



SIPTU: The Early Years Educators and Managers Union – **Early Years Staffing Survey**

April 2023





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Introduction



There have been major changes in the Early Years sector since SIPTU's previous staffing survey was conducted just last year.

After years of campaigning by SIPTU and other organisations, the Government increased funding to the sector by an additional €173 million in 2022 via a new 'Core Funding' scheme. This investment underpinned an historic first pay deal which saw pay increases for over 70% of Early Years managers and educators.

For example, the hourly rate of pay for a Graduate Room Leader (QQI Level 8) went from an average of €13.21 to a minimum of €15.50, per hour. Similarly, the hourly rate of pay for an Early Years Educator went from an average of €11.57 to a minimum of €13, per hour.

This investment had several objectives, including (1) improving quality for children by reducing staff turnover rates, (2) supporting the ongoing professionalisation of the sector and (3) supporting provider sustainability.

This year's staffing survey shows that while progress has been made, recruitment and retention remains the biggest problem for services. The consequences include challenges in maintaining child to staff ratios, increased workload, stress and pressure, lower quality for children and limiting services for parents.

Simply put, there is a staffing crisis in Early Years.

Darragh O'Connor
Head of Strategic Organising and Campaigns,
SIPTU

Key Findings

The Staffing Crisis

According to 38% of Early Years managers, the recruitment and retention of staff is the biggest problem facing their services. A further 33% stated that it is as a 'significant problem'. Specifically, recruiting staff was 'extremely difficult' for a majority of services, with low pay identified as either the 'biggest obstacle' (38%) or a 'significant obstacle' (39%). A majority of services also reported that they currently have a staff vacancy.

An overwhelming majority of managers (93%) also reported that recruitment challenges are negatively affecting service provision. They identified 'difficulty in maintaining staff to child ratios' (66%), 'lower quality for children' (49%) and a 'reduction of service' (42%) as key concerns.

Staffing and Quality for Children

While staffing challenges clearly affect the sustainability of services, high staff turnover and understaffing also undermine quality for children.

High-quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) plays a vital role in the cognitive, social and emotional development of young children. Not only does it provide a safe and nurturing environment for children, but also offers opportunities for them to learn, socialise, and grow.

However, low pay and high staff turnover can significantly affect the quality of ECEC. Studies¹ have shown that higher staff turnover rates are associated with lower quality care and poorer outcomes for children. Additionally, low pay has been found to be a significant predictor of staff turnover.²

Staffing, Stress and Burnout

Problems recruiting and retaining staff were reported as having a major impact on employees.

For non-managerial staff, 81% agreed that staff shortages are a problem in their workplace. The top three consequences were 'stress and burnout' (73%), 'increased workload' (68%) and 'not enough time for non-contact work' (61%).

Managers also identified 'increased work for existing staff' as a major consequence of recruitment and retention problems.

Staffing and Low Pay

A large number of non-managerial staff (36%) reported that they are actively looking for a job in another sector, a slight reduction of 2% from 2022. As with previous years, 'low pay' was identified by 71% of respondents as the biggest push factor, followed by 'stress/burnout' and 'lack of benefits' at 59% each.

In addition, a large number of respondents (35%) reported that they do not get paid for all hours they worked. An additional 49% stated they do not get paid for attending training for work.

Continued improvements in pay and conditions are necessary for the skills, qualifications and work of Early Years professionals to be recognised and rewarded appropriately. In the absence of progress on pay and conditions, the staffing crisis will continue.

¹ Claudia Hale-Jinks, Herman Knopf & Herman Knopf (2006) Tackling Teacher Turnover in Child Care: Understanding Causes and Consequences, Identifying Solutions, Childhood Education

² Whitebook, M., Sakai, L., (2003) "Turnover begets turnover: an examination of job and occupational instability among child care centre staff". Early Childhood Research Quarterly, Volume 18, Issue 3

Impact of the Early Years Pay Deal

After years of campaigning by SIPTU and other organisations, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth significantly increased investment in ECCE to address low pay via a new 'Core Funding' scheme in Budget 2022. This resulted in an historic first pay deal for the sector which saw a pay increase for over 70% of workers.

The improvements in pay appear to have had a positive impact. The number of managers reporting that recruiting new staff was 'extremely difficult' reduced from 68% to 58% between 2022 and 2023. However, there was a corresponding 11% increase in those reporting recruitment to be a 'difficulty'.

Despite the recent improvements, low pay continues to be the biggest issue facing employees when considering their future in the sector.

"Cost of living is pushing many to seek alternative employment and it is a shame as we are passionate about making a difference".

Grace, Early Years Manager

"Children don't have the same care giver for too long. This affects their routine and the trust they built up with the previous care giver. Understandably, the children are upset and the parents too."

Aoife, Early Years Manager

"It is a constant battle hiring inexperienced staff who are unaware of the requirement of the role, unaware of Aistear, Siolta and regulations, finding the rates of pay too low that they cannot find suitable accommodation and end up leaving the job and we go back to square one!"

Elaine, Early Years Manager

About the Survey

The survey was conducted online between the 12th and 27th March 2023 and was completed by 2,112 people working in the Early Years sector. The profile of the respondents reflects that of the sector in terms of county, job role and service type. The survey was carried out by the SIPTU Big Start Campaign.

Survey Results

Total Responses: 2,112

MANAGERS & OWNER MANAGERS RESPONSES: 442

To what extent is staff recruitment and retention a problem for your service?

| | |
|------------------------|--------|
| The biggest problem: | 37.56% |
| A significant problem: | 33.03% |
| Somewhat of a problem: | 20.59% |
| It is not a problem: | 8.82% |

If yes, what was your experience of recruiting new staff?

| | |
|----------------------|--------|
| Extremely Difficult: | 58.12% |
| Difficult: | 36.04% |
| Easy: | 4.82% |
| Very Easy: | 1.02% |

Did you have to recruit staff in the last 12 months?

| | |
|------|--------|
| Yes: | 85.49% |
| No: | 14.51% |

To what extent is low pay an obstacle to recruiting new staff?

| | |
|-------------------------|--------|
| The biggest obstacle: | 38.10% |
| A significant obstacle: | 38.78% |
| Somewhat an obstacle: | 17.23% |
| Not an obstacle: | 5.90% |

"Children deserve happy Early Years educators who should educate them in a stress free environment."
Hazel, Early Years Educator

Have any staff left your service in the past 12 months?

| | |
|------|---------------|
| Yes: | 75.79% |
| No: | 24.21% |

If yes, why did they leave?

| | |
|---|---------------|
| To improve their pay/conditions in another job: | 55.38% |
| Return to education/training: | 8.06% |
| Retired/No longer working: | 5.11% |
| Stress Burnout: | 28.23% |
| Emigrated to another country: | 11.29% |
| Lack of promotional opportunities: | 10.22% |
| Don't know: | 5.38% |
| Other: | 29.30% |

Do you currently have a staff vacancy?

| | |
|------|---------------|
| Yes: | 54.55% |
| No: | 45.45% |

Are you concerned that problems recruiting and retaining staff will negatively impact service provision?

| | |
|------|---------------|
| Yes: | 93.44% |
| No: | 6.54% |

If yes, what will the impact be?

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Difficulty in maintaining child/staff ratios: | 66.28% |
| Reduction of service (e.g. fewer hours or room closures): | 42.09% |
| Unable to expand service or hours: | 21.40% |
| Closure of service: | 20.23% |
| Lower Quality for Children: | 48.60% |
| Use of staff with limited experience: | 45.35% |
| Increased workload for existing staff: | 69.53% |
| Other: | 6.51% |

Do you get paid for all hours worked, contact & non-contact time (managers).

| | |
|------|---------------|
| Yes: | 59.60% |
| No: | 40.40% |

If things stay the same, I will still be working in the Early Years Sector in 12 months' time (managers).

| | |
|------|---------------|
| Yes: | 43.55% |
| No: | 56.45% |

"I love working in this sector but it is unrealistic with rate of pay and no recognition. Not that many people will stay if changes don't happen."

Natalie, Early Years Educator

I am actively looking for another job (manager)

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Yes, in another Early Years setting: | 5.61% |
| Yes, in another sector: | 25.74% |
| No, I am not actively looking for another job: | 68.65% |

If things stay the same, I will still be working in the Early Years Sector in 12 months' time.

| | |
|------|---------------|
| Yes: | 49.52% |
| No: | 50.48% |

If you intend to leave your job, what are the main reasons? (manager)

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Rate of pay: | 48.84% |
| Lack of benefits (pension, maternity pay etc): | 55.43% |
| Unable to recruit suitable staff: | 29.46% |
| Stress/Burnout: | 65.89% |
| Unmanageable workload: | 43.80% |
| Lack of recognition: | 41.09% |
| Other: | 13.57% |

"I love my Job but the amount of extra work we do is unreal. No extra time to do observations so I do it at home, no pension which always worries me. 13 euro an hour is really bad. For all the work we do. No wonder so many people leave childcare."

Early Years Educator

"Pay has improved but conditions have not. In fact since we got the pay rise, they have become worse. I got Covid 3 times last year and the last time I got it at beginning of December my employer would not pay me a cent. She told me I could use annual leave, but I needed to keep that for Christmas Holidays."

Michelle, Early Years Manager

"Burnt out and struggling to justify the 7 years of college and Masters degree and years of experience for a career that is continuously been forgotten about and completely underpaid! Would be insane to say that I can see myself still here in this sector in the long run."

Jessica, Early Years Manager

EDUCATOR, LEAD EDUCATORS & DEPUTY MANAGER RESPONSES

RESPONDENTS: 1,670

Are staff shortages a problem in your workplace?

| | |
|------|---------------|
| Yes: | 81.31% |
| No: | 18.69% |

If yes, what is the impact?

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Increased workload: | 68.04% |
| Difficulty in maintaining child/staff ratios: | 52.53% |
| Increased stress/burnout: | 73.02% |
| Not getting breaks: | 19.31% |
| Not enough time for non-contact work: | 61.30% |
| Lower quality for children: | 43.17% |
| Other: | 12.14% |

I am actively looking for another job

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Yes in another Early Years' service: | 9.39% |
| Yes, in another sector: | 36.21% |
| No, I am not actively looking for another job: | 54.40% |

If you intend to leave your job, what would be the main reason?

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| Low pay: | 70.85% |
| Lack of benefits (sick pay, pension): | 58.79% |
| Experience is not recognised: | 52.61% |
| Stress/Burnout: | 59.45% |
| Unmanageable workload: | 30.13% |
| Lack of promotional opportunities: | 29.23% |
| Lack of recognition: | 54.23% |
| Other: | 11.64% |

Do you get paid for all hour worked (contact and non-contact time)

| | |
|------|---------------|
| Yes: | 65.41% |
| No: | 34.59% |

Training and Pay

| | |
|---|---------------|
| I get paid when doing training for work: | 45.93% |
| I do not get paid when doing training for work: | 48.89% |
| I am not required to attend training for work: | 5.18% |

If things stay the same, I'll be working 12 months' time

| | |
|------|---------------|
| Yes: | 30.11% |
| No: | 69.89% |

"All my wages go on gas electricity and mortgage. I wish I got paid more just so I had some money left for myself."

Early Years Educator



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