

'On the nannying side of things, there has been a drop in permanent nannies being recruited,' says Clare Riley, managing director of Tinies North West. There has been a huge increase in temporary nannies and people being hired on an ad hoc basis.

'On the nursery side it is really buoyant - settings have to maintain ratios. During the early part of the year it was quieter, but employers are now taking on full time staff.

'So far we are not seeing any requirements for people with EYPS or graduates. We don't recruit Level 2, so we are recruiting people with Level 3. Salaries still vary hugely - for a Level 3 nursery nurse, the range could be from £11,000 to £16,000.

'Candidates will look at the quality of the setting and then the salary. The level of staff turnover is an influence, as are issues such as what the staff room is like. Employers are now stressing their commitment to CPD and it is something staff look for.'

Regional focus: Strengthening skills

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Extra funding has been targeted at developing leadership, management and higher-level skills in the North West to plug the skills gap between the region and the rest of the UK and to help businesses through the recession.

The proportion of the region's workforce with higher-level skills and the proportion trained as leaders and managers are both lower than the national average, according to the North West Regional Development Agency. It has invested a further £6.5 m in the leadership and management programme offered by Train to Gain in the North West to help businesses in the current economic climate.

In the childcare sector, Early Years Professional Status is firmly identified as the route to developing leadership and practice in early years settings. Warrington Borough Council promotes the benefits of a fully qualified childcare workforce at every possible opportunity - through a professional development programme, practical support, advice and funding.

'In terms of financial help, we pay for the course fees right through from Level 3 to foundation degrees,' says Kate Rogers, training and recruitment officer for the council childcare team.

'We also offer financial incentives through the Graduate Leader Fund in the form of the HGGI (Home Grown Graduate Incentive), QP (Quality Premium) and Achievement Reward. They all help fund the learner and the setting in regards to supply cover when the learner is away at university or college, help to fund equipment and books, provide salary bonuses and make improvements to the setting's own facilities.

'We currently have 11 EYPs in Warrington and 18 on one of the immediate pathways. We also have many more who have committed via the HGGI and are currently in their first or second years of foundation degrees.'

Three North West universities - Liverpool Hope and the universities of Chester and Cumbria - have collaborated to form the Early Years Transformation Group to deliver EYP pathways to practitioners across the region.

'We have just taken on a new cohort of 80,' says Val Simpson, a tutor at Liverpool Hope and marketing officer for the group. 'We could have taken on more, but we were capped by the Children's Workforce Development Council.

'Settings which have EYPs in post are buzzing. We are going to be undertaking some research on the impact EYPs have on practice. We are holding a two-day EYP event in Liverpool on November 25-26, when there will be a graduation ceremony. It will also be aimed at recruitment networking.'

'Local providers continue to feel a mixed impact in terms of the recession,' says Punima Tanuku, chief executive of National Day Nurseries Association. 'Some members, especially those near to Manchester city centre for example, report slight increases in usage. Others report less children for less hours and a need to increase fees to cover additional expenses.'

Kathy Brodie, EYP and trainer, reports that employers are recruiting cautiously in the current climate but that the growth in children's centres has been a boon. 'Children's centres are currently expanding rapidly across the whole of Cheshire East,' she says. The focus is very much on multi-agency work to improve outcomes for children. For example, there are currently some fantastic job opportunities for early years workers in children's centres, who also work in partnership with other agencies - as well as family support worker posts.'

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The Childcare Experts



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