

Underqualified candidates are

Settings are seeing an increase in candidates who are unaware that their qualifications are not

- Childcare students continuing to enrol on online Level 3 / Level 2 courses that they mistakenly believe are full and relevant.
- Nursery group says it has seen an increase in job applicants with qualifications that don't provide a licence to practise.

Nurseries are reporting an increase in the number of job applicants who have undertaken online childcare courses mistakenly believing they were full and relevant qualifications, which they say is having a 'huge' impact on a sector experiencing a worsening recruitment crisis.

This is not a new problem, but according to Sophie Hayter, N Family Club's apprenticeship manager, who supports the nursery group's compliance team in checking early years qualifications are full and relevant, it appears to be increasing. She believes this could be having a 'huge impact' on the sector, which is already under great pressure with a worsening recruitment crisis, 'making it harder for employers and their settings'.

Nursery World reported back in 2017 that recruitment agencies and nursery groups were concerned about 'significant' numbers of early years job applicants that had undertaken online childcare courses mistakenly believing they were full and relevant. Five years prior in 2012, we ran a story to say there was 'widespread confusion' among childcare students about the status of qualifications run by distance learning colleges and whether they were full and relevant.

Confusion is rife over Level 3 online courses

The Department for Education



Some course providers have now changed their descriptions

(DfE) requires all early years providers to have a minimum number of suitably qualified staff working at all times. These staff members must hold a qualification deemed by the DfE as full and relevant. All full and relevant qualifications, which allow staff to be counted in ratios within a setting, are listed on the department's Early Years Qualifications list. There are more than 50 full and relevant Level 3 qualifications included.

A Facebook group set up by Hayter, who has 32 years' experience in early years and training, reveals the extent to which confusion continues to exist among the sector about which qualifications provide a licence to practise. There are multiple posts every week on the group, which has 18,000 members, from nursery managers asking whether a job candidate's qualification is full and relevant to posts from individuals who say they have spent money on a course that they believed would enable them to be fully qualified, when that wasn't the case.

After *Nursery World* contacted one online training provider mentioned on the Facebook page about one of its unregulated courses, it added a line to its webpage to make it clear the qualification is not full and relevant.

Hayter said, 'The posts in the group suggest an increase in people applying for jobs that do not hold a full and relevant qualification, which they are unaware of.'

'The issue with many of these training providers is that they are offering qualifications that aren't full and relevant, but they are marketing them in a way that suggests they are.'

'[People] are then applying for jobs, believing they are fully qualified, when they are not.'

Premier Early Years Training, a CACHE/NCFE-accredited training provider, said it has had several learners transfer to it from online colleges.

Director Lisa Tray said, 'We are frustrated with the number of courses that are being sold as full and relevant. We try and help where possible and have several blogs on our website and social media trying to help and offer the correct information to guide people.'

'We have reported some of the companies to our awarding body who do deal with the situation as well.'

Call for tighter regulation on marketing courses

Hayter said she wants tighter regulations for courses so the marketing by companies is clear about what learners will come away with upon completion.

However, NCFE told *Nursery World* that in order to gain accreditation from it as an awarding body, training providers running 'customised qualifications' must adhere to stipulations that include how a qualification is advertised and promoted (see: <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/learning-for-work/accreditation-and-employer-services/customised-qualifications/>).

Nursery World is unaware of the terms and conditions, if any, of other awarding organisations.

Janet King, sector manager of education and early years at NCFE, told *Nursery World*, 'We get lots of calls asking if qualifications are full and relevant. We'd encourage learners to contact an awarding organisation for advice or go to their local college/provider in the first instance.'

'Unregulated courses do hold some value as an introduction to the sector, for example, or for the purpose of specialised CPD. However, if learners want a qualification that will enable them to join the workforce, they should ensure any course they undertake will provide a licence to practise upon completion. Our dedicated team working on accredited, non-regulated provision follow stringent review processes and impose mandatory stipulations that must be followed when such products are marketed to ensure students are clear about the qualifications they are taking.'

Online courses that aren't full and relevant

Examples of online courses that are not full and relevant, flagged on the 'Early Years & Teaching Assistants Training and Qualifications (UK)' Facebook group, include:

- **The Online Learning College's 'Early Years Level 3' course** states, at the top of the page, 'This Early Years

adding to recruitment crisis

full and relevant, which means that they are not suitable to fill roles. By **Katy Morton**

Level 3 course teaches the knowledge required to work in a day nursery or pre-school and provide the greatest possible care and support throughout the most important part of a person's life.' To find more detail about the course and that it is a 'knowledge-only qualification', you have to scroll further down the page to the 'quality licence scheme' tab, which states, 'The completion of this course alone does not lead to a regulated qualification, but may be used as evidence of knowledge and skills gained.'

■ **NCC Home Learning's CACHE Level 3 Award in Childcare and Education RQF.** *After Nursery World* contacted the online training provider, it added a paragraph to the course information to say that the course isn't full and relevant. It states, 'This is a knowledge-only course and is not "full and relevant" when applied to the children to staff ratios.' It then directs students looking for the full and relevant Early Years Educator Qualification to another page within the website. When asked why it had included the additional

information, a spokesperson for NCC Home Learning said, 'As you have implied the readers of your magazine need as much information as possible to the point where something needs identifying what it is and furthermore what it isn't, we have included this statement.'

■ **The Open Study College's CACHE Level 2 certificate for the Children and Young Peoples [sic] Workforce.**

The course says, 'Upon successful completion of your assignments and workplace assessments, you will achieve an CACHE Level 2 Certificate for the Children and Young Peoples Workforce.' This qualification ceased to be full and relevant for early years in August 2019 and was replaced with the Level 2 early years practitioner diploma.

Nursery World contacted the above online colleges for a response.

A spokesperson for NCC Home Learning said, 'We offer a range of courses in many subject areas and will always include information that is accurate; for what it's worth, we do deliver the Diploma for the Early Years Workforce (EYE).

'We take seriously any suggestions that we have misled any of our learners and would be happy to investigate and work for a resolution, although we are confident in our students' diligence and don't believe this to be necessary.'

A spokesperson for the Online Learning College said, 'The course has been designed by Oakwood Home Learning to meet specific learners' and/or employers' requirements which cannot be satisfied through current regulated qualifications. It has been endorsed under the Quality Licence Scheme.

'The completion of this course alone does not lead to a regulated qualification, but may be used as evidence of knowledge and skills gained. Regulated qualification refers to those qualifications that are regulated by Ofqual/CCEA/Qualification Wales.

'The learning outcomes of the course have been benchmarked at the level shown against level descriptors published by Ofqual to indicate the depth of study and level of demand/complexity involved in successful completion by the learner.

'We have a student support line and online chat enabling learners to ask questions before enrolling on a course with us.

Our course advisors never mislead learners. We also offer a 14-day money-back guarantee so that learners can get a refund should they decide the course is not for them.'

The Open Study College did not quote a response.

An Ofqual spokesperson said, 'Our rules require awarding organisations to take all reasonable steps to ensure that training providers do not advertise or promote their qualifications in a way that could mislead learners.'

'We have checked the websites of the training providers you have quoted as well as what the awarding organisations say about these qualifications. We are unable to identify any content which would appear to misrepresent these qualifications as full and relevant.'

'Ofqual has not yet received any complaints about these matters. But if we find evidence of training providers advertising or promoting a regulated qualification in a way that would mislead learners, then we would expect the awarding organisation to investigate. Failure to take all reasonable steps would put an awarding organisation in breach of its regulatory conditions.'

case study: Level 3 online course

Jessica Barker told *Nursery World* she paid 'hundreds of pounds' for a qualification which turned out not to be full and relevant, something she only learnt after securing a Level 3 position within a nursery. She is now working as an unqualified member of staff at the setting and has enrolled on a Level 3 course that will provide her with a licence to practise.

She said, 'I got into a conversation with the manager of the nursery I was using, and she suggested I undertake an early years course to secure employment within the setting. She

advised me to look for a course that was CACHE/NCFE-accredited.

'At the time, I was pregnant with my second child so decided to do an online course while on maternity leave. I used a credit card to pay for the course, which cost hundreds of pounds.'

Barker said that upon completion of the course, she secured a Level 3 practitioner position at the nursery, which is attached to a school. It wasn't until six months into the job that it became apparent she didn't have the basic knowledge needed for the position when uploading photos onto

Tapestry and not knowing any of the Early Learning Goals.

'My manager then checked my qualification again and realised it was not full and relevant,' she explained.

Barker undertook Oxbridge Home Learning's NCFE/CACHE Level 3 Award in Childcare and Education at the end of 2019. She said that since doing the course, the wording has changed slightly on the website about how it is marketed. *Nursery World* is not aware of the exact wording change.

Oxbridge Home Learning failed to provide a response.