

New research to examine why more men are not employed in early years education

December 11 2018

Currently only around 2% of the UK's Early Years Education (EYE) workforce are male—a figure that has remained stubbornly resistant to change for several decades.

Now new research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, at Lancaster University aims to improve understanding of the obstacles that stand in the way of more men taking up employment in the EYE workforce.

Working with the Fatherhood Institute, the team, led by Dr. Jo Warin of the University's Educational Research Department, will learn about possible solutions that can help the UK diversify the gender of its workforce in the most efficient and effective ways possible.

The [GenderEYE](#) (Gender Diversification in Early Years Education) team will work with hubs of EYE professionals, located in four English locations, who are interested and active in advocating an increase of men in EYE and engaged in supportive Men in the Early Years regional networks and national conferences.

They will also work with academics and practitioners from Norway—which has the highest percentage of male EYE professionals in the world (around 10%) - and whose national 'gender equality action plan' calls for regional and national recruitment strategies to achieve a government target of 20% men in kindergartens.

Strategic focus will be on best practice recruitment, support and retention.

The Research team have just returned from a knowledge exchange event at Queen Maud University College, Trondheim, Norway's lead institution in preparing teachers for Early Childhood Education, and will cascade their learning to EYE colleagues, engaging eight different settings (pre-schools and primary school Reception classes) who will then form a sample of case studies.

The team will also administer a survey to the wider sector, seeking data on male recruitment and retention, and information.

"The study will provide a much needed evidence base for understanding what men's contribution is and could be" said Dr. Warin.

And Dr. Jeremy Davies, of the Fatherhood Institute, added: "There's a growing sense that the UK needs to rethink its approach on this: the lack of gender-diversity in our EYE workforce has been allowed to go unchecked for too long. We hope that by focusing on what's worked in Norway, we can develop some clear, achievable strategies for accelerating the pace of progress."

Early findings, based on the knowledge exchange event, indicate that a concerted effort at grassroots, local and regional levels supported by government interest, and target setting, as illustrated in Norway, can produce a slow but steady change in the direction of an improved gender-sensitivity amongst the EYE workforce.

Key messages from the event include:

- Norway has a wide-ranging gender equality plan covering everything from parental leave and free childcare, to actions to

reduce the gender pay gap and a target of 20% male participation in the [early childhood education](#) workforce.

- Earmarked [government funding](#) has been provided to support male recruitment at regional and local level.
- Strong leadership and belief in the benefits of a mixed-gender [workforce](#) is important.
- Support and networking opportunities for male practitioners can improve retention.

Provided by Lancaster University

Citation: New research to examine why more men are not employed in early years education (2018, December 11) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-12-men-early-years.html>

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