

England

# Early Years Employer Toolkit

#firstfiveyearscount



National Day Nurseries Association

Read more about early  
years education and why  
#firstfiveyearscount

[ndna.org.uk/firstfiveyearscount](https://ndna.org.uk/firstfiveyearscount)

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# 1. Introduction

Early years businesses and their workforce play an integral role in educating the next generation throughout their earliest years. These businesses not only support the local and national economy by providing a large number of jobs in early years education and care, they also provide the education and care that parents and families need to be able to obtain and stay in employment.

There are currently approximately **236,000** early years staff employed across **21,300** group based providers in England, with the total number of staff employed in the early years sector in the UK at **257,758**.

Based on Department for Education (DfE) data on staff turnover, we estimate there are:

- **43,819** practitioners changing jobs in early years
- **9,590** vacancies, based on NDNA data from our 2019 workforce survey, which found that **7.6%** of role's within the sector were vacant at that time
- Department for Education findings showing the level of turnover has increased by **2%** since 2018.

The government has pledged to provide 15 hour funded places for all three and four year olds, 30 hours for working families (that meet the eligibility criteria) and 15 hours for two year olds in the most deprived communities. This has created thousands of job vacancies and a need to constantly recruit qualified staff to be compliant with legislation surrounding adult:child ratios.

Findings within the *DfE Survey of Childcare and Early Years Providers April 2022* cited that one of the main concerns setting managers spoke of was the limited number of qualified and experienced candidates in the sector.

# 2. Why the First Five Years Count

Nurseries aren't just childcare. They educate children from 0-5 and make a difference that lasts a lifetime.

Research tells us that high quality nurseries can put children three months ahead by the time they start school. We're here to shout loud and proud about the incredible difference that nurseries and the early years workforce make and give thanks to those who give so much to the futures of children.

The NDNA **#firstfiveyearscount** campaign has been launched to celebrate amazing work of the early years sector. In the first five years of a child's life, their experience and the relationships they build with others stimulate each child's development. Children's brains develop connections faster in the first five years than at any other time in their lives. This is the time when the foundations for learning, health and behaviour throughout life are formulated.

NDNA's First Five Years Count campaign strives to:

- Increase understanding of the importance of early childhood education
- Better the perception of the early years workforce as educators of young children 0-5
- Address the recruitment and retention crisis
- Boost the positive feedback the workforce receives about their work
- Support the uptake of early years places within daycare settings.



# 3. Why do we need you?

Quite simply, from birth to the age of five, the early years workforce influence and directly impact the most critical phase in a child's development; building their foundations for the future and helping them to adopt a love of lifelong learning, which has a positively impacts their future happening improving their life chances.

For many years, the sector has reported staffing shortages. However, as a result of the pandemic, staff shortages are now at a critical point, meaning some parents and carers are unable to access places so they can find and remain in employment themselves.

In a recent survey carried out by Pregnant Then Screwed in July 2020, 51% mothers cited that they do not have access to sufficient childcare <https://bit.ly/3uw1Ddr> We know that there is demand for places we need to attract the right people to join the sector as a profession.

The NDNA **#firstfiveyearscount** campaign aims to attract people from a range of ages and backgrounds to the sector, encouraging them to consider working with children aged zero to five and letting them know how to apply. Our skilled early years workforce provides curriculum play based learning opportunities, which help our youngest children flourish into successful and thriving adults. **As campaign partners, you play a vital role in helping babies and young children to get the right people into early years so that the futures of our youngest generation aren't compromised.**

As part of the **#firstfiveyearscount** campaign, we have developed a career progression recruitment toolkit. Using this toolkit we can collectively spread the word that working in early years is a rewarding, flexible and progressive career for a diverse range of individuals. Although it is possible to work in a nursery without a qualification, employers strive to continually develop their workforce and our toolkit can support with this.

Within this toolkit and on our website (<https://ndna.org.uk/firstfiveyearscount/>), NDNA has equipped you with a range of useful information and resources to help maximise recruitment and support you in finding the right candidates for early years settings to thrive.

# 4. Encouraging people into the early years sector

We strongly believe that the early years workforce is not given the recognition it deserves, as professional educators playing a vital role in educating children from birth to five. As campaign partners, you can help to spread the word and improve the perception of the early years workforce as educators of young children aged zero to five, therefore attracting more people to begin, or return to, a career within the sector.

Here's how:

## 4.1 Planning a local recruitment campaign

- Think about your community and the audience you want to target
- What about factors such as age, gender and ethnicity within your community – does this affect where you might reach potential candidates?
- Are they likely to be at the gym, swimming pool, bingo hall or library?
- Think about your messaging and what is most important to your target group so they are motivated to apply
- As many early years settings already know, most early years staff are recruited from the local community so consider local careers fairs, open days and notices in public places.

Within your planning, you may wish to consider people that want to change careers later in life. Instead of winding down towards retirement, more people than ever are looking to change career direction and embark upon a new challenge that helps them to pay their bills.

According to the Department of Work and Pensions, employment rates for the working-age 50 to 64 grew from 57.2% in 1995 to 71.2% in 2021. While the recent pandemic has made the job market more competitive, there are still lots of opportunities to promote early years to people at different stages in their career.

People over 50 are an attractive option for employers for a number of reasons. They possess lots of useful experience, have a strong work ethic, and are organised, efficient, and confident. They also tend to remain in their jobs for longer than younger employees, and as a result, this will provide continuity for your children.







## 4.2 Use your website

If you have a website, you can expose more people to the opportunity of working in early years by sharing links to the campaign from your website recruitment and parent pages by:

- Linking information about the #firstfiveyearscount campaign on your home page
- Including the campaign supporter logo on a relevant page, or in the footer of your website
- Sharing the campaign on your latest news pages and provide links to social media channels.

Your website is a tool that links with the outside world, use this to:

- Tell prospective candidates about why they should work for you and the benefits you provide as an employer
- Post positive testimonies from your staff team about why they enjoy working with children and working in your setting
- Signpost back from social media posts to encourage individuals to complete applications
- Have an online application that is easy for individuals to complete and return to you.

Why not encourage others to find out more about a career in early years by sharing the link to our early years workforce quiz on your website?

You can access the early years workforce quiz here: <https://bit.ly/3P9jMHp>

## 4.3 Use every available communications channel

There is a vast range of ways to promote recruitment to a local target audience or those further afield.

### 4.3.1 Social media

Social media is an incredibly powerful tool, with approximately 57.2 million active users across the UK as of February 2022, with Facebook being the most popular social media channel amongst regular users.

#### Facebook

You can promote job roles on Facebook in a number of ways:

- Posting available roles on your settings Facebook page
- Promoting roles in Facebook groups specifically purposed to promote available roles in the local area
- Specific groups that specialise in early years recruitment
- Paid Facebook adverts that reach a bigger audience than a standard organic post on your page.

#### LinkedIn

As effective as Facebook is, due to its popularity, it's important to utilise every social media channel that is available. LinkedIn is a specialist networking platform that is becoming increasingly popular for early years professionals, with many nursery settings creating LinkedIn accounts to promote their available roles and the activities of their setting on the platform.

LinkedIn jobs is a component of the platform that allows a business to promote its available roles. Using hashtags can help promote any post on LinkedIn to the users that follow a particular hashtag or that type the hashtag into the platform's search feature. Using the **#firstfiveyearscount** hashtag accompanied by other key sector hashtags like **#nurseries**, **#education** or **#childcare** will notify LinkedIn users that follow the hashtag that the post is specific to the early years sector.

You can cast the net further by including recruitment and area specific hashtags, like **#recruitment**, **#earlyyearsjobs**, **#jobsinearlyyears**, **#nurseryjobs**, etc. Finally, LinkedIn has introduced features to let your network know that you are actively recruiting on your profile. You have the option to add a filter to your profile photo including the hashtag **#hiring**.

#### Twitter

Other social media platforms like Twitter also use hashtags to help broaden your social media post and allow users to promote your available job roles.



## Insight

When promoting recruitment on your social media channels, make sure that you use every communication channel that's available to you. This will help you to raise awareness and maximise the number of people you can reach to let them know that you are recruiting. Make posts visual with graphics or videos to make your content more engaging. Use hashtags on your digital platforms to help your posts reach a wider audience. Ask staff within your setting if they would like to produce a short (less than one minute) video telling others what is great about working for you.

To support your recruitment posts on social media, you can download the **#firstfiveyearscount** social media toolkit from the NDNA website - <https://ndna.org.uk/firstfiveyearscount/>

### 4.3.2 Newsletters

Local newsletters are a useful tool when it comes to recruiting people into new roles. Many locations have local newsletters and most have early years specific online newsletters that are available on a monthly basis and are generally free to sign up for in most cases.

Each newsletter will have contact telephone numbers or email addresses for their readers to submit content. Promoting recruitment opportunities within your setting in the local newsletter is either a free, or in some cases low cost, way of advertising your vacancies. Readers of the newsletter may know of or recommend a colleague or friend for the role.

If your setting has its own newsletter, you can post the information on an online platform or display this in a public setting to promote roles within the setting. You can encourage your newsletter distribution list to recommend anyone they may know that is suitable for any available roles or even ask them to share your newsletter. Within this, you can really market yourself as a local employer of choice. You can signpost people to your newsletter using your website or social media channels. There may be a local job board, shop or place of interest willing to pin up a hard copy of your newsletter to promote the content to a wider audience.



### 4.3.3 Emails

Emails are a way of tailoring recruitment related information quickly and effectively to a target audience.

Your setting may use email marketing software to publish emails to an email subscriber list where you could promote the available roles you have. Using email marketing platforms comes at a cost, but allows you to track the effectiveness of your emails by knowing how many people open your emails and click on the information.

Alternatively, you can create and send emails promoting roles from your setting or personal email address. Sending recruitment related emails to other people you know in the sector may lead to a role recommendation. You could also send emails out to universities or college to promote available roles to graduates or colleges students. If you are having open days or recruitment events promote them to students so they can come along and find out more about a profession in early years. This will more than likely come at a small cost but could open up engaging conversations with the local university or colleges to promote your setting and the available roles you have.

To support your recruitment emails, you can download the **#firstfiveyearscount** email toolkit from the NDNA website - <https://ndna.org.uk/firstfiveyearscount/>

### 4.3.4 Flyers

Flyers and promotional leaflets are a great way to help promote your setting and available roles you have. Flyers to promote roles can be created quickly on free software like Canva, allowing you to create graphic design level quality flyers free of charge. It is important with flyers to ensure the quality of the final print is high so that your job advert doesn't look cheap and it maximises the potential impact of the flyer. You could also get a flyer designed by a professional graphic designer, but their time will come at a cost and will depend on availability.

Flyers can be sent out to recruiters, job fairs, universities and other platforms in both print and digital form to promote recruitment opportunities, open days or recruitment events you may be holding. If you decide to print the flyers either yourself or professionally at a cost, you can ask the relevant people for permission to pin the flyers up in local shops and supermarket notice boards, and provide them to the local job centre, colleges or universities.

You can also post the flyers in prominent places at your nursery setting, for example on notice boards or in the window of your setting. Parents or visitors that come to your setting will see the flyer and may know someone suitable for the role that they can recommend, or show an interest in the vacancy themselves.

## 4.3.5 Intranets

Intranets are generally popular for informing people with access to the latest setting or sector updates, but can also be used effectively to promote and encourage recruitment opportunities. Ensure that if you use or have access to an intranet you identify a single person who has ownership of updating the intranet, to make sure that all vacancies are communicated on this channel.

## 4.3.6 Referral schemes

Referral schemes are extremely effective in recruiting people to available roles you have at your setting. Incentivised referral schemes like refer a friend or family member will see the staff at your setting rewarded for helping fill an available job opportunity by recommending a suitable candidate for the role.

When considering an incentivised scheme, make sure staff at your setting are aware of the scheme and the benefits they will receive for recommending a suitable candidate for an available role. You can communicate this at staff meetings, on notice boards within the setting or on the company intranet. Many referral schemes work on the basis that the individual being referred passes their probationary period before the benefit is passed on to the member of staff making the referral.



## 4.4 Local PR

Local media and press is a great way to reach those who aren't already aware of who you are. Using their contacts you can create further reach about recruitment to an early years setting.

Think about a newsworthy story such as a special event you are holding at the setting for children. Write about this, potentially involving your early years staff team who can highlight the positives of working with children. Get in touch with local newspapers and local television networks inviting them to come along to capture your story.

### Insight

#### First Five Years Count campaign – what to put in your press release

One of the best ways of raising awareness of what great work you are doing in your nursery is by writing up a press release or notice for your local press and media.

This alerts the local media to what you are doing, gives them some information about what to put in their article and generally piques their interest. They may wish to know more from you or even send a photographer. Or they may just use the information you have put together to form their feature.

Here's what to think about when putting together a press release:

#### Headline

- Keep it as short and simple as you can while also grabbing their attention
- Try to keep it to one line and don't try to slot in all your news
- Feel free to include the odd pun or piece of wordplay but try to avoid too many clichés.

#### Intro and first two paragraphs

- Again keep your intro short but you can introduce a bit more detail – try to include the name of your nursery here
- Keep it to just one sentence for your intro paragraph or a couple of short sentences
- Follow it up with two more short paragraphs into which you can drip feed your main news.

#### Comment(s)

- News articles and features really come alive with comments from key people involved so if you can include a comment or two, that will help the journalist
- Think about who is best to give a comment – manager/owner? Parent? Child?
- Think about speech punctuation which can be tricky
- Try to keep your comments snappy and to the point but feel free to use superlatives or emotional language
- If you are using comments from a parent, pick out any complimentary phrases and ensure you have permission to use these.

### Any other info

- If you have other detail, leave it until after at least the first comment
- If there's a lot of data or information, could you include it as bullet points, a top ten list, etc?

### Important additional info

- Always include a contact name and contact details - who should they speak with for further information or to arrange a visit? Include a telephone number and email address ideally
- Are you holding a photo opportunity? Or is it an open day or event you wish to invite them to? Include date, time and address – ask them to confirm if they expect to attend
- Add any caption information if you are including your own photos or images for journalists to use – if you aren't sending a photo, could you send them your nursery logo? Articles are much more likely to be published if they include an image
- You may wish to put in a Notes to Editors section at the end which could include background information about the nursery – for example, how long the nursery has been running, how many children are within your setting, how many staff you employ, etc. This is entirely a matter for you to decide
- Don't forget to include a date at the top and write the words Press Release/ Press Notice/Press Photocall at the top of your release.

## 4.5 Ask staff to spread the word

Your existing early years staff team can be the best advocates for recruiting into the early years sector so it's important to involve them where possible.

- Early years staff can share the website and quiz links on their social media channels
- Consider implementing referral schemes where existing staff are rewarded for helping to secure a new member of staff through promotion and word of mouth
- Ask existing employees to share the **#firstfiveyearscount** campaign graphics and in their own words say why they are supporting the campaign, what they enjoy most about educating the youngest generation and why they enjoy working for you as their employer.

### Insight

Referrals and recommendations are key drivers for recruitment and higher retention rates. Staff recommendations are one of the most influential and powerful recruitment methods in the early years sector.



## 4.6 Events

Direct contact with employers is one of the best methods of encouraging candidates to apply for jobs. Research shows that this can more than double the candidates' likelihood to apply. Participating in, or hosting your own events is a great way to let potential candidates know about you as an employer, sell the reasons why you are a great local employer, get to know more about progression opportunities and training, and for you to be able to directly answer any questions they may have.

### 4.6.1 Encourage taster sessions and open days

Run a short session in an early years setting, asking staff to support this by talking about their experience of working in early years and their career journey. Invite the general public so they can see what a nursery looks like, what a role within early years looks like and have the opportunity to ask questions directly to your existing staff team.

If possible, early years settings could offer a taster session so interested candidates can really understand what it is like to work in early years before they apply. This would also help candidates to understand how our youngest children are educated, the importance of the profession and bust existing myths.

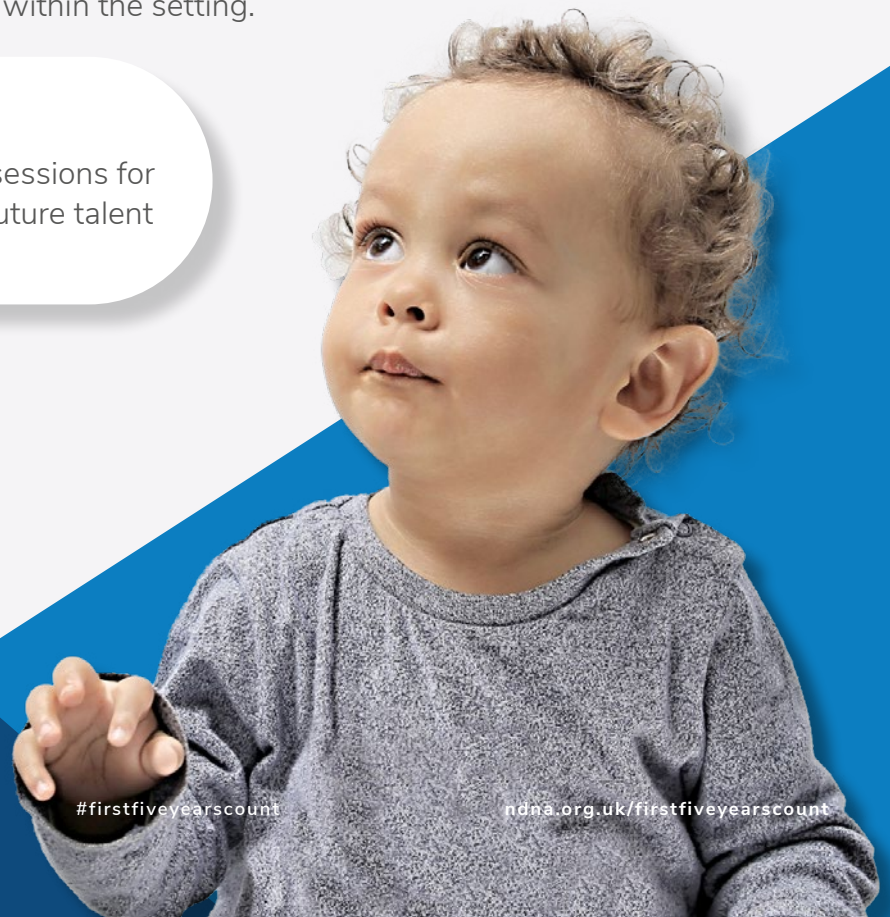
At taster sessions and open days, encourage potential candidates to take the **#firstfiveyearscount** quiz as this will also help them to understand how their existing passions and skillsets are transferrable to working with young children. On completion of the quiz, provide them with an opportunity to ask questions.

Whilst candidates are in the setting, explore the benefits package they would receive working for you. If you think the candidate is a good fit for the setting, have application forms at hand and give candidates the option of completing and submitting them whilst they are there.

Consider holding taster sessions and open days for specific groups, e.g. men. This might encourage more males to apply for roles within the setting.

### Insight

Take time to offer open days and taster sessions for school age children - they could be the future talent pipeline.





## 4.6.2 Recruitment fairs and employment events

Advertise attendance at recruitment fairs and employment events, sharing these widely through all communication channels. Ask your team to share these too.

If members of your early years team are able to attend with you, they can talk about their rewarding and positive experiences working in the early years sector.

## 4.6.3 Visit local colleges and schools

Appoint ambassadors from an early years setting to get involved in raising awareness of a career in early years if you have the capacity within your nursery setting.

Encourage and support ambassadors to speak to students about their career and raise awareness of working in a nursery. Many of those in learning may not have already considered early years as a career. Ask your ambassador to tell students what inspired them to work with children and the educational route they took to get there.

### Insight

Did you know that people are twice as likely to complete an application if they have spoken directly to an employer?

Interaction with employers and referrals from friends and family are hugely influential in securing new staff.

## 4.6.4 Consider volunteers and recruiting career changers

Why not provide open events specifically for volunteers? Volunteering provides individuals with an enhanced sense of purpose and new skills. It is also an opportunity for the volunteer, especially if they are a career changer, to experience working in a nursery. If they enjoy the work it can also provide a good opportunity to recruit them should they wish to become permanent, transitioning them into a new job with skills and experiences.

Retirement looks much different today than it did a couple of decades ago. Many people retire sooner but are not looking to spend their retirement years watching the world go by, and some might actually find the idea of retiring and not having something to do tedious. They may wish to volunteer or work less hours in a different occupation. Just like most employees, mature workers are seeking purpose and meaning and these needs don't change because of their age.

A volunteer may come from a number of backgrounds, e.g. career changers or early retirees. Recruitment strategies should be reconsidered so career shifters can be targeted. Consider how roles are advertised to broaden the target audience, e.g. someone who wants to switch from marketing to early education and might not have a qualification or experience, but that doesn't mean they can't be successful and progress in the role. They might have transferrable skills from other work experiences, other college majors or certification courses. A candidate with a strong work ethic and the necessary soft skills could quickly outperform someone with years of experience.

### Insight

Did you know that 16 to 18 year old mandatory education also includes an option for individuals to spend 20 hours or more a week working or volunteering while also doing part-time education or training? 16 to 18 year olds have an option of volunteering to help them to make informed career choices.

Only those aged 17 or over may be included in ratios if they are suitable, as stated in paragraphs 3.9 to 3.11 (and staff under 17 should be supervised at all times). Suitable students on long term placements and volunteers (aged 17 or over) and those working as apprentices in early education (aged 16 or over) may be included in the ratios if the provider is satisfied that they are competent and responsible.

# 5. Attracting and talent through government funded programmes

## 5.1 Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are investments that could effectively integrate new employees into early years settings. This is an opportunity to grow a team and shape them to deliver the quality of service strived for. Although this is a longer term investment, apprenticeships are often more cost-effective and candidates have the potential to carry out roles and responsibilities to the same standard as other early years professionals, once qualified.

Did you know that you can create your own advertisement for an apprentice on the government apprenticeship website? Follow the link for more information on how you can do this  
<https://bit.ly/3hmq5uU>

## 5.2 Accelerated apprenticeships

This route is for practitioners who already have some prior knowledge or skills before starting an apprenticeship, e.g. a member of the team you employ already has a level 2 qualification and wishes to progress to level 3. Within this route, the learner will complete an assessment of prior learning and where the individual already has prior knowledge or skills, this could be removed from their training plan within the apprenticeship. Where an apprenticeship is reduced in duration, by at least three months or more, this becomes an accelerated apprenticeship.

If you are interested in this route, your first step will be to speak to your college or training provider.

Use the following links for more information about accelerated apprenticeships and initial assessment guides for employers and apprentices.

An overview of accelerated apprenticeships <https://bit.ly/3UTniXG>

Initial assessments, guides for employers and apprentices

<https://bit.ly/3VYAxl3>

<https://bit.ly/3WcYCKZ>



## 5.3 T Levels

T Levels are two-year courses which are taken after GCSEs and are broadly equivalent in size to three A Levels. The 'Education and Childcare' route launched in September 2020 and prepares students for entry into skilled employment, an apprenticeship, further or higher education.

The T Level requires students to undertake both a technical qualification and an industry placement with an employer. Industry placements in Education and Childcare gives the student an opportunity to develop practical skills, much the same as an apprentice. It also gives employers an opportunity to ensure that students are developing the skills and experience that employers within the sector need.

The benefit of being involved in T Level programmes and offering industry placements is that it provides a recruitment pipeline for your setting once the student has completed their qualification.

For more information about T Levels, click [here](#)

You can find out about how industry placements work by clicking [here](#)

If you are interested in offering an industry placement, click [here](#)

## 5.4 DfE - Early years Qualification Checker

When recruiting, you have the responsibility for checking that staff who will be operating within the ratios have the right qualifications to do so. The DfE Qualifications Checker can help you to be sure that the qualification held is full and relevant: <https://bit.ly/3FmAb6V>

If you are employing unqualified members of staff, before agreeing with the training provider to participate in training programmes, ensure that the college or training provider offers qualifications that are included within the full and relevant qualifications list.



## 6. Campaign resources

You can download campaign resources from the [#firstfiveyears count](#) webpage [here](#).