

# In their own words: EYPs speak out

## Aspect's EYP Survey 2009

### Summary

Aspect's EYP survey, which closed at the end of March, tells a very clear story.

Enthusiasm and recognition of the potential benefits of the EYP project in terms of standards and quality is more than balanced by discontent and concern over pay and conditions for all early years' staff including EYPs, and the ongoing lack of status accorded to early years work and early years workers.

The survey was open to all EYPs and anyone currently studying on a pathway towards EYPS – 70% of respondents had attained the status already. For EYPs the survey included questions on their experiences as an EYP as well as questions around their anticipated future and plans for further professional development. Candidates for EYPS were asked about the barriers they anticipated facing, as well as their experiences while undergoing their pathway.

The survey provided EYPs and student EYPs with the space to express their own views in their own words. The response was overwhelming with hundreds of comments and opinions submitted.

The opportunity to comment on pay was particularly popular, with many of the comments demonstrating growing concern over wage levels and the disparity across the board between early years and other sectors, as well as between EYPs and other professionals.

### Key findings included:

- 96% of all respondents to the survey believe EYPs should be paid – either directly or indirectly – by local or national government
- £8 - £9 per hour is the most common pay level among EYPs, only £1 more than among those working towards EYPS
- 88% of those who responded believe an agreed pay scale for EYPs to be either “Very Important” or “Important” while another 10% believe that it “Needs Tackling”
- 90% believe it is similarly important to have specific measures to ensure parity between QTS and EYPS
- 90% also believe parity between the PVI sector and Children’s Services is either very important or important.

Both EYPs and student EYPs demonstrated their recognition that pay, status, recognition and wider understanding all go hand-in-hand, with overwhelming concerns expressed about the general awareness of EYPS and what they do.

- 94% of EYPs and 98% of student EYPs stated that more publicity about EYPs and what EYPs do was either very important or important.

Answers to questions regarding job titles and duties brought out clearly the huge range of roles and responsibilities undertaken by EYPs, with over 60 different job titles reported by those responding to the survey. The duties described also covered an immense range from specialised roles in large organisations, to room leader positions, to owner/manager roles, to advisory roles, to family support workers in Children’s Centres. All types of settings were represented, with childminders and early years teachers among the respondents as well as employees from pre-schools, nurseries, Local Authorities, Children’s Centres and training providers.

Professional development was another key theme, with many highlighting the support and opportunities offered by their local networks. Studying for NPQICL or for Masters or Doctorates was a popular suggestion, with many also

identifying opportunities to develop within the EYP community taking on roles as assessors or lecturers. Again, however, concerns around money and the benefit of professional development were expressed. Several respondents anticipated they would have left the sector within 3-5 years, or have moved sideways into social work or teaching – with pay being the key reason.

Other issues were also highlighted in the survey. The position of childminders remains anomalous; concerns were expressed over the higher ratios for EYPs; while the disparity between those with QTS and EYPS extends to access to initiatives such as “key worker” housing, as well as access to future professional development opportunities.

# Survey Findings

## Pay and Pay Scales

The survey focused on exploring in depth issues that already been raised by members. Feedback had indicated that pay and conditions, along with status and recognition, were key concerns. Overwhelming responses demonstrated that indeed these are key issues - with concerns growing rather than reducing.

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Issues associated with pay begin with basic wage levels:

- "I think there has to be a national pay structure similar to that in place for teachers. Whether subsidised or not, if the structure was in place and publicised, parents would begin to understand the real cost of childcare." (Yorkshire EYP)
- "The workload has increased enormously in the past ten years especially with keeping up with Ofsted requirements, the EYFS, sharing information with parents, accreditation scheme, further training, SEF; but the pay has not increased in line with this." (South EYP)
- "The government want a graduate but are not prepared to pay for it." (South East EYP)

While the Graduate Leader Fund (GLF) has helped many EYPs to improve their pay in the short term, numerous issues were highlighted, including concerns about whether the money actually reached individuals and worries about long-term stability.

- “Top-up pay should be directly to the EYP & not the setting; to ensure its receipt” (South East EYP)
- “Extra support from the local authority to provide a slightly better salary is only for a very short term so many settings will not be able to keep their EYP in the long term. I only intend to stay because I am one of the owners.” (Yorkshire EYP)
- “Continued annual grants not to stop after 3 years - as our work doesn't stop in 2011!!” (South East EYP)

Many comments also contrasted the position EYPs are in with the position of teachers, particularly with respect to pay, but also wider conditions of service:

- “A national guideline put into place to bring salary pay scales in line with teachers and teaching assistants” (South East EYP)
- “I think the government should set a salary scale for Early Years Practitioners in accordance with their qualifications, just as they do for Teachers/Teaching assistants” (South East EYP)
- “EYPs must be paid directly by the government in line with teachers' pay scales. Otherwise the notion that EYPs are just 'cheap teachers' will prevail.” (Yorkshire EYP)
- “Paying early years professionals less than teachers sends a very clear message about its importance and the skills needed to do the job.” (South East student EYP)
- “If the qualification is deemed to be on a par with QTS, there needs to be pay parity and equal professional working conditions - I have had better conditions working as an office cleaner in terms of breaks, holidays, etc.” (EYP)
- “Housing: a teacher is a 'key worker' and can apply for key worker housing. An EYP can't.” (London EYP)

EYPs know the situation is complex however. Both employees and owners and managers recognise the very real strains on settings and families in paying wages for individuals.

- “As an owner/manager of a private setting, my greatest concern in raising wages is that it would

necessitate higher fees, which would exclude a high percentage of our parents. This would produce a client base which did not reflect the society which our children will be experiencing outside the setting” (London student EYP)

- “Salary top ups will have to continue to come from Government as childcare will not be affordable for parents if we charged what we deserve.” (South East EYP)
- “Support by the government [is needed to provide] equality of funding to PVI settings and schools taking 3 year olds into nursery classes. Our only source of income is from parents’ fees which we have to keep low and realistic in an inner city area. This when working on low ratios means we have only limited funds to be able to allocate to staff salaries. I wish it could be 3x as much but we would go bust.” (North West EYP)
- “Small playgroup settings have to manage primarily on the government funding that is available at present. (They only charge for children between 2 and 3.) Their hands are tied!” (Yorkshire EYP)

The costs entailed to settings in relation to the “free” entitlement also raised concerns:

- “The Government needs to recognise that well qualified and experienced early years practitioners are the greatest resource of any setting and provide funding to bring up the levels of pay. Too much money is being thrown about for resources and short term fixes without true thought and planning for sustainability and pay levels. The 15 hours early years free entitlement will impact on pay again and the message coming across from national and local government is cut staffing ratios!!” (South East EYP)

Status was also a concern for many, with the distinction between the position of EYPs and the position of teachers again being highlighted:

- “Teachers are given much credit for the work they do - we are not” (South EYP)
- “Very few people actually acknowledge how important early years care is. We need to be seen as quality workforce like teachers.” (South West EYP)
- “Local authorities need to be fully aware of the status. I am aware of EYFS advisors posts being advertised. QTS is stated as a requirement - EYP is not even mentioned. When people have enquired about the job they have been told that EYP is not acceptable.” (EYP)
- “Raise awareness: the government needs to send a clear message - that this is the status to have for leading practice within the EYFS and nothing else is acceptable.” (EYP)
- “More awareness: I have been told about big promotional campaigns planned by the CWDC.....where are they? I am active in Early Years and have not noticed anything! If an EYP has the same status as a QT, why is the pay not the same? We are specialised teachers and not a rung lower on the ladder and this is the opinion that is validated by the vast discrepancies in wages” (London EYP)

Reflecting their understanding and leadership role within the sector as a whole, many EYPs also highlighted the

need for higher pay for colleagues at all levels, and for work to align different types of setting in terms of their ability to pay proper wages to all staff:

- “The pay for the upper end of the tree needs to be given to the lower end of the tree as well.... All the money which is given to the children’s centres should be given to private settings too” (South EYP)
- “Because trainees are on such a low pay scale it makes it easier to pay the rest of the staff minimum wage. Each qualification should have a pay scale across the country.” (South West EYP)
- “There should be a defined pay scale for EYPs and there should be a parity between EYPs working in children's centres and PVI” (London student EYP)

The overall position on pay was expressed very simply and directly:

- “[the government is] pushing for higher levels of qualifications, but most nurseries still pay the majority of staff minimum wage.” (West Midlands EYP)
- “[the government must] recognise what we actually do and reflect it in the funding we receive for the children, we can not keep being expected to carry on providing free education for children on such low pay” (South West EYP)
- “The government need to address the issues immediately. The pay is poor!” (West Midlands EYP)

One EYP summed up her own feelings succinctly if sadly:

- “I feel disillusioned! I trained as an EYP full of motivation and excitement. I was then offered my 'dream' job but this did not go hand-in-hand with a 'dream' salary as there is no pay scale in place. This has disappointed me greatly.” (Yorkshire EYP)

## Campaigning Priorities

Building on previous work by Aspect's National Committee and discussions among existing members, the survey asked specifically for views on key areas previously raised by EYPs and student EYPs. The results are striking – and worrying:

<b>Very important &amp; Important</b>	<b>Needs tackling</b>	<b>Not important or not an issue</b>
An agreed payscale for EYPs		
<b>87.7</b>	9.9	2.5
Agreed conditions and terms of service for EYPs		
<b>84.8</b>	12.8	2.5
More clarity on the job description and role of EYPs		
<b>89.1</b>	8.4	2.5
More publicity about EYPs and what EYPs do		
<b>95.1</b>	3.4	1.5
Clearer professional development opportunities		
<b>88.1</b>	7.9	4
Parity between EYPs in Children's Centres and PVI settings		
<b>90.1</b>	8.9	1
Specific measures to ensure parity between QTS and EYPS		
<b>90.1</b>	7.4	2.5

While those working towards EYS expressed even stronger views on basic pay and agreed conditions of service, it was noticeable above all how consistent across all groups the results are, and how clearly EYPs believe change is necessary and action must be taken if the EYP project is to survive.

## Being an EYP: the voices of experience

The survey clearly shows that there are a huge range of roles taken on by EYPs, with over 60 different job titles provided by the EYPs who responded. Roles ranged from supervision and co-ordination to responsibilities for management, training and development of staff, being a keyworker, leading settings, supporting settings from an LA perspective, to roles that are mainly administrative. Many mentioned leadership of the EYFS – but often among a huge range of other duties.

Asked about the benefits of their status, EYPs are quick to highlight the benefits of attaining the status for themselves, their settings, their colleagues, and the children:

- “It encouraged people in my team to go for the status themselves” (North East EYP)
- “Confidence has increased personally. Greater professional recognition within the team and the workforce.” (West Midlands EYP)
- “I was made a nursery Manager in 7 months.” (London EYP)
- “I was promoted within a year of gaining it.” (Yorkshire EYP)
- “[the best thing has been] working with the children and being part of helping them to be happy and motivated learners” (South EYP)
- ... “seeing the children and team move on together” (South West EYP)
- “I am proud to be an EYP and feel as if I have achieved a great deal and have a lot to offer others” (North East EYP)

Some also mentioned how their skills were recognised by colleagues:

- “I am now asked for my opinion/advice more openly than before by both my manager and peers” (Yorkshire EYP)
- “Leading in-house training and sharing my

knowledge and understanding have led to colleagues coming to me for advice, and staff working towards further qualifications ask for help and support with assignments. Colleagues also saw how hard I worked to achieve EYPS! Having a day off-ratio dedicated to my role as an EYP has been a key factor in promoting this.” (South West EYP)

- “The Head likes to boast that the school has an EYPS!” (South East EYP)
- “Being an EYP has elevated my role from 'just a childminder'.” (South West EYP)

However, in contrast many identified that without wider recognition of the status demonstrating and delivering the benefits can be impossible:

- “Gaining EYPS has made me a confident practitioner but unfortunately there is still a long way to go in convincing others particularly Heads of schools” (South East EYP)
- “As a private business it makes no difference to the prospective parents that come around. It is also 'snuffed' at that it is equivalent to the QTS status” (South EYP)
- “Head teacher cannot see the relevance of it” (South East EYP)
- “Nothing changed in the role, but I changed!” (South West EYP)
- “I have been unable to change my job due to lack of other suitable positions advertised within the county” (South East EYP)
- “No, the requirements of my current position are QTS and that is all my head wants - no real understanding of EYPS although has improved my practice as far as I am concerned” (North East EYP)

Unfortunately, rather too many stated that for them as individuals their status as an EYP had actually made things worse:

- “Definitely made previous staff I worked with very wary!!” (South West EYP)
- “[gaining the status has had an impact] in a

detrimental way. I was seen as a threat and when the post I was acting up to was advertised I was informed EYPS was not suitable an NVQ3 was far more important.” (South West EYP)

- “Personally I feel it has made my status worse” (East Midlands EYP)
- “I have in fact become over qualified and there are no relevant jobs in my area.” (EYP)
- “I left my full time position in a nursery where I was a nursery nurse as I was not offered any extra money, consulted by the manager on any changes or asked for my opinion on any matters within the nursery. I went for a better paid job which involved more than just working with children.” (South East EYP)

Inevitably, too, the question of pay was again brought up by many – highlighting the ongoing discrepancy between EYP pay and the pay of comparable professionals, as well as issues with the Graduate Leader Fund:

- “More responsibility and a pay rise (but still not as much as a qualified teacher who does exactly the same job with the same responsibilities!!!!)” (South East EYP)
- “no changes to role or pay” (East Midlands EYP)
- “Had the job before I achieved EYPS and have now been told that I cannot access the EYP premium as I don’t have the right job role.” (South West EYP)
- “The LA service I worked for had clear strata - Support worker or QTS.” (EYP)

## Future plans & professional development

Questioned about plans and expectations for 3-5 years hence, both EYPs and students demonstrated an ongoing commitment to the sector, but expectations regarding future roles varied considerably.

While some were hoping to stay within their current setting, perhaps moving into a more senior role, and in some cases saw EYPS as an additional element building on an extensive range of experience and qualifications, others viewed the attainment of EYPS as a stepping stone to advisory work:

- “Hopefully remaining within my own setting and seeing it move from strength to strength.” (North East EYP)
- “Exciting times ahead, I am hopeful for the future: would like to be leading practice and running a nursery” (South East EYP)
- “Hopefully still at work, supporting and leading my setting forward.” (South East EYP)
- “Either working in my current job (hopefully supporting more than one setting by this time) or working in some sort of early years advisory capacity.” (South student EYP)
- “Yes [being an EYP], if I could be employed as an Early Years Consultant. At the moment these jobs are for QTs and have the financial security that brings with it. Hopefully the same will apply to EYPS by then.” (East Midlands EYP)

Inevitably the issues already discussed have led to more ambivalence for some – pride in the recognition of their skills and expertise being undermined by their fears around pay and the status of early years more generally. Answers to the question as to whether they saw themselves being an EYP into the medium future included:

- “I hope so, but the money is always an issue.” (East Midlands EYP)
- “Yes, if conditions improve; higher wages needed”

(North West EYP)

- “Not exactly sure where this will lead. It depends on the status being fully accepted I suppose.” (North West student EYP)
- “I have applied for other positions or am also considering returning to do PGCE” (South East EYP)
- “I hope so; it's the perfect job for me. I'd like to carry on with similar responsibilities, but I would like to be paid a reasonable salary for it. I would like to work in a Children's Centre.” (South West EYP)

Despite the commitment already made in undertaking EYPS the survey showed that some are already finding it hard to envisage a future:

- “Probably office work of some description. I would love to continue in EY, but I don't think the hours and working conditions will allow me to.” (EYP)
- “no job description no salary scale no motivation” (East Midlands EYP)

EYPs also highlighted the lack of any clear link between professional development and recognition or reward:

- “Have a set payscale for professional courses and development rather than just a 'well done but carry on doing what you've been doing' attitude” (EYP)
- ““hopefully becoming more of a leader and no longer working at the same level as a level 3 qualified member of staff” (South East EYP)

The attraction of teaching and social work were particularly prominent, with several EYPs commenting that they anticipated moving within the next three to five years:

- “I aim to be a qualified teacher in that time” (London EYP)
- “might switch into social work as I would get more money, sick pay and pension (don't get pension or sick pay as a manager!) even if I was an unqualified social worker – EYPS does not give me job security” (South East EYP)
- “may have to go back to teaching in order to increase my salary.” (West Midlands EYP)

- “My career prospects are to manage a Children's Centre, although I would like to manage our nursery but because I haven't gained QTS status I am unable to fulfil this ambition” (London EYP)
- “become a social worker. (better pay)” (North East student EYP)
- “Teaching in a foundation stage class. It disappoints me that to work with 3-5's in a maintained nursery class I need to go on and do QTS, when EYP should be equal. I have colleagues working in the maintained sector as QTS who have better pay and conditions for doing the same role as I do in a private day nursery where the pay and conditions and no future!” (South EYP)
- “Full time advisory teacher” (East Midlands EYP)
- “I would if the money was better, I am getting the grant for being an EYP but that stops after 2 years so I'll be back on minimum wage! I think I'll go into teaching” (South West EYP)
- “At present I am considering going onto teacher training for the 3-7 year age group, as this will give me a clear career structure, better pay and conditions and it is well supported by the government.” (South EYP)

Despite these concerns, and the mixed feelings about the continuing lack of recognition for professional development and qualifications, it was clear that most EYPs, and indeed those working towards EYPS, already had a wide range of plans for their future professional development: 70% of student EYPs already had plans for their future professional development, ranging from mentoring future EYPs, particular professional disciplines such as Montessori accreditation, to the NPQICL or a Masters (with the last being a particularly popular option)

Unsurprisingly even more of those already accredited as EYPs (76%) had plans or ideas regarding their ongoing professional development, ranging unsurprisingly from short-term consolidation to longer-term thoughts regarding career moves. The diversity of plans can be seen with just a few quotations:

- “I am interested in educational psychology I would like to take a role that is geared more towards using

- the EYPS (advisory, training staff) rather than day care management.” (South East EYP)
- “Attend EYP forum group meetings. Attend local training on CAF.” (EYP)
  - “Completing my MA and leading a nursery / children’s centre” (South EYP)
  - “I have recently trained as an assessor/mentor and relish the opportunity to mentor prospective EYP candidates as I feel this is crucial to their understanding of their role” (North East EYP)
  - “Am doing the NPQICL at the moment” (Yorkshire EYP)
  - “Through the EYP Network I am attending an Advanced Forest School Leaders Course.” (West Midlands EYP)
  - “I am training as a SENCO” (South West EYP)
  - “I'd like to do my doctorate” (Yorkshire EYP)
  - “I want to get someone to fund me an MA and to research into how this is working in detail for all practitioners not just childminders - in my research so far I am really interested to see how information is a valuable commodity and how it gets stuck and so those in direct contact with children don't have the information to be as good as they could be because of bureaucracy etc” (Yorkshire EYP)

Others were less certain as to their plans for future development:

- “Possibly, is the honest answer [to whether I see myself as an EYP in the future]. I am pleased to see increasing numbers of job advertisements stating that an EYP would be preferred for the role, but dismayed at the salaries offered, which do not acknowledge the experience, training and commitment in achieving EYPS. I am considering further training to teach students or maybe a qualification to become a manager, but I love my work and would miss working with the children and their families.” (South West EYP)
- “will have to do QTS to be truly recognised as early years expert” (East Midlands EYP)
- “Currently looking for a new job and as there are none in my area looking for my level of qualifications

I may be moving out of Early Years, reluctantly.”  
(South East EYP)

- “Until the next level of CPD (Masters) is funded as it is for qualified teachers I will not be going any further” (South East EYP)

## EYPS candidates: views from a student perspective

As mentioned above, in general the issues highlighted by students were very similar to those raised by colleagues who have already attained EYPS, with similar views expressed both about the positive platform provided by the role to act as an agent of change, and about the issues with pay, status and recognition.

In general, those who were working felt that their employers were supportive, with 56% agreeing that they felt supported by their employer.

- “[My manager] is so happy about the ideas and changes I bring in the setting” (South West student EYP)
- “I have one full day off a week to study. I also do my placement in my setting. My manager is my mentor and I can go to her with everything re EYPS. She was the one who encouraged me to apply for EYPS training.” (South student EYP)

A large contingent explained that they were also the employer in their setting; however 20% of student EYPs who were also working did not feel supported by their employer:

- “Manager has said she does not recognise it as a qualification (she is right as it is a 'status') and would not give someone a job with it.” (South East student EYP)
- “[I am supported] only to the extent that the setting get money for me doing this course” (South West student EYP)

Despite such issues student EYPs very clearly saw their future roles as agents of change, leading practice and providing the best possible pedagogy for children in line with the EYFS, as shown when they described their ambitions:

- “To lead and support others and to put into practice

- what I have learnt; to help others to know how these children can attain their potential.” (London student EYP)
- “I am interested in exploring the role of curriculum lead in a Children's Centre” (West Midlands student EYP)
  - “To improve the lives of young children by improving practice through collaboration and change.” (North East student EYP)
  - “Supporting colleagues in implementing EYFS and helping to improve practice on day to day basis. I would also become a link between parents and practitioners. My ambition for the future would be becoming a deputy manager.” (South student EYP)

Interestingly, while candidates expected to face a range of issues in carrying out their leadership role, the main concerns highlighted were fundamentally hurdles of perception and recognition, although (perhaps inevitably) pay was also again mentioned:

- “I believe issues will be based around others not having sufficient understanding of the role and maybe seeing it as a threat. This may be especially true for non-qualified but very experienced staff members who demonstrate excellent practice themselves.” (London student EYP)
- “Gaining appropriate recognition by others, such as Ofsted or Early Years Consultants/Teachers” (South West student EYP)
- “Recognition by local early years department as I am a childminder” (South West student EYP)
- “If I stay in the job I have now I will find it hard to carry out a leadership role as the present leader does not support me as I am better qualified than her” (West Midlands student EYP)
- “The wages: if I can get employment in a different sector I may be tempted to move from working with children” (North East student EYP)
- “status, recognition and pay, time” (North East student EYP)

## Current debates and concerns

### How can childminders be supported within the EYP framework?

It was clear right from the start that the EYPS project was established to raise skills, qualifications and ultimately quality throughout the whole early years sector. However, the implementation has so far seen childminders too often feeling as if they are the uninvited guests.

In general many EYPs praised the support from their Local Authorities, and it is clear that the networks are a source of considerable support to many. However with respect to childminders the situation was far less clear:

- “Other childminders ask for advice and help - local Early Years has made it clear that as a childminder they don't support my wish to be EYPS; [my] Council have refused me access to Graduate Leader Fund as a childminder - they won't even contribute to travel costs for prep days or reviews” (South West student EYP)
- “How will Childminders be recognised financially for EYP status? Quite possibly, childminders who gain EYP status will give up Childminding to work in an establishment. Therefore the quality of Childminding will not be as high as other early years settings.” (West Midlands EYP)
- “I will probably still be doing the same unless they have mobile EYPs that are responsive to need; it would have been nice to have had a career path and support once I had finished - all others had routes to go through - I was recommended to do this and know I was a guinea pig but what has changed for childminders?” (North East EYP)

### Ratios, and the role of EYPs

One of the debates raised in various meetings and conferences ever since the first EYPs attained the status has been the issue of ratios, and this was highlighted

again in the survey. Comments reflected both concerns about the quality of provision (let alone the ability to lead practice more generally when responsible for more children), and worries about the “unintended consequences”:

- “Having the status does not give someone more arms to cuddle a child or eyes in the back of their heads!!!!” (Yorkshire EYP)
- “I've heard of settings recruiting an EYP so they can operate with less staff making existing staff redundant” (Yorkshire EYP)

Linked to the question of ratios, is also the question of how EYPs are perceived. At its most fundamental level the EYPS programme was introduced to ensure highly skilled expertise and leadership throughout the range from birth to five. This is not necessarily reflected in the publicity however:

- “I am concerned that EYPs are going to be perceived by some settings as just working with 3 - 5s as most adverts I have seen (nationally) are mentioning this. We need to make people aware that EYPs are to work with all children from birth - that is part of the point.” (North East EYP)

### **Is an EYP a teacher?**

Throughout the survey, as already mentioned, respondents frequently drew comparisons between the position of those with EYPS and those with QTS; and at the fundamental level, the demand that EYPs be given equivalent recognition, career paths, pay and status (in line with the expectations many were given when they embarked upon their EYPS path) is clearly common to all.

However, views are mixed as to how EYPs themselves feel their status should be viewed from a more pedagogical perspective. The focus on curriculum leadership leads some to see the role of an EYP as effectively a teacher in early years with specialist knowledge and skills:

- “EYPS needs to be recognised as teacher status

within the Early Years” (London EYP)

On the other hand, teachers’ focus on education led others to disassociate themselves from such a description:

- “We are not trying to be teachers and in my opinion it would be detrimental to the care of a young child if we tried to be so!” (Yorkshire EYP)

While partly a question of linguistics and interpretations, this debate interestingly also demonstrates the wider impact of the reflective and self-evaluative approach expected for meeting the 39 standards is also driving wider reflection and debate.

## Conclusion

Aspect's EYP survey has given EYPs the chance to speak for themselves; and the messages come through loud and clear.

Voices from every type of setting, every career stage, and every part of the country, have taken their chance to be heard. Their words speak of pride and commitment – to their status, to their colleagues, to early years, and of course to the children in their care. However, their words also speak of disillusion and of disappointment – with real recognition still seemingly beyond reach, career paths and roles still unclear, and pay still regarded as “the elephant in the room”.

As demonstrated in the recent Aspect report “Vulnerable and in need of support: the EYP project spring 2009”, without firm and immediate action the whole EYP project is jeopardy. EYPs are calling for change throughout early years, for recognition and professional respect, and for a fair future for themselves and their colleagues.

The message could not be clearer. Now it is the turn of the government and its agencies to lead the way, alongside employers, local authorities, and all the other bodies with influence in early years, not only to listen and to learn, but to act. Research has shown the absolute importance of high quality practice in early years. EYPs have shown they are committed to their role leading the continuous development of high quality care and education; now it is the turn of the government to match and support that commitment with a national pay framework, proper recognition, and career paths throughout early years.

EYPs are professional workers. They deserve professional respect and reward.

**Helen Willis**

# April 2009