

The Role of Qualified Teacher Support in Children's Centres: Balancing Requirements and Need in the Children's Centre Reach Area

Introduction

This paper results from discussion between TfC, the National Strategies Team and local authorities. It is intended as a guidance note for local authorities and relevant support agencies. Teacher support for children's centres is of considerable concern to many local authorities and carries major funding implications for their children's centre programmes.

The 'children's centre teacher' is in most cases a relatively new role. It requires skills and expertise outside that which many teachers moving to the role will have – work with the under 3s, supporting private, voluntary groups and childminders, work with individual families – to list just some. This in turn raises the need to look at the training and support available for this group, within authorities, regionally and nationally.

Outcomes expected from the input of Qualified Teacher Support

The role of Qualified Teacher Support (QTS) in Children's Centres (CCs) was developed particularly as a result of the learning from the EPPE project:

“Pre-school can be an effective intervention for the reduction of special educational needs (SEN), especially for the most disadvantage and vulnerable children. It was found that integrated centres (these are centres that fully combine education with care) and nursery schools tend to promote better intellectual outcomes for children.

Having qualified trained teachers working with children in pre-school settings (for a substantial proportion of time, and most importantly as the pedagogical leader) had the greatest impact on quality, and was linked specifically with better outcomes in pre-reading and social development”.
The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from the Pre-school Period.

This research has emphasised the deployment of QTs into Children's Centre services in an effort to drive up cognitive development and close the gap between the most disadvantaged and other children.

The challenge for strategic and operational managers has been to determine how best to manage this deployment and balance the benefits of three competing demands for QT time:

- focussing on the child care provision in the CC,
- working with other services within the full core offer, and
- working across the reach area with all providers.

Like other members of the CC team, they are expected to show some flexibility in their responsibilities and tasks if they are to be a full participant in multi agency partnership working but

care also needs to be taken to ensure that the core skills and the outcomes from these are maximised.

It is crucial that early years provision in CCs is excellent. Each CC should be seen as a centre of excellence for the area it serves, and the needs of many children attending the CC will require excellent services. The first and main priority for the QT has to be to help ensure this excellence in the nursery.

Key considerations in raising quality will be:

- The Early Years Outcomes Duty (EYOD) of the local authority – Communication, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD); Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED).
- The stage of development of the CC – is it well established or recent?
- The role of the authority and its priorities for development – setting attitudes and values through co-ordination, communication and professional development.
- Examples of effective practice.
- Professional development for the QTs – leadership and management, and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

Deployment challenges

There are no definitive answers about how to deploy the QTs but a balance has to be struck, in which the skills and knowledge of the QTs are put to most effective use to ensure key outcomes are achieved, at the same time as they are deployed to the benefit of all families and children but especially those who are a priority in the reach area.

The balance will be affected by such matters as the size of the childcare provision, which and how many children are using the provision, the size of the reach area, the level of skill of the childcare staff and the stage of development of the core offer services overall.

The main roles are both 'hands on' practice and leading curriculum development and planning.

“Hands on” practice

In the CC childcare provision (which may include childminder provision)

The aim is to ensure that the childcare provision is working to the highest possible standards and that the QTS is sufficiently engaged to set the standard through their own practice and to be able to work effectively with the whole staff team to develop their practice and the curriculum. Judgements have to be made about the time commitment to this task but it has to be sufficient to enable the QTS to be adequately engaged with practice to be able to model best practice.

One of the more complex issues that is emerging, particularly in rural and more dispersed areas, is how the CC childcare provision is defined. In Sure Start Local Programmes and

Phase 1 children's centres, this provision was usually on-site and therefore physically part of a building containing a range of services. In phase 2 of the CC programme, it is more difficult to define which of a range of services is that which "belongs" to the CC because delivery is from a range of dispersed settings. Indeed, guidance suggests that: *"Everyone who has contact with a family living in the Children's Centre catchment area should consider themselves to be part of the Children's Centre"*. In other words, several child care services and providers may be deemed to be part the Children's Centre's childcare and so decisions will have to be made about the most effective balance of hands on work across these providers in the reach area.

In the core offer services

Whilst recognising the importance of the child care provision in the CC being of the highest standard, it has to be recognised that many of the priority families and children will not access this provision and that the work in other services will also improve their outcomes with the benefit of QTS input. Children spend most of their time within their family and so the impact on children of the QTS working with families to develop their understanding of cognitive development and their skills should have a significant impact on children's development. Some limited hands on work in other core offer services should be possible, even at 0.5 levels of resourcing. As the DfES paper says: the QTS needs "a knowledge of planning, observation-based assessment and documentation and the importance of sharing this with families".

Across the reach area

Guidance is clear that all services in the reach area should be considered as part of the Children's Centre offering and as such will benefit from the QTS input. At 0.5 resourcing, it is unlikely that the QTS will be able to offer regular hands on time to other services, but some planned input should become more possible as the QTS moves to full time.

Curriculum development and planning

In the childcare provision

Some QTS time needs to be available for assisting with curriculum planning within the child care settings of the CC.

In the core offer services

Equal time needs to be given to planning across the core offer. This might take the form of a planned programme of training for the CC team and joint planning of the next programme of services with the team.

Across the reach area

Some time may be offered to priority services within the reach area.

Job roles and key tasks

Children's Centre managers are responsible for ensuring that their centre delivers a range of services which effectively improve the outcomes for children in their area. Difficult decisions have to be made about the balance of services and deployment of staff and the expectation is that all workers show some flexibility in their working patterns and duties so that families experience services which are well integrated and do not require them unnecessarily to move from worker to worker to receive an individual service. This applies as much to the QTS as any other worker.

The QT needs to be responsive to this expectation and to share skills as appropriate to achieving the broad range of outcomes. This will mean that occasional tasks will be allocated which are right for a particular family and are within the skill set of the QT but may not be in their regular working pattern.

The QT is a member of the CC core team and however the CC staffing is structured; needs to be able to attend team meetings and service planning meetings. The CC manager needs to be able to manage their priorities within the framework of their job description and the needs of achieving the required outcomes from the CC services.

Outreach provision is critical in reaching priority families and may be the only means of working with some priority families. The QT has to be available to support outreach work, in both a hands on way and in planning with the CC outreach workers.

Issues for the local authority

The local authority will need to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the various models of QTS delivery. Those most commonly found are:

- Children's centre based
- Part of Foundation Stage Support Team
- Based in a school nursery class that forms part of the centre.

The authority will also need to be clear about the relationship in a reach area between the Foundation Stage Advisory Team and the CC QTs.

There should be a strategy to provide support and development opportunities for the teachers in children's centres, to help them become effective mentors and enable them to manage change. This will include ensuring that they are committed to a pedagogy that is consistent with effective early years practice, - a concern for many teachers working with the under 3s.

Appendix 1

Department for Children, Schools and Families

Teachers in children's centres – Some questions and answers

Q1: Do children's centres have to employ qualified teachers?

A: Children's centres located in the 30% most disadvantaged areas will be offering integrated early learning and childcare for under fives. As a minimum they must employ a qualified teacher on a half time basis.

Children's centres located in the 70% more advantaged areas that choose to provide integrated early learning and childcare must also employ a qualified teacher on a half time basis.

The teacher must be appointed in order for designation as a children's centre to take place.

In both cases a half time qualified teacher is a minimum. We would expect most centres to exceed this. We would expect those centres offering the minimum to build up to a full time teacher within 12-18 months of designation.

Q2: If the children's centre is based on a school site is a further 0.5 qualified teacher necessary?

A: If a children's centre is located on a school site, the school and centre can be considered as one. Therefore it is not a requirement to appoint an additional teacher but it would remain a requirement of designation that at least 0.5 of a qualified teacher's time was spent planning and leading the delivery of the integrated day care and early learning provision within the children's centre.

Q3: Can one half time teacher cover more than one children's centre in an area?

A: No. Each children's centre that offers integrated early learning and care must have a half time teacher as a minimum.

Q4: Could one qualified teacher cover two centres?

A: Yes, but we would expect the teacher to divide his or her time equally between the centres and that both centres would work towards a full time teacher within 12-18 months of designation.

Q5: What happens if the qualified teacher leaves after designation?

A: The local authority is responsible for putting in place a plan for interim support and recruiting a replacement. We would expect TfC to investigate reports of centres no longer employing a qualified teacher.

Q6: Can a children's centre replace a teacher with an Early Years Professional?

A: No, not currently. By 2010 all children's centres offering early years provision will be expected to employ someone with Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) but for now the requirement to have an early years teacher remains.

Q7: Will QTs working in children's centres be required to become an EYP?

A: There is no requirement for this to happen but by 2010 all children's centres offering early years provision are expected to employ someone with Early Years Professional Status to plan and lead the delivery of the integrated day care and early learning provision. We anticipate that many EYPs working in children's centres will be qualified teachers who have undergone the additional training to achieve EYPS.

Q8: Can we appoint a more experience teacher on a less than half time basis?

A: No, the minimum is 0.5, irrespective of grade.

Q9: Could the qualified teacher be the centre manager?

A: It is unlikely as the QT must be working with the children and overseeing the early years provision for at least 0.5 of their time. It is unlikely that they would be able to lead the centre effectively in the remaining 0.5 of their time.

Q10: Who should manage the qualified teacher?

A: The centre manager should have a clear job description setting out their responsibilities for the line management of centre staff. In some cases management responsibility will be shared between the centre manager and a manager from the member's own profession, based elsewhere who might be responsible for CPD and performance management. The manager should ensure that all staff are clear about who they are accountable to on a day to day basis, and should enable staff to retain good professional links to colleagues in their home agency or profession.

Q11: What is the role of the qualified teacher in the children's centre?

A: The qualified teacher should be involved in planning and leading the delivery of integrated day care and early learning provision in the centre. Teachers will work closely with other early years staff in observing, supporting and extending children's learning. They may lead a team of key workers in working with children as well as offering support in planning and assessing, including the training and support of childminders.

Appendix 2

From:

http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/faqs/foundation_stage/1162267/#1162287

“Children’s Centres provide multi-agency services that are flexible and meet the needs of young children and their families. The core offer includes integrated early learning, care, family support, health services, outreach services to children and families not attending the Centre and access to training and employment advice. Children’s Centres will be models of multi-agency and partnership working. At the heart of a centre will be high quality learning and full day care for children from birth.

What will be different about the role of a qualified teacher in a Children's Centre?

A4: Local authorities should be working with partners in health, education, social services and the private and voluntary sector to reshape services through Children's Centres and linked provision. Everyone who has contact with a family living in the Children's Centre catchment area should consider themselves to be part of the Children's Centre. Families will certainly view them as that. Although this offers exciting opportunities for innovative ways of working, it also means that the remit of the teacher will go far beyond the provision of educational activities. The drive for high quality means that teachers working in Children's Centres will need to be early years specialists, they should have extensive experience of working with young children and be reflective, analytical and committed to continuous professional development. Unless a teacher has been working in organisations such as Early Excellence Centres or Family Centres they may have had fewer opportunities to work with children and families in such a holistic way and to work in such a diverse team of other professionals.

The teacher will need:

- a commitment to flexible, innovative multi-agency and team working;
- an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the other professionals working in the centre;
- the ability to establish effective and professional relationships with colleagues from different backgrounds;
- a commitment to developing themselves and their colleagues as learners;
- experience of leading early years provision;
- strong communication skills, including diplomacy and sensitivity to the needs of others;
- an ability to translate their own knowledge and understanding into effective practice;
- a knowledge of child development and children's learning
- a knowledge of planning, observation- based assessment and documentation and the importance of sharing this with families;
- a commitment to the [Key elements of effective practice.](#)”

Appendix 3

Example of QTS key tasks from a current job description

1. To work closely with parents, engaging them in their child's education and development from an early age.
2. To promote the development of high quality care and education by developing and disseminating best practice.
3. To liaise closely with schools in the targeted area to ensure that there is minimal disruption to the child's development and parental engagement.
4. To work alongside other professionals to ensure that a multi agency approach to the delivery of Children's Centres is achieved.
5. To lead courses and INSET sessions (including twilight sessions), for the dissemination of training concerning the Foundation Stage curriculum, Early Learning Goals and Birth to Three Framework to meet locally identified needs and promote joint working.
6. To support and facilitate co-operative working and networking between settings.
7. To support settings in relation to Ofsted inspections. To assist settings with addressing the identified areas for development and implement inspection action plan.
8. To maintain records of the support given.
9. To assist the line manager in monitoring and evaluating the quality of the early years provision in the identified area.
10. To keep abreast of current developments in early years education.
11. To undertake other duties compatible with the grading of the post.