demand for training and/or employment in childcare is greater than the available opportunities.
- To investigate regional variations regarding any discrepancy between access and outcomes.
- To assess what might be the conditions that generate this, for example shortage of places, shortage of staff, funding matters, etc., as well as to explore how and in what ways this might be addressed.
- To recommend suitable strategies for increased BME participation in early years training and into the early years' workforce.

**This research draws on the findings from Alliance research undertaken earlier this year and entitled Accessing Childcare Training and Careers: Including Black and Minority Ethnic Groups into the Childcare Workforce. The key findings from that research that impact on the current project are as follows:**

- **There is greater demand for childcare training and careers in deprived areas than availability.**
- The lack of funding (particularly long-term sustainable funding) and the complexity involved in securing funding impact on BME groups' ability to access further training and/or enter into the childcare workforce.
- **The local context, primarily demographic factors and funding issues, impacts directly on the successful meeting of inclusion targets.**

By eliciting information from Alliance Regional Training Officers, college childcare course leaders and Alliance tutors, this report hopes to clarify these questions, as well as identify areas where the demand for training is greater than the opportunities available. The research also hopes to ascertain what factors, besides those already identified, impact on parents (particularly those from BME and other excluded groups) from gaining further training and beginning childcare careers. It also aims to provide a number of recommendations on what measures should be

---

<sup>1</sup> Daycare Trust (2000) *Ensuring Equality* London: Daycare Trust.

implemented to ensure that the available places keep pace with demand for training programmes and careers.

Questionnaires were devised and interviews undertaken. Responses from the first set of questionnaires were incorporated into a summary of initial findings using SPSS. Other responses were written in field note form (see Appendices 4, 5 and 6) to give a continuous narrative. Findings from the summary were operationalised in further interviews. The timing and scope of the research meant that respondents were not always easy to contact because of other commitments. Any problems encountered, were however, offset by the enthusiasm and willingness to provide information from those who eventually took part.

The key themes of demand for training, funding and the demographic nature of inclusion issues were identified during the earlier project as areas that warranted further research. Ineffective partnership working in some areas arose during the first stage of data gathering. Other key themes, for example, 'college as concept', emerged during the data collection stage, and gained increasing importance. It should be noted that the findings from the earlier research have again been highlighted in this project. Changes in the criteria relating to funding have made it more difficult – and not less – for some students to access training. In some areas the criteria for receiving funding is based on proof of income. This means that the barriers are increased for married women who do not work outside the home they cannot provide such proof, and there is no category that applies to them. They are, therefore, invisible in the documentation. Once again, the data suggests that the factors impacting on inclusion initiatives are context specific and a centralised (national) policy may not be properly equipped to address variations in access that manifest on the ground.

Below is a summary of the key findings that emerged from the research:

**Equality of Opportunity is not Matched by Equality of Access.**

- The demand for childcare training and subsequent entry into the childcare workforce is not matched by equal and universal access to that training. This manifests as a national problem in relation to the areas covered by this research. Numbers of reasons were given for this, some, for example staff shortages and the cost of training venues were related to funding. In other areas the mis-match was attributable to the fact that some policies discriminate against mature students. There is some overlap in the findings because equality of opportunity that is not matched by equality of access manifests and re-manifests in different ways. Some of the findings suggest that in a number of cases student access is limited by their lack of awareness of what is on offer. RTOs related this to under-marketing of courses and the need for outreach through development officers. A development officer in every area would ensure that students receive the relevant information regarding the range of courses that are available. The demand for training is greater than the number of places available and, again validating the earlier findings, this was more evident in areas where fifty percent or more of the population were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups. If the drive for greater inclusion of minority groups is to be realised then it is vital that this issue is addressed.

**Effectively Working Partnerships on the Ground Leads to Increased Access to Training and Careers for BME Groups.**

- Current policy in early years' provision was adopted because, in theory, local authorities, Sure Start initiatives and voluntary organisations on the ground would be able to operate in mutually beneficial partnerships one with another. The reasoning behind this was that in working together agencies would ensure that access was available to all. The evidence from

this research suggests that the reality is patchy and more complicated. When partnerships do not work effectively this can affect childcare provision and it can inhibit access to childcare training. It is unfortunate that in some of the most deprived areas, partnerships are not working well. One of the original aims of Sure Start was that it should work as targeted initiatives that were meant to draw in hard to reach groups. The man behind Sure Start, Norman Glass has said in a recent article that

“There was to be an emphasis on outreach to access difficult-to-reach families, and autonomy for local projects to add extra services of their choice, such as debt counselling, benefits advice and so on”.<sup>2</sup>

This certainly does not seem to have been the result when the demand for training in areas where BME groups account for more than 50% of the population is not met by access, and where funding is difficult to acquire. From 2006 Sure Start initiatives will be brought back under local authority control.<sup>3</sup> There will be changes in how pre-schooling is delivered and how early years training is delivered. People working with children and families will be required to periodically update their skills. Partnership working should be an integrated process that works at every level. However, effective working is more likely to happen when there are a sufficient number of trainers on the ground. In some areas Sure Starts, Early Years Partnerships, and Alliance sub-committees work effectively together, and in others they do not work so effectively. What began as targeted initiatives seems to have become a universalistic model without a blueprint for effective partnership working. Without an agreed integrated process, ineffective partnerships will continue to inhibit access to training and to the childcare workforce.

### **The Perceptions of Training and Working in the Early Years Impact on the Numbers Accessing Training.**

- Some college course leaders/tutors and Alliance tutors reported specific instances of childcare being devalued both as a training option and a career. Stereotypical ideas of childcare as an easy option are still prevalent and working in early years is not seen in professional terms. This devalues it as a career option and young people are deterred by the image of an ageing workforce. Tutors report that the ways in which childcare training is undervalued can affect workers' and students' newly won confidence. Some have felt so undervalued that they give up further training. One tutor reported that students who applied for jobs in schools felt considerably undervalued. The DPP, even though it is a level 3 only qualifies them up to age 5 rather than age 8 and because of this they are paid unqualified rates. In order to qualify for the higher rate students have to take NVQ level 3. They feel that what they have done is not appreciated and that the hard work they have put into their professional development is not recognised.

It seems clear that there needs to be a more easily recognisable professional standard in the early years' sector, with systematic retraining. Ongoing training and greater levels of support when difficulties are encountered would lead to greater diversity in the system and a wider ethos of encouragement and valuing. Greater recognition of the value of pre-school and other early years provision is vital if the shortfall in the childcare workforce is to be addressed.

---

<sup>2</sup> Guardian Newspaper Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> January, 2005.  
<http://society.guardian.co.uk/children/story/0,1074,1383034,00.html> no page no given

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

### **The Contextual Nature of Inclusion Issues.**

- This research verified earlier findings that inclusion issues can only be addressed on a contextual basis. Where a person lived affected their access to training and those who lived in isolated rural areas were often prevented from accessing training. The ethnic mix on courses and in the childcare workforce is demographically determined, but some Alliance tutors say that this is not always reflected on Alliance courses. In some areas they still tend to attract mostly white British students even though the area's ethnic mix might be broad. A number of factors may account for this. Funding mechanisms can work against married women and this would affect the numbers of women from BME groups who might otherwise access training. Cultural restraints also impact on inclusion figures and this may be a reason why, even in an area that has a broad ethnic mix, courses attract mainly white British students. In some contexts however, cultural restraints can disappear, where group settings are supportive and accepting students become forceful agents of their own progress.

In contrast to the mutual acceptance of diversity of multi-cultural central Leicester, one tutor reported that there were still pockets of discrimination in the more rural parts of Leicestershire where she worked. She believed that members of BME groups might, at the same time, be wary of facing discrimination. Practitioners who are from mainly white areas need more exposure to different cultural groups in order to address racist issues. It is also the case that being in the minority is itself threatening and may prevent people not only from accessing training but from accessing childcare. Again, greater recognition and acceptance of diversity, along with a supportive atmosphere should offset such constraints and encourage greater inclusion of Black and Minority Ethnic groups.

### **Over-subscription to Courses and the Lack of Waiting Lists Impact on the Numbers that Access Training.**

- Some colleges, despite many of their courses being heavily over-subscribed, do not operate waiting list policies. For differing reasons they instruct students to reapply next year. In this way they appear to demonstrate that they have satisfied the demand for training. Colleges may be unable to meet the demand for training but do not wish to be seen as deficient in meeting such a demand. They may also not want their entrance requirements to be regarded as exclusionary. Telling students that they have to re-apply negates the need for a waiting list and may also appear to present college policies and their ability to satisfy demand in a better light. This research found that over-subscription for training and a mis-match between opportunity and access was a national problem. The lack of waiting lists sometimes operates to make invisible those who have been unable to access training. Waiting lists might be unpopular but they are, arguably, a better way of determining how far the demand for training exceeds the number of places available. Where this happens in areas with greater numbers from BME groups it is vital that the numbers are visible if their inclusion into training and the childcare workforce is to be adequately addressed.

### **Personal Barriers to Training.**

- All interviewees were of the opinion that the barriers to training were complex. Some were institutional, i.e., where demand for training was not satisfied, or the required courses did not run in the local area; others related to a student's perceptions of their own abilities, to family commitments and to funding, validating and reinforcing the finding from the earlier report. Some students could not afford training that was only partially funded and this limited their access. Personal barriers to training were especially obvious in the case of those from BME groups. Tutors reported that often family concerns had to come before a woman's training and work needs. Another reported that students from BME groups were more reluctant to

travel outside the immediate area and that this was due either to family pressure or to the fact that they did not like using public transport. If the shortfall in the childcare workforce is to be reduced, and some of the barriers to training removed, then educational providers and policy makers need to provide training that suits people's needs, e.g. putting on local courses in community halls. Women with heavy family commitments and those who could not (for whatever reason) travel any distance could then access training.

### **Funding**

- As in the earlier research these findings suggest that the ways in which funding operates can create barriers for some students wishing to access childcare training. Interviewees report that funding for training is haphazard, with some tutors remarking that they keep hearing their area is well funded but are not seeing the results as they would expect. One Regional Training Officer said that the funding for her area was really haphazard and it was difficult to predict when and where courses would be funded. Accessing funding is also difficult in a borough that has been described as one of the most deprived areas in the country, as one alliance tutor reported:

“Accessing funding to run courses is difficult. Sure Start has funded us twice and we do not know if they'll fund again. The other problem is that they will only fund the cachement area and there are parents [outside] who want to access training. The local PLA is unable to do much. They've had staff cuts and although they work in conjunction with Early Years they do not provide Alliance courses. Funding for this borough is difficult.” (Shabnam: Appendix 4) BME report Apr.2004

The current research found that funding for Newham was still difficult to obtain and there were long waiting lists at the local college thus further inhibiting access to training for members of the most deprived groups.

Students who apply for funding often have to give proof of their income, using proof of income as criteria for funding prevents numbers of married women from accessing training. The refusal to fund smaller groups also impacts on the numbers accessing training. This is especially relevant in rural areas where students may have to travel miles in order to access training. Better funding levels would mean more tutors would be able to take training to small groups in outlying areas. Funding mechanisms have impacted on access to and inclusion in training at all levels. Diversified funding streams would facilitate greater access to class based learning and more outreach training, and would thus provide greater levels of access for Black and Minority Ethnic groups, and for those living in isolated areas.

### **'College as a Concept'**

- Tutors report that the further education sector is constantly changing in order to meet the needs of a changing society. Increasing the numbers of people who access training, particularly those from the most excluded groups, requires the development of new strategies and methods of learning. Different problems arise across a variety of contexts, living in isolated rural areas or cultural constraints, for example, increasingly necessitates the drive for marginalised groups to access training by other means.

Responses to this challenge have been distance learning, e learning and a growth in the number of community based courses. This may raise the question of how necessary the college, as a recognisable building actually is, could the college of the future be a material building in conceptual terms only? This would certainly be particularly relevant to those who

live in rural areas with not a college building in sight. At the same time, class based and group learning are a valuable part of the whole process and are vital elements in the consolidation of students' skills. New modes of learning may necessitate course development that is based on the model provided by the Open University where students have access to a tutor and will occasionally meet for group learning. Greater implementation of such strategies would, presumably, reduce the number of cases where the demand for training is greater than the number of places available and make it easier for those from excluded groups to access training by other means.

As a result of the data analysis and the key findings noted above, the following represent our recommendations:

### **1). Ensuring Equality of Opportunity and Equality of Access**

Funding mechanisms and methodology need to be more flexible in order to ensure that there is a greater match between equality of opportunity and equality of access. It was clear from this research that equality of opportunity was not met by equality of access to childcare training. It is a cause for concern that this problem manifested and re-manifested in a number of different guises and as a national problem. There are a number of reasons for this mismatch and Colleges themselves may contribute to this. Colleges set their own fees and charge more for students who live outside the college boundaries. Problems with funding sometimes manifests as a location issue but the move to prioritise skills for 16-19 year olds often means that other, more mature learners lose out. Development officers in all areas would facilitate greater outreach and ensure that students are not prevented from accessing training through a lack of awareness of what is on offer. It is imperative that solutions are found to ensure greater flexibility and diversity in funding so that those who wish to access early years training, particularly those from the most excluded groups, are more able to do so.

### **2). Increasing and Improving Adult Learning Pathways**

There should be a clear statement of what, if any, qualifications are required on entry to a college. Those already in the system should be able to access training through the accreditation of prior learning. The QCA sets the qualification levels for entry into childcare training and perhaps this should take into account exactly what elements of prior learning could be incorporated into a qualification and what not. This could be achieved through the level two qualification which is very closely connected to childcare practice and fully funded by the Learning and Skills Council. Given the need to both get new students into childcare training and ensure that those that are already in the childcare workforce (and thus have experience and expertise but perhaps not the qualifications) are adequately trained, new and improved adult learning pathways must be

developed. This is particularly relevant for excluded groups and BME groups especially. As an organisation the Alliance values qualification-centred courses. At the same time it believes that offering flexibility in training, such as the 'Stepping Stones' to learning route, increases access and availability to excluded groups. Both of these approaches are necessary if both the qualification levels of childcare workers are to increase and the required numbers of suitably qualified staff achieved. Such flexibility should be on offer wherever childcare training takes place. Without such flexibility in the system, achieving the required number of childcare workers seems unlikely.

### **3). The Need for Flexible, Long-term and Sustainable Funding for Training and Learners**

It is recommended that funding regulations be reassessed. Long-term, allocated and sustainable funding would guarantee that the required number of childcare workers are eventually incorporated into the childcare workforce as well as ensure that the childcare workforce is representative of the society that it serves. A reassessment of the need to ensure that there are a required number of students on a course in order to obtain funding is needed if more training demands are to be met. Long-term funding would also allow for more tutors, and give greater job security to those who work in the early-years training sector. Such funding measures would also enable more outreach to a greater number of students. Funding for development officers in all areas would ensure that students are aware of the opportunities on offer. This would also further facilitate the task of taking training to areas where it is most in demand but not easily accessed.

There should be less concentration on boundaries, the very notion and practice of which are exclusionary, and an extension of the areas that colleges serve. Flexibility must operate with regard to the location of training. There also needs to be enough flexibility in training provision to allow tutors to train smaller groups that wish to access early years careers. This applies particularly to BME groups and those located in rural areas. This is imperative if the 180,000 shortfall in childcare workers is to be significantly reduced. Greater flexibility would result also in more outreach (via providing training in community-based centres, including pre-schools) and greater access to those that are presently most excluded from training and careers, namely those living in deprived or isolated areas. Such flexibility would enable the satisfaction of demands for training that are not fully met under the current means of provision.

### **4). Ensuring Partnerships are Effective**

Partnerships should benefit individual learners and this research discovered that sensitivity to local contexts is an essential feature of an effective working partnership. Individual blueprints for effective partnerships should, therefore, be a vital part of the planning structure. There also needs to be an emphasis on knowing your partners as this will increase their effectiveness. The Government recommends that early years' partnerships be developed between the local authority, Sure Start and the voluntary sector. In many cases, as Alliance tutors reported, these agencies have worked together and have developed effective partnerships. However, evidence from this research also suggests that in some areas partnerships do not work so effectively. There appear to be lapses in communication and tutors have reported that some Alliance courses have been sidelined due to refusals to fund because of a lack of recognition that they are QCA validated. It is recommended that partnerships be structured in such a way that they do not differ so much on the ground. Effective partnerships benefit individual learners more than non-effective ones. If the shortfall in a properly qualified childcare workforce is to be addressed then it is vital that agencies in all areas develop effective working partnerships. Effective working partnerships that are sensitive to the needs of their local area would ensure greater access to learning for those from BME and other excluded groups.

##### **5). Redefinition of Inclusion Targets**

Given that inclusion targets are impacted upon by the more local factors – not least the demographic composition of the areas – inclusion targets should be context sensitive rather than generic. There needs to be a recognition that those who live in rural areas deserve to be given the means to access training and that different modes of training may be necessary to ensure great inclusion of those from BME groups. Funding mechanisms need to be sensitive to the diversity in location and greater effort needs to be made to ensure that it is targeted at the most deprived and the most rural areas.