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# Press Release

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## **Graduate leaders 'drive up standards' in nursery provision**

A new report has underlined the importance of employing graduates who specialise in early years care and education in improving the quality of nursery provision, particularly in relation to the quality of support for children's learning.

The report presents the findings of a national evaluation, designed to assess the early impact of Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) on the quality of provision being offered to under-fives. The research, commissioned by the Department for Education, and carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), the University of Oxford, and the Institute of Education (University of London), finds that nurseries that employed Early Years Professionals (EYPs) made significant improvements in quality compared with settings that did not.

Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) is the graduate level professional accreditation programme for the Early Years sector. It focuses on developing highly skilled practitioners and the ability to lead and support others. EYPS has been delivered across the country since 2007.

EYPs were found to improve the quality of support for children's communication, language and literacy, their reasoning and thinking skills, and their scientific understanding, says the report. Other gains were in providing 'developmentally appropriate' schedules for children, and the way in which their individual needs were catered for. EYPs questioned as part of the study, reported that the Early Years curriculum (the Early Years Foundation Stage) had acted as a catalyst for many of the improvements in child-led learning and meeting the needs of the individual child.

Early Years Professionals were more influential on the quality of practice in their own rooms than on quality across the nursery. The more time they spent working hands-on with children the greater impact they had on quality, reflecting the role of EYPs as 'leaders of practice'. Fewer measurable improvements were seen in the quality of the physical environment, care routines, health and safety procedures, facilities and training for staff, and communications with parents.

The positive benefits of EYPs related almost exclusively to children aged between 30 months and five years old; with little evidence of gains in the quality of provision for younger children (birth to 30 months). The study suggests this could be due to the low number of EYPs working in these rooms and recommends further research to establish how to raise the quality of provision for this younger age group.

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The government has announced its ongoing commitment to funding EYPS next year with the next intake in January 2011. There will be a planned review of EYPS standards in the autumn and alongside this an independent review of Early Years qualifications, to be headed by Professor Cathy Nutbrown, has been announced.

Principal investigator Sandra Mathers, from the Department of Education at the University of Oxford, said: *'This study provides clear evidence of the importance of having graduate level staff in leadership roles if we are to improve the overall quality of provision for under-fives. We hope that the weight of this evidence will be fully considered by the review of Early Years qualifications.'*

Study co-author Helen Ranns, from the National Centre for Social Research, said: *'This research highlights the important role of Local Authorities when it comes to safeguarding professional standards in our Early Year's settings. The work of local authorities' Early Years teams is crucial here, as they create opportunities for continued professional development and allow EYPs to make changes for the better. We hope that this support is continued for all professionals working with young children.'*

Judith Thompson, Assistant Director for Early Years at the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) which leads the EYPS programme, said: *'We welcome this seminal research highlighting the positive impact EYPs have on children's learning and development. We know that over 7,500 EYPs are already making a difference, everyday, throughout the country. This research reinforces the importance of investing in graduate leadership across the Early Years workforce and recognises the pivotal role EYPs play.'*

This latest study adds weight to a raft of recent reports which have highlighted the importance of early intervention, high quality early years education and having well-qualified staff working with young children: Frank Field MP Poverty Review – The Foundation Years; Graham Allen MP Early Intervention: The Next Steps; Dame Clare Tickell The Early Years: Foundations for life, health and learning.

For more information, please contact the University of Oxford Press Office on +44 (0)1865 280534 or email [press.office@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:press.office@admin.ox.ac.uk)

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## Notes to the Editors

\*'Evaluation of the Graduate Leader Fund' by Sandra Mathers et al is due to be published on the Department of Education website on 28 July 2011. It will be available at <http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/research>

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\*The National Evaluation of the Graduate Leader Fund (2007-2011) was commissioned by the former Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and carried out by a consortium of researchers from the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), the University of Oxford and the Institute of Education (University of London). The main aim was to assess the implementation of the Graduate Leader Fund and its impact on the quality of early years provision in the private, voluntary and independent sector.

\*The study was carried out through a series of methods:  
Ratings using ECERS- R (which assess the provision for children from 30 months to five years) and ECERS-E (which assess curricular provision for children aged three to five years) and ITERS-R (which assess provision for children from birth to 30 months).  
Qualitative case studies in 12 nurseries focusing on what improvements had been made and why. This included a survey with parents to assess their views on the quality and whether it had improved.

\*NatCen, Britain's largest independent social research organisation, aims to promote a better- informed society through high quality social research. [www.natcen.ac.uk](http://www.natcen.ac.uk)

\*Oxford University Department of Education has been making a major contribution to the field of education for over 100 years. It has a world class reputation for its research, teacher education and its Masters and doctoral programmes. [www.education.ox.ac.uk/](http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/)

The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) supports local areas to drive sector-led improvements so that millions of people and volunteers who work with children and young people across England are able to do the best job they can. [www.cwdcouncil.org.uk](http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk)