



The Early Years Professionals' Survey 2019

September 2019





This report was compiled by Dr. Amy Greer Murphy.

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Foreword



When you meet an Early Years educator, ask them what they like about their job. No matter how tired they are after a long day's work; they will light up with passion, empathy and pride. Every day they see the impact they make in the lives of children. For those working in areas of disadvantage that impact can be life changing.

But if you ask an educator what's the worst thing about working in the Early Years sector, the response is very different. Low pay and poor conditions mean that educators are struggling to make ends meet and worried about their future. They talk about their lives being put on hold because buying a house or starting a family is financially impossible. Many simply can't afford to stay in their profession and are either emigrating or retraining.

Until now, the experience of Early Years educators had been told anecdotally. This survey uniquely looks at the working lives and everyday struggles faced by Early Years educators; the results are deeply troubling.

The survey which took place from 6th June – 30th June 2019, reveals a profession living in poverty. Low pay and a lack of basic entitlements predominate. For instance, 84% are unable to cope with unexpected expenses, like replacing a washing machine. Just 11% get paid maternity leave from work, even though 98% of educators are women.

The impact of this situation is threefold. Educators struggle to make ends undermining their quality of life, providers struggle to attract and retain staff, undermining their sustainability and quality for children is undermined as staff turnover rates stand at 25% per year.

This survey will be repeated annually. If the results remain the same, Ireland will have failed educators, providers and most importantly children.

If Ireland is to build a high-quality Early Years sector that supports children's cognitive and social development, the current situation must change.

In the upcoming budget, the Government has an opportunity to establish a threshold of decency by supporting a living wage for all Early Years educators and address the staffing crisis that is undermining quality.

Darragh O'Connor
Head of Strategic Organising,
SIPTU

Introduction

This survey was carried out during 2019 by SIPTU Big Start Campaign to gather information on the attitudes of those employed in the early years sector in relation to their work and involvement in early years settings and changes they thought could be made to improve the sector. We invited a wide variety of those working in the sector to reply and there was 3,200 responses.

Using the responses, we were able to generate a rich picture of the attitudes, experiences and expectations of those working in the early years sector. We found mixed results – workers reported that they were very passionate about the sector and particularly enjoyed working with children. However, despite their dedication and enthusiasm, they stated that several factors made their future in the sector uncertain. Some indicated that they were actively looking for another job, and many stated that if they didn't see improvements, they would leave the sector within 5 years.

Workers listed undesirable and stressful working conditions, low pay and lack of recognition and respect by society as major barriers to them staying in the sector. They also indicated preferences for positive changes to their working conditions and for the sector. This survey's results show that changes need to be brought about to improve the quality of working conditions for employees. What is at stake is the wellbeing and financial security of employees and the welfare of the children in their care.

A recent Prime Time documentary focusing on substandard management of a chain of creches has generated a renewed interest in how the early years sector is run, funded, managed and staffed. We acknowledge that this case was an unusual example of poor management and as the documentary highlighted, staff in the settings did their best to raise their issues with management and with Tusla directly. We wish to emphasise the need for systemic reform to address the set of problems that beset the early years sector. The role of the Government in funding, regulating and providing for early years

services needs to be at the centre of this reform. For early years professionals, there is a great need to focus on the conditions of their work – to improve their financial health, day-to-day working conditions and ultimately improve the quality of the vital service they provide by caring for the nation's infants and young children.

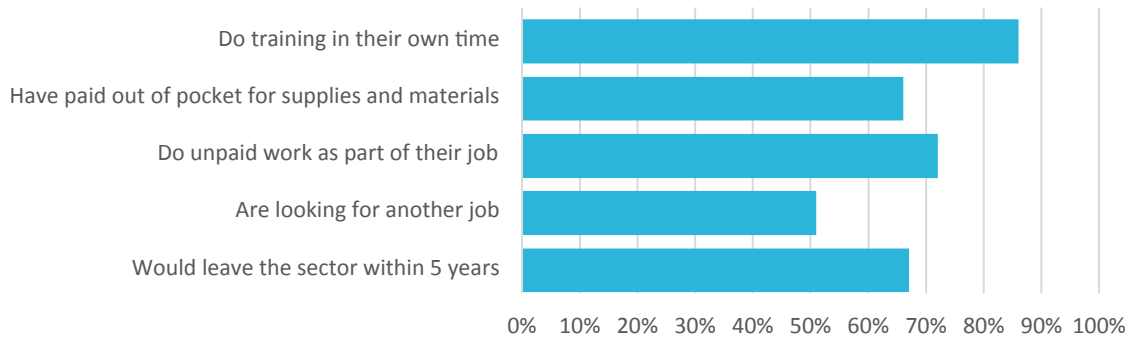
Lived experience of working in the sector

The survey highlighted two points relating to the day-to-day experience of working in the early years sector – extensive amounts of unpaid work and a sense of insecurity about the future of the sector and their place in it. Workers said they were expected to engage in a huge amount of extra work outside of their specific job descriptions – record keeping, cleaning, paperwork and liaising with parents. While this work is an important component of operating a successful early years facility, it is often done outside of hours and unpaid.

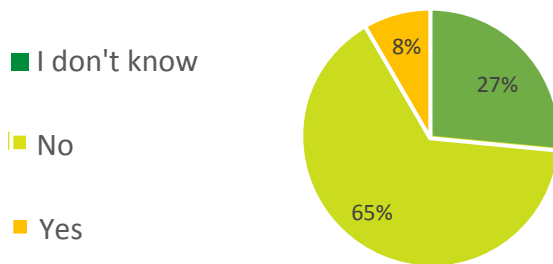
Many respondents frequently purchase supplies out of their own pockets and many more had to do training on their own time. They were passionate about working with children and wanted them to have the best possible early years experience – but this meant they had to buy supplies with their own money and do training in their own time, which they thought were unfair. Many workers reported that they were currently looking for another job. This was due to being on an temporary or insecure contract or due to dissatisfaction with their current workplace. Many said that if the sector didn't improve within 5 years they would leave it entirely.



Workload and Prospects: % of respondents that stated the following



If things stay the same, I will be working in the Early Years Sector in 5 years' time

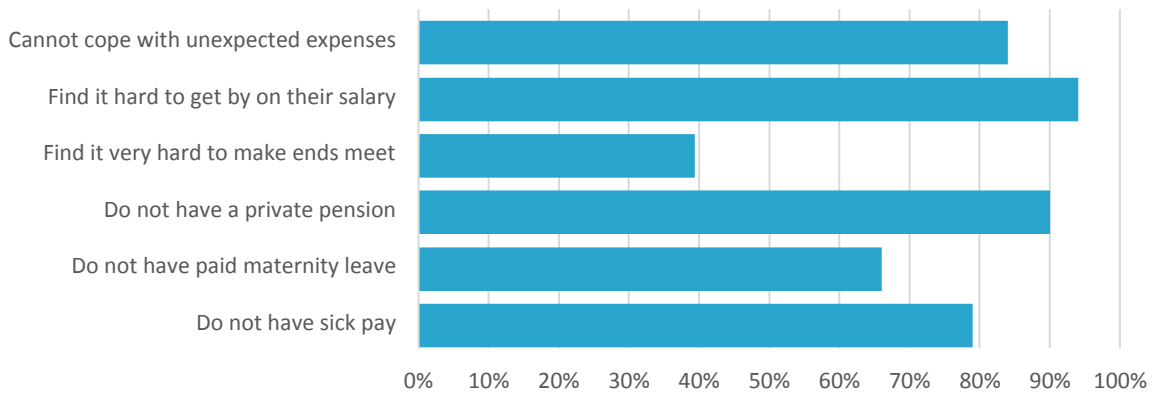


Conditions of employment and financial health

Based on the survey results those working in the early years sector stated that they felt undervalued and underpaid. A majority of those surveyed stated that they had poor financial health – they found it hard to manage on their salaries, could not cope with unexpected expenses and found it hard to make ends meet.

They felt there was a lack of crucial provision of entitlements such as sick pay schemes, paid maternity leave and private pension schemes. They also felt that gaining a higher qualification didn't necessarily lead to better pay – which was unfair.

Financial Health and entitlements: % of respondents that stated the following



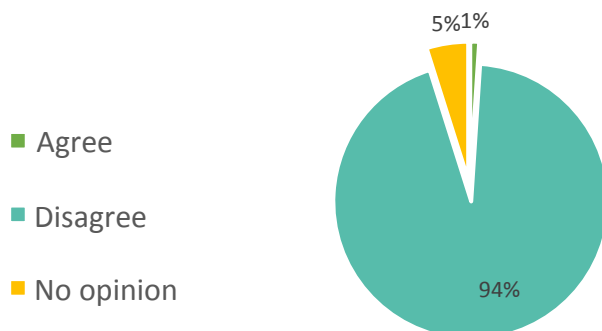
Pay in the sector

Findings indicated that almost all workers surveyed believed that early years workers are paid an unfairly low wage and that there was a cap on the salary a worker in the sector could be expected to attain. The majority of those surveyed stated they found it hard to get by on their salary and most would struggle to deal financially with unexpected expenses.

Rates of Pay: % of respondents that stated the following



Early years professionals are paid a fair wage



Main issues concerning early years sector workers

Issue	% of respondents affected
Low pay	86%
Lack of recognition	66%
Stress	49%
Summer lay-off period	29%
Unpaid non-contact time	28%
Lack of job security	14%
Too many inspection bodies	30%
Not enough government funding	35%
Too much paperwork	43%
Job security	8%

Perspectives on changes in the sector

Respondents expressed a clear preference for reform of the sector around the areas of increased salaries, a pay scale, greater allocation of government funding and the introduction of a professional body to represent the sector's workers.

They indicated a preference for more government involvement in the sector – the introduction of a pay scale relative to qualifications, that early years workers should be part of a professional body, that more government funding is needed, and that additional funding is needed for tasks such as administrative work, cleaning and catering. Fundamentally, there was a call for greater government involvement in the funding of the sector.

Perspectives on change	
99%	believed there should be a pay scale for the sector
94%	Early years professionals are paid a fair wage
96%	believed wages for early years professionals should be fully funded by government, as they do for primary and secondary school teachers
97%	believed there should be a professional body for the Early Years sector, like the Teaching Council
95%	believed there should be additional funding available for back office work/administration/HR/finance/cleaning/catering
89%	believed the government inadequately invests in the early years sector

Conclusions

Respondents reported that they really enjoyed working the sector. They were passionate about their work, enjoyed working with children and loved feeling like they made a difference. But the majority of those surveyed were dissatisfied - they felt the working conditions were poor, pay too low, and many were considering leaving the sector altogether.

Respondents reported carrying out a lot of additional unpaid work outside of their contracted hours, doing training in their own time and purchasing supplies out of their own money. They lacked many of the benefits required to make life easier – maternity pay, sick pay and private pension entitlements. Many were struggling on their salaries and weren't able to save. Overall, workers indicated that they were dissatisfied with their position in the sector and would consider leaving the sector entirely if it didn't improve. Early Years workers are well qualified, passionate about the sector and candid about the changes needed to improve their conditions. We need to listen to them.

To retain highly skilled, hard-working and caring staff in this sector, the conditions of workers need to be improved workers need security in their contracts, to be paid for training and reimbursed for materials and to be paid a fair wage. They need adequate time to prepare, train and carry out administrative and support tasks. They also want to be respected by society and valued for their important work. The future health of the sector is at stake – so many employees indicating a desire to move job or leave the sector entirely is a poor indicator of the sustainability of the current model of early years service provision in Ireland.

Appendix

Demographics of survey respondents

In the early years sector, 98% of employees – 21,800 workers – are women. Most of the 25,262 early years employees work in private settings (15,824), while 9,338 are employed in community childcare facilities.¹

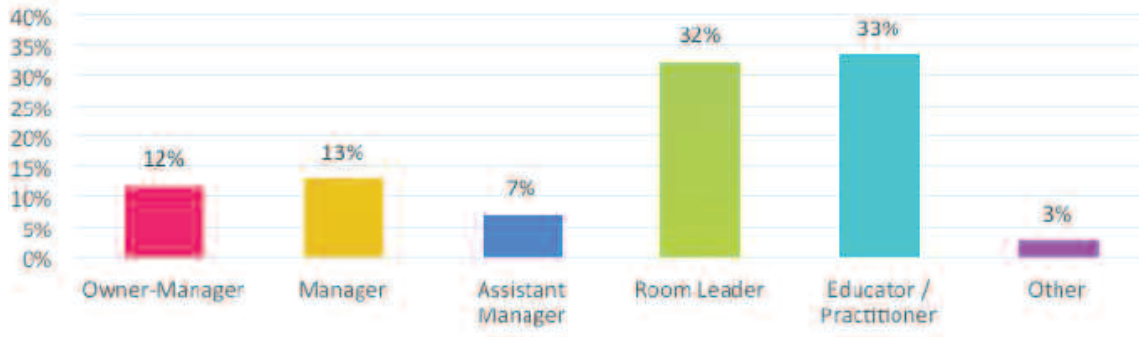
Over 3,200 individuals took this survey – 12% of total employees in sector.

Most workers who answered survey were employed in private early years settings (61.25% in private facilities and 37.9% community). Most were non-managerial educators and practitioners (33.05%), 31.2% were room leaders, 7% were Assistant Managers, 13% Managers and 12% Owner-Managers (24% of total were managers).

This survey therefore captures the experiences of a variety of workers across the sector who have diverse experiences of the work, educational attainment, pay, and varying levels of control and responsibility.

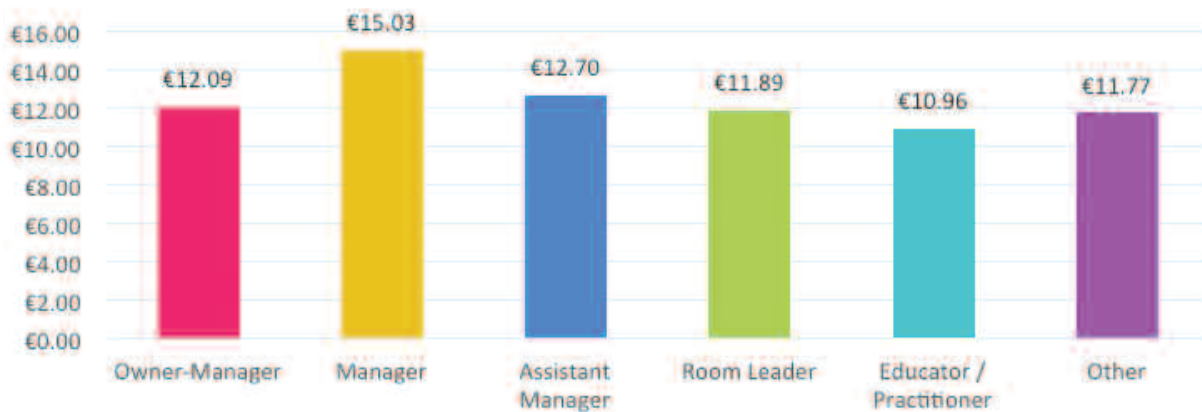
¹ <https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2018/11/Early-Years-Sector-Profile-Report-2017-2018.pdf>

Percentage of Respondents by Role Type

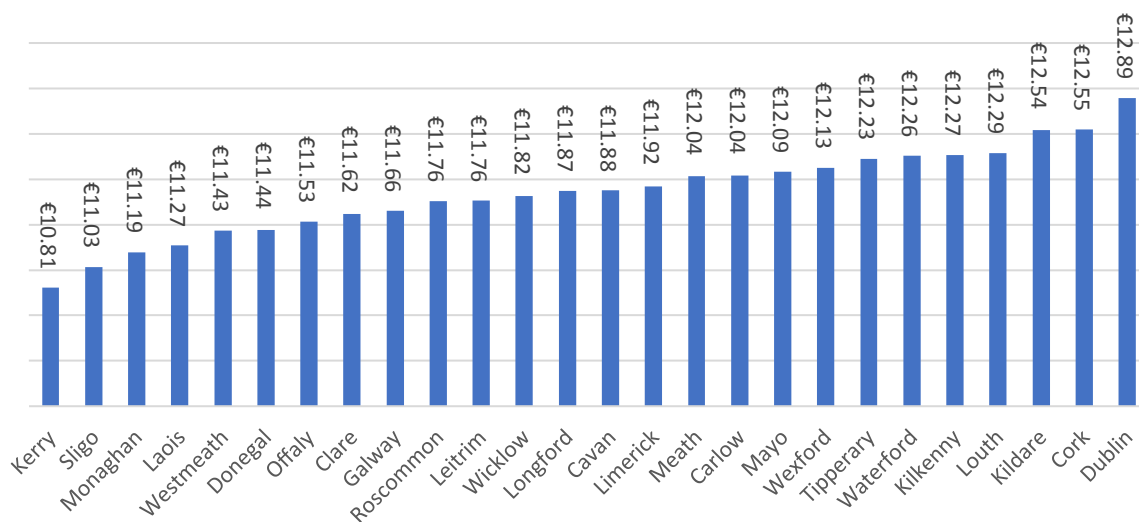


Rates of pay in the sector

Average Hourly Rate by Role Type

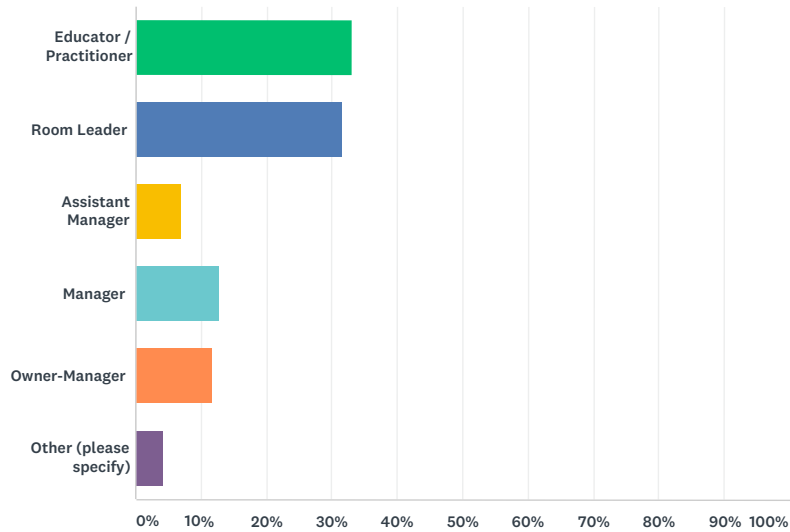


Average Hourly Rate by County for all grades



Question: What is your job role?

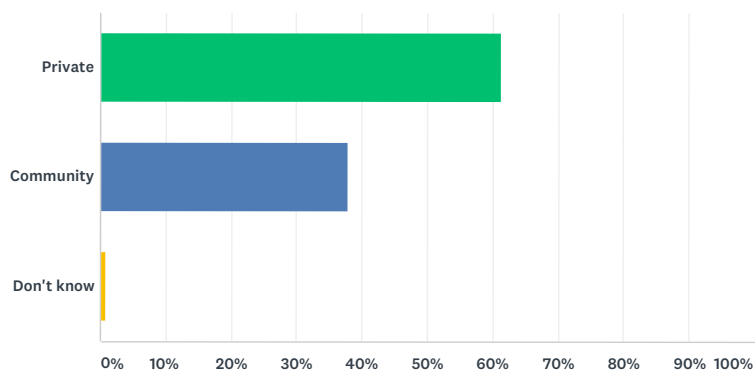
Answered: 3,271 Skipped: 9



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Educator / Practitioner	33.05%	1,081
Room Leader	31.49%	1,030
Assistant Manager	7.00%	229
Manager	12.72%	416
Owner-Manager	11.65%	381
Other (please specify)	4.10%	134
TOTAL		3,271

Question: Do you work in a private or community setting?

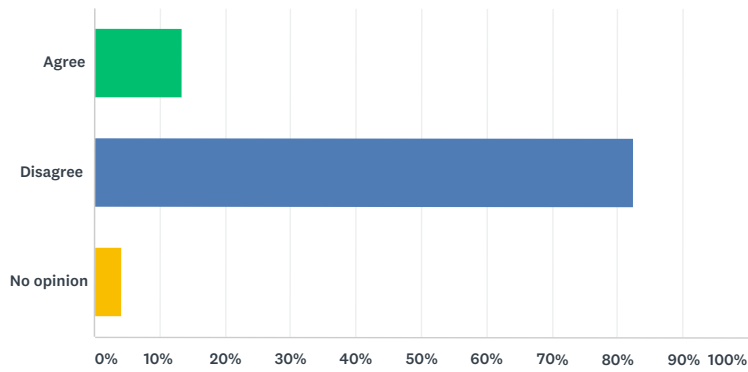
Answered: 3,272 Skipped: 8



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Private	61.25%	2,004
Community	37.90%	1,240
Don't know	0.86%	28
TOTAL		3,272

Question: I am recognised as a professional by society

Answered: 3,130 Skipped: 150

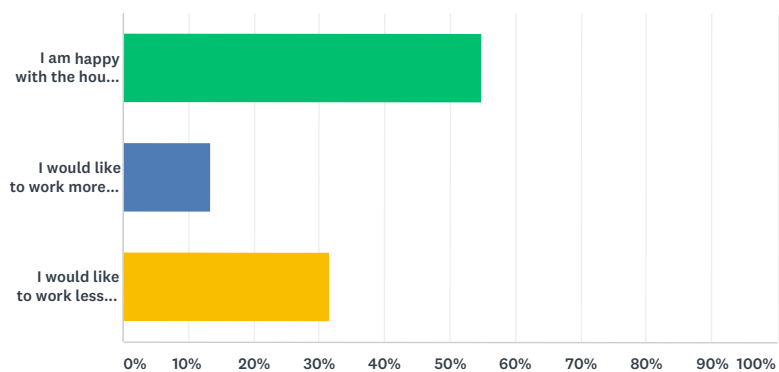


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Agree	13.35%	418
Disagree	82.36%	2,578
No opinion	4.28%	134
TOTAL		3,130



Question: Working hours

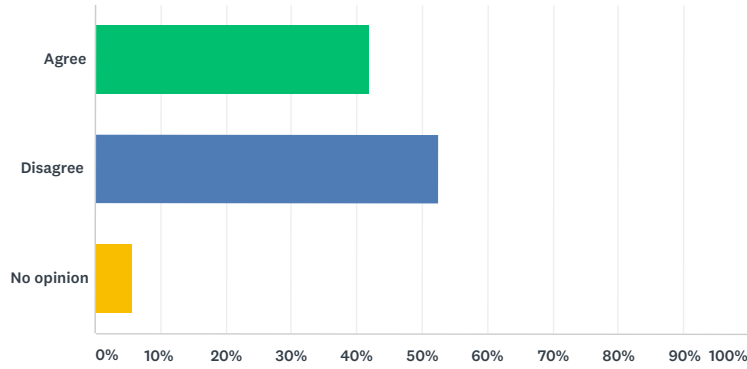
Answered: 3,128 Skipped: 152



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
I am happy with the hours I work	54.83%	1,715
I would like to work more hours	13.49%	422
I would like to work less hours	31.68%	991
TOTAL		3,128

Question: I have enough time to take my breaks

Answered: 3,125 Skipped: 155

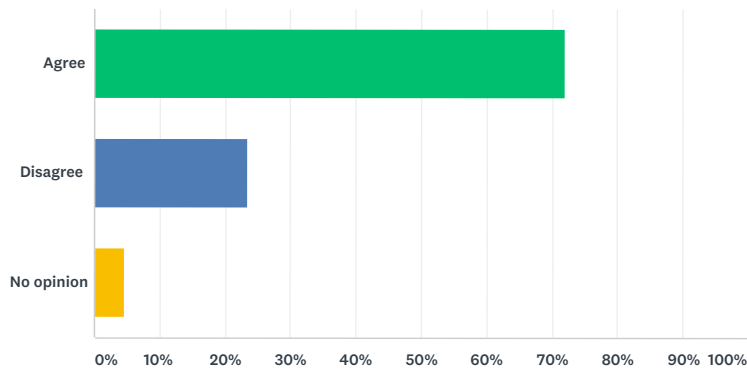


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Agree	41.86% 1,308
Disagree	52.45% 1,639
No opinion	5.70% 178
TOTAL	3,125



Question: I regularly do unpaid work

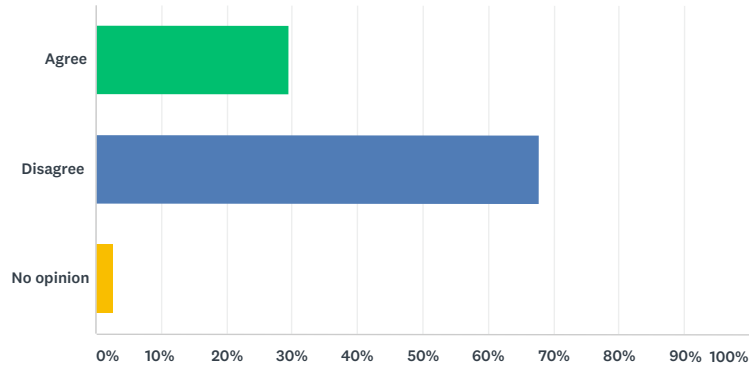
Answered: 3,126 Skipped: 154



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Agree	71.98% 2,250
Disagree	23.51% 735
No opinion	4.51% 141
TOTAL	3,126

Question: I believe higher qualifications currently result in higher wages

Answered: 3,127 Skipped: 153

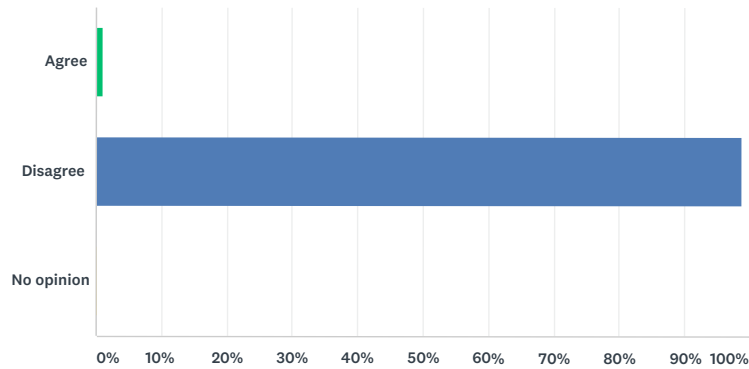


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Agree	29.52% 923
Disagree	67.83% 2,121
No opinion	2.65% 83
TOTAL	3,127



Question: Early years professionals are paid a fair wage

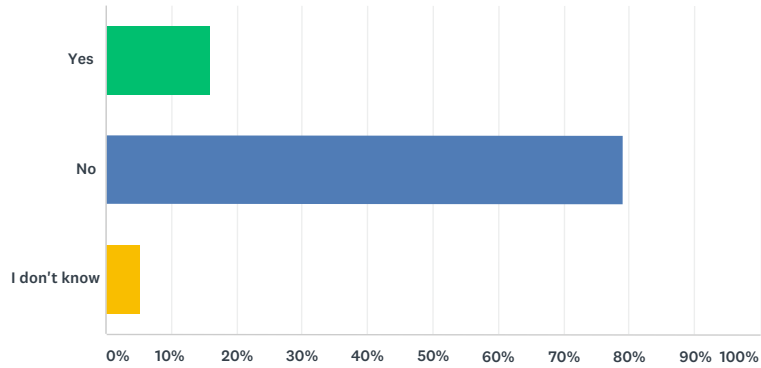
Answered: 3,128 Skipped: 152



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Agree	1.09% 34
Disagree	98.66% 3,086
No opinion	0.26% 8
TOTAL	3,128

Question: I have a sick pay scheme in work

Answered: 3,125 Skipped: 155

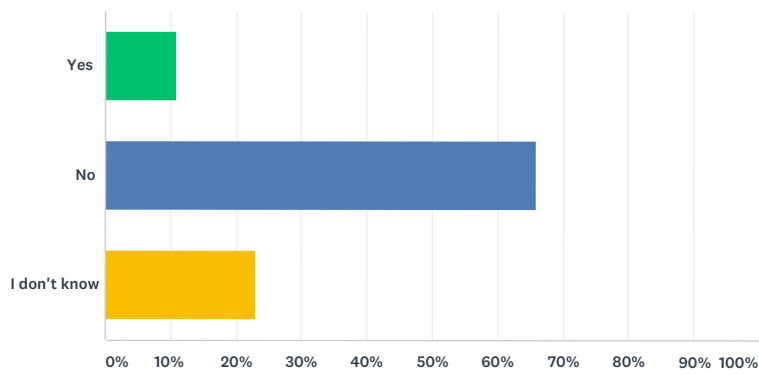


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	15.81%	494
No	79.04%	2,470
I don't know	5.15%	161
TOTAL		3,125



Question: I get paid maternity leave from work

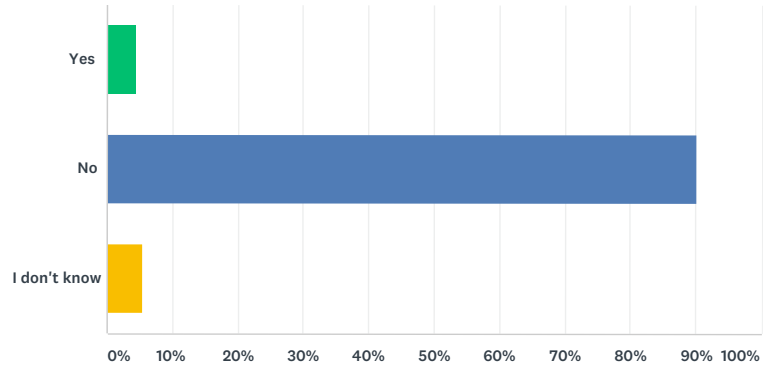
Answered: 3,200 Skipped: 80



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	10.94%	350
No	66.00%	2,112
I don't know	23.06%	738
TOTAL		3,200

Question: I have a work pension

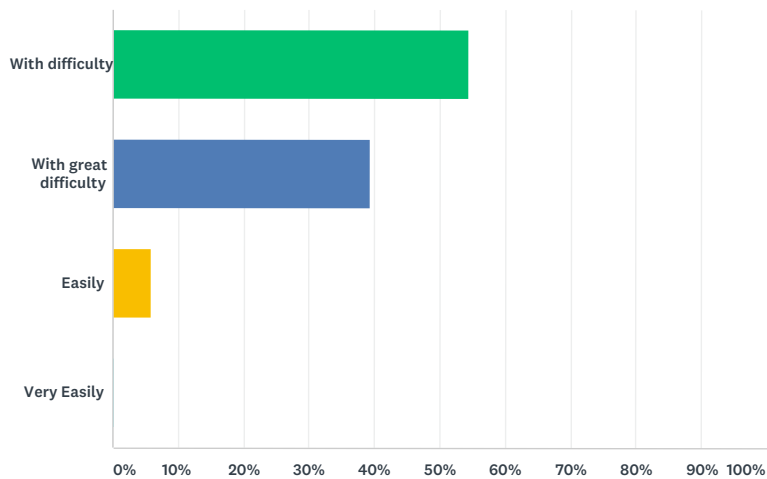
Answered: 3,198 Skipped: 82



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	4.44%	142
No	90.15%	2,883
I don't know	5.41%	173
TOTAL		3,198

Question: I am able to make ends meet with my current income

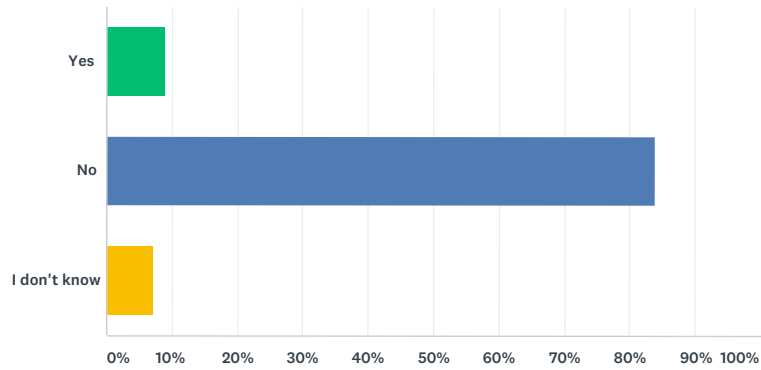
Answered: 3,192 Skipped: 88



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
With difficulty	54.45%	1,738
With great difficulty	39.38%	1,257
Easily	5.92%	189
Very Easily	0.25%	8
TOTAL		3,192

Question: I am able to cope with unexpected expenses (e.g. replacement washing machine or boiler)

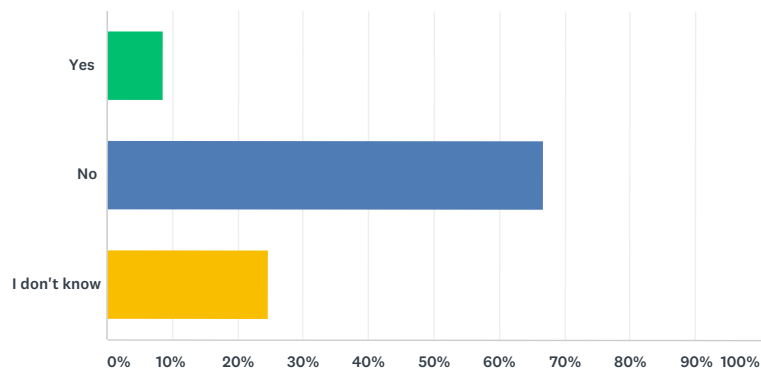
Answered: 3,190 Skipped: 90



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	9.09%	290
No	83.86%	2,675
I don't know	7.05%	225
TOTAL		3,190

Question: If things stay the same, I will still be working in the Early Years Sector in 5 years' time

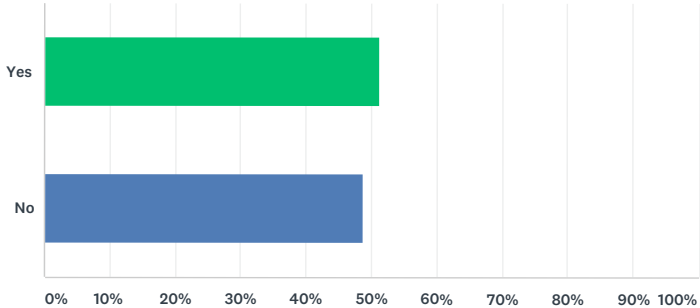
Answered: 3,199 Skipped: 81



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	8.60%	275
No	66.74%	2,135
I don't know	24.66%	789
TOTAL		3,199

Question: I am actively looking for another job

Answered: 3,195 Skipped: 85

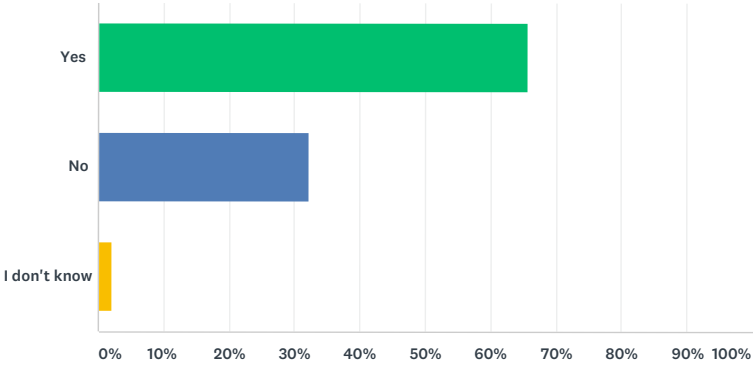


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	51.27%	1,638
No	48.73%	1,557
TOTAL		3,195



Question: I pay for educational materials out of my own pocket

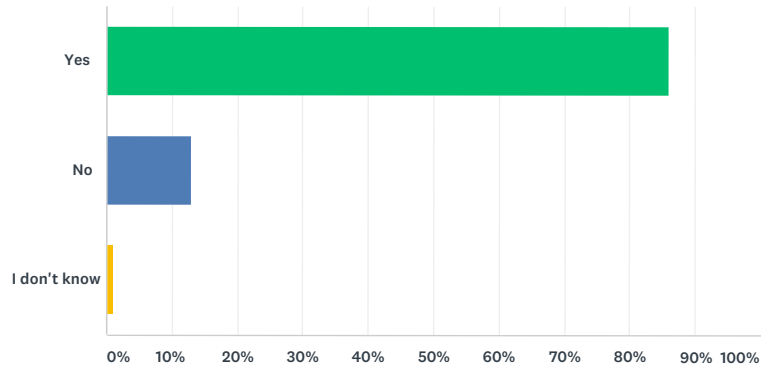
Answered: 3,195 Skipped: 85



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	65.76%	2,101
No	32.14%	1,027
I don't know	2.10%	67
TOTAL		3,195

Question: I do work training in my own time

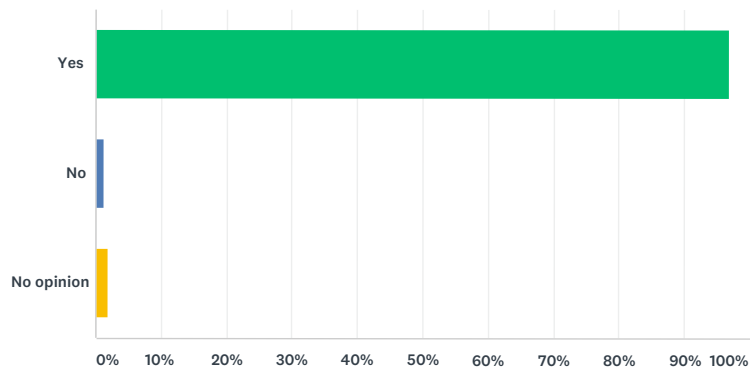
Answered: 3,197 Skipped: 83



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	85.99%	2,749
No	12.92%	413
I don't know	1.09%	35
TOTAL		3,197

Question: There should be a pay scale for the Early Years Sector?

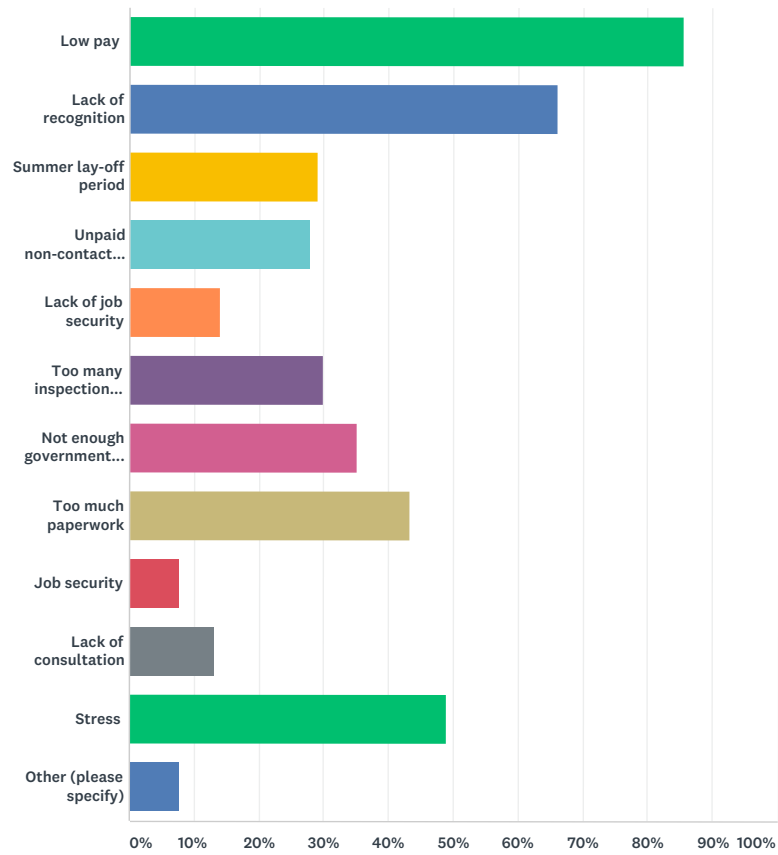
Answered: 3,265 Skipped: 15



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	96.78%	3,160
No	1.32%	43
No opinion	1.90%	62
TOTAL		3,265

Question: What are the biggest issues for you (please choose up to 3)

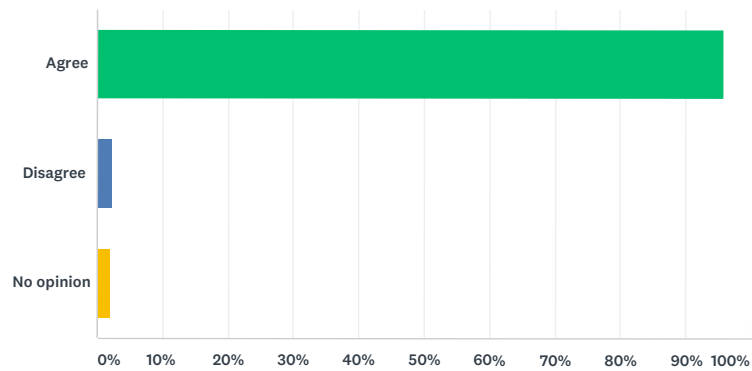
Answered: 3,278 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Low pay	85.54%	2,804
Lack of recognition	66.20%	2,170
Summer lay-off period	29.01%	951
Unpaid non-contact time	27.88%	914
Lack of job security	14.03%	460
Too many inspection bodies	29.84%	978
Not enough government funding	35.17%	1,153
Too much paperwork	43.35%	1,421
Job security	7.84%	257
Lack of consultation	13.21%	433
Stress	49.05%	1,608
Other (please specify)	7.75%	254
Total Respondents: 3,278		

Question: Wages for early years professionals should be fully funded by government, as they do for primary and secondary school teachers

Answered: 3,267 Skipped: 13

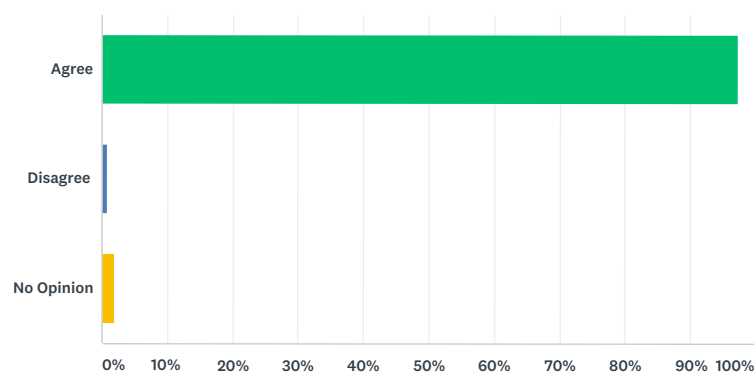


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Agree	95.78%	3,129
Disagree	2.20%	72
No opinion	2.02%	66
TOTAL		3,267



Question: There should be a professional body for the Early Years sector, like the Teaching Council

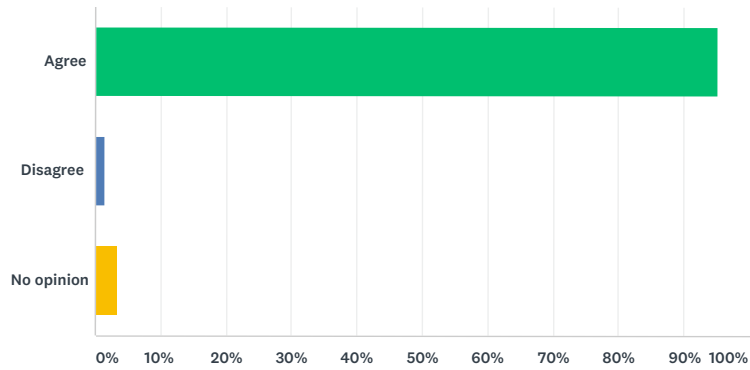
Answered: 3,263 Skipped: 17



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Agree	97.36%	3,177
Disagree	0.83%	27
No Opinion	1.81%	59
TOTAL		3,263

Question: There should be additional funding available for back office work administration/HR/finance/cleaning/catering

Answered: 3,266 Skipped: 14

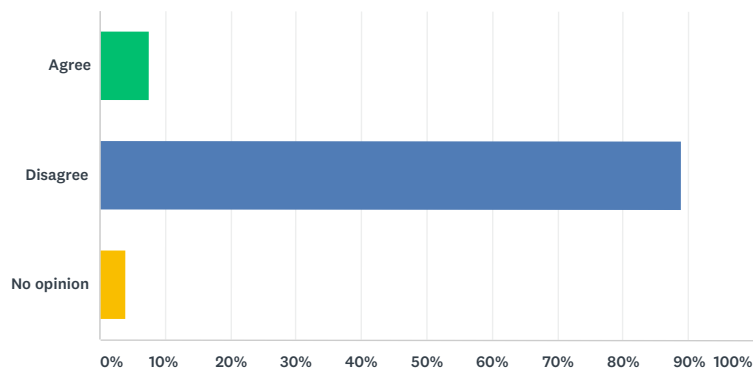


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Agree	95.19%	3,109
Disagree	1.38%	45
No opinion	3.43%	112
TOTAL		3,266



Question: The government adequately invests in the early years sector

Answered: 3,267 Skipped: 13



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Agree	7.62%	249
Disagree	88.86%	2,903
No opinion	4.04%	132
Total Respondents: 3,267		



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