



#mityey
Men In The Early Years

How can we attract more men into London's Early Years workforce?



Introduction

There is a growing recognition in the UK's early childhood education (ECE) sector, that inclusion of more male teachers and practitioners in the workforce could make a vital contribution to the ongoing development of a more gender egalitarian society – as well as giving statutory, private and voluntary sector ECE providers access to a much-needed new source of recruits and trainees.

The proportion of male staff in the ECE workforce remains at 2% in England. In the UK, the Teacher Training Agency and the DfES set a target in 1998 for the early years workforce to increase male recruitment to 6% by 2004, but little progress was made and the target was allowed to remain unmet. It is worth noting that by 2016, 26% of teachers in England were men; the proportion was greater among secondary teachers (38% of whom are men) than primary (15%).

In some countries, getting more men into childcare has been as a crucial element in a mix of policy measures designed to increase the likelihood of gender equality. For example in 2014 Norway set a goal “to increase the share of men employed in kindergartens to 20% and men employed in primary schools to 40%”, alongside a raft of other gender equality measures in working life, family, welfare and education.

There are many likely societal benefits that could arise from opening the ECE sector to more men. These include:

- the sector becoming better equipped to counter gender stereotypical expectations (among managers, practitioners and parents) about women's and men's suitability as carers and educators of young children;
- the sector reaching out to a bigger pool of potential recruits, at a time of expansion to achieve the government's 30 hours-per-week free childcare offer;
- children being better supported to grow up free of restrictive gender stereotypes, enabling them to make less gender-constrained choices about their own careers and gender roles within their families as they mature;
- men gaining job satisfaction and developing successful, rewarding careers in a field that might have otherwise been closed to them.

The UK ECE workforce's stubborn resistance to change is not unique; it is part of a global phenomenon. But some countries, for example Norway, Belgium and Germany, have made some small positive advances. One example is the More Men in Kitas project in Germany, which has received significant government funding.

In 2013-15 the Fatherhood Institute led a Department for Education-funded project aimed at supporting local recruitment of more male staff and volunteers in early years and childcare services. Our role was to help early education and childcare services develop and implement strategies to recruit and retain more male staff and volunteers. We worked with key managers and staff in four local authorities, drawing on emerging good practice and local surveys of practice. We shared ideas for local strategies with four other local authorities, and worked in different ways with them to support implementation. Two London boroughs (Lambeth and Southwark) were part of this work, along with six other authorities (Brighton, Bradford, Leicester, Milton Keynes, Southampton and York).

We produced a report outlining key strategies arising from this project, and identifying the wide-ranging and substantial challenges obstacles standing in the way of progress.¹

More recently there have been signs of renewed interest in the men-into-childcare agenda, including two national conferences (the latest in July 2017 in Bradford and with a third planned for 2018, in Bristol), and mention of the value of increased male participation the DfE's 'Early Years Workforce Strategy' (2017).

Following on from our DfE-funded project the FI, in partnership with the East London FE college, City Gateway, obtained two-year funding (2015-17) from Trust for London to develop, deliver and evaluate a systematic multi-agency approach to encouraging young men to access training, volunteering and career opportunities in ECEC in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets; and to test these approaches with excluded/poor young men in the district, working closely with them to adapt the project throughout. We published our evaluation of this project, *Jobs for the Boys*, earlier this year.² Its findings also form the basis of the current paper.

Arising from the Tower Hamlets work, the FI has also been developing a campaign (#MITEY)³, aimed at sharing thinking with and between local networks; providing a national voice for men-into-childcare advocacy; developing practical, evidence-based resources; and exploring the role of greater national coordination in bringing the gender composition of ECE closer in line with other parts of the education sector.

In Section 1 of this paper we present some key findings from our work in Tower Hamlets, in an easy-to-digest form that will, we hope, stimulate discussion and be helpful to ECE providers considering and developing strategies to attract more men into the workforce. Section 2 presents a *schema* for embedding a pilot project in a local area. In Section 3 we present along with a summary of some commonly expressed opinions and beliefs about men in childcare (even among managers and practitioners at the forefront of efforts to boost male recruitment) – and responses to help unpick these unhelpful myths and stereotypes. Supporting practitioners to rethink such positions is an important element in FI training courses and workshops.

We hope all ECE providers in London (and beyond) will find this paper useful, and that it will help nudge more along the road towards a more gender-equal workforce. Do please sign up to the #MITEY campaign, and contact us directly if you would like to discuss some training or future joint work.

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1 Available for free download from the FI website: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Men-into-Childcare-PDF.pdf>

2 Available for free download from the FI website: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Jobs-for-the-boys-Trust-for-London-evaluation.pdf>

3 Find out more from the FI website: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2017/men-in-the-early-years-mitey/>

Section 1. Key findings from Tower Hamlets

Background

No known initiatives in the UK (or overseas) have had significant short- or long-term positive impacts on encouraging substantial numbers of men into early childhood education and care (ECEC) in traditional settings.

Unfunded networks which aim to offer mutual support for male childcare practitioners tend not to remain active for any length of time, and their impact on recruitment of men into the workforce is unclear.

The extent to which campaigns that challenge social norms like the lack of gender diversity in the ECEC workforce must go hand-in-hand with detailed strategy at institutional level, is unknown.

Reshaping the gender culture

It has been suggested to us by many stakeholders that replacing the term 'childcare' with a more 'professional' sounding label, like 'Early Childhood Education and Care', may be fruitful as a way of attracting more men and boys to this work. It may also be helpful to build in associations with education, teaching, health, leisure, sports; and to link with local or national apprenticeship/ training initiatives.

We have found that many stakeholders in the sector lack any real understanding of why encouraging men's employment in ECEC might matter, or how it could be achieved (even if, when challenged, they will often express goodwill towards the idea). Many do not see that 'special steps' might be needed if we are to fight the gender homogeneity of the workforce.

However, we have also found that with the right opportunities to learn, discuss and reflect together, stakeholders can be supported to understand the importance of men's employment in ECEC; differences and similarities within, and between, the sexes when engaging with young children; and the value of both sexes' engaging with children in diverse and non-stereotypical ways.

The topic of men in ECEC is a critical element of any project relating to this sector, adding reach, credibility and impact, and building the leverage necessary for broader policy conversations – including about wider and more positive engagement with fathers and 'whole families' in ECEC provision.

Safeguarding policy is an important issue that male workers want to discuss; and differences/similarities in male/female nurturing and child-developmental activities are a valuable topic of discussion for both male and female workers. Men in

Childcare Forums may also usefully support male workers' career trajectories, through providing information and support to the men.

In communities with substantial minority ethnic populations, the issue of fathers and male workers entering 'female spaces' must be explored with relevant local parenting and other community and religious organisations, as well as with any local partner in the project.

Careers advice and training

Career pathways need to be well researched and presented to potential trainees, with remuneration levels and the qualifications needed, clearly set out.

Schools should help quite young boys and girls think about and understand non-traditional occupations, and should continue these conversations as career- and subject- choices loom. Evidence suggests that this is not happening routinely, even though some initiatives designed to encourage girls to consider courses and careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering and medicine) are well-established.

Our experience suggests that if ECEC courses are routinely promoted to boys and young men in schools and at careers events by staff confident about, and committed to, recruiting men, and with back-up materials that promote the benefits to all and show men engaging with children, recruitment of some males is likely to be successful.⁴

Social marketing strategies to reach out to individual young men are likely to be of value, as this form of marketing develops in sophistication.

Despite a dearth of stock images of men working with children (particularly BaME men), striking male-focused materials can be produced easily, and prove popular and impactful. There is a need to develop a library of images of a range of men engaging with children of all ages, and with fathers and mothers, in a professional capacity.

Computerised careers advice services, programmed to challenge gender stereotypes in career choice and to flag up links between ECEC and education, teaching, health, sports and leisure opportunities, may also serve to break down barriers to male employment in ECEC.

4 Whether the sex of the recruiter is significant is not known, but should be tested. Male volunteers who already work locally in ECEC accompanying college recruiters might well add value, and could provide such men, particularly if they are members of a local Forum and could later reflect on the experience, with a volunteering activity that to value and learn from.

Adapting the curriculum

Learning from reviewing the childcare curriculum of a leading training provider in east London, and from anecdotal evidence in relation to both the content and delivery of other childcare courses offered in the UK, suggests that if these are successfully to include males and prepare females to work alongside men in childcare, modifications will be needed. At the very least, additional NOTES FOR TUTORS should be provided, together with gender-awareness training.

Widening recruitment

To attract men into childcare in large numbers, wages for childcare at entry level and beyond need to be equal to, or higher than, wages in other comparable-skill-level occupations.

Recruitment of men into childcare should not be limited to young men, but to men considering employment throughout the life cycle. Recruiting older men who have gained experience and confidence as fathers, stepfathers and grandfathers, as well as through other employment, should be considered.

There is some evidence that 'men in childcare' is of substantial interest to the media, both widely and in the trade press, meaning that there are opportunities to challenge and change the mainstream narrative – and to widen the recruitment net.

Using social media to raise awareness of the wider significance of the 'men-in-childcare' issue (as we have started to do through #MITEY) and to challenge the cultural and societal assumptions that lead to the exclusion of men from this sector serves to build momentum towards change, join up local projects that are attempting similar things, and encourage individual men.

Section 2. A *schema* for embedding a pilot project in a local area

A major learning point from the Men in Childcare project in East London has been that working at a micro-level in a Local Authority, with 'buy in' at a high level, has the potential to impact positively on the recruitment of males into the childcare workforce, and to challenge cultural and social norms.

The need to employ a local Implementation Manager is clear: such an individual must already work, or have worked recently, in the area, and have good contacts with education and employment organisations, along with other appropriate local organisations.

Learning from attempts at local partnerships suggests it is important to establish links with more than one key partner from the outset, in very good time and with sufficient opportunities for preparation and 'getting to know you'. Among other things, this will spread risk.

Wider partnerships/ local engagement may also be valuable, with ongoing investment in those relationships, and a meaningful budget and personnel allocated to this. Key elements of a 'holistic' approach to increasing the number of men working in early childhood services would include the following activities:

1. **Lessons in schools** that encourage students to reflect on gender roles, to encourage both boys and girls to consider and understand 'non-traditional' occupations
2. Collect and publish **annual data on workforce diversity** in early years, to include sex of managers and employees. This should be collated at local, regional and national levels.
3. **Explicit national/ regional/ local policies** to encourage male employment in the ECE sector. Such policies could include mission statements and objectives, guidelines, training, targets, audits, reporting, ring-fenced funding, and incentives.
4. An **ongoing campaign to promote men in early years** (see #MITEY above). This could be national, regional or local (if a pilot were established locally)^[1] and would include dissemination of case studies, statistics, trends, good practice, opinion and relevant research.
5. Recruit **Champions to promote the issue**. Nationally, that would mean Members of Parliament and preferably a Minister; locally, this could include influential local councillors as well as local authority staff; within an agency or a workplace, an individual (or individuals) with some influence and status. Parents could also be effective Champions.

6. Make available accessible **high quality training in early years that is consciously male-inclusive:**
 - Free or subsidised training for youth to follow careers in early years
 - Free or subsidised training for career-change-older-men (and women)
 - 'Reserved' places for males on training courses
 - 'Proofing' of content of early years training courses and materials, to ensure they are male-friendly/ male-inclusive
 - Training for course tutors in addressing, including and supporting male students.
 - Personnel recruiting students to early years courses to be trained and supplied with materials and 'scripts' to help them present careers in early years to males.
 - Such personnel could include school/ college careers advisors, individuals who recruit students onto college courses, employers, Job Centre staff etc.
7. **Recruitment materials** for early years training and employment to be **systematically 'proofed'** to ensure they are male-inclusive
8. Materials that publicise early years services more generally, also need to **show men working in early years, as routine.**
9. **Training/ guidelines for employers and managers** in early years settings, to include the following:
 - transparent and robust safeguarding policies
 - communicating with parents about men in early years
 - supporting male workers
 - supporting female staff to support male colleagues
 - reviewing services and the materials that promote them for male- and father-inclusiveness
 - reviewing the physical environment
 - self-auditing policy, practice, services and staffing on an annual basis.
10. **CPD training** to include the value of engaging men in early years and ways of supporting them.
11. Establish the **best possible pay scales and career trajectories.**
12. Establish **community and educational implementation officers** in the locality.
13. Fund **local and regional peer support forums** for men working in early years and considering employment in the sector.

Section 3. Challenging some common myths and stereotypes

From our discussions with ECE managers, practitioners and others during the Tower Hamlets project, at the #MITEY17 conference in Bradford and in our recent London workshop, we have identified some key position statements commonly heard in discussions about getting more men into childcare – and present them here with what we feel are valid responses to each. Challenging myths and stereotypes is central to progressing the men-into-childcare agenda, and is at the core of FI's training courses. We hope you find these useful...

1 Men are naturally less suited to caring roles

Men's participation in hands-on caring for children has increased hugely over recent decades – so there are plenty of men out there with experience of looking after and nurturing the future generation.

Dads' average childcare time per day was just 15 mins in 1975, and 2 hours 30 minutes in 2007; it is likely to have risen further since then.

Today, only 22% of UK families with dependent children comprise a working father and a stay-at-home mother (Connolly et al., 2013). This is the lowest percentage ever recorded in the UK. In 1961, fathers' share of care of preschoolers was 12-15% of mothers' (Fisher et al., 1999). By 1999 it was about one third (Fisher et al., 1999). Today it approaches half (ONS, 2016a).

Fathers have far fewer opportunities to learn about caring for their new baby and healthcare systems set up mothers as the conduit of information to fathers.

But scientists have found no biologically-based differences between the sexes in capacity to interact sensitively with or provide intimate care to infants (Parke, 2008). Fathers' responsiveness seems to vary depending on the degree to which they assume responsibility for the care of their infants (Lamb and Lewis, 2010), ie the more they do, the better they get. When similarly supported, both mothers and fathers develop childcare skills at the same rate (Myers, 1982).

We also know that similar brain changes take place among 'primary caretaker' mothers and fathers, and that hormonal changes take place in men who look after children. In short, the male body becomes 'primed' for caretaking – and this effect endures: hormonal responses are more rapid in experienced fathers (Kim et al, under review; Atzil et al, 2012, Gray & Anderson, 2010).

What this shows us is that, whilst many men may present as less *confident* at looking after children, and especially the more intimate aspects of caregiving, this does not mean that they are less *competent or capable*. Rather it suggests that some may need additional support to increase their confidence.

2 Men don't want to work in ECE because of low pay

Low pay is a source of dissatisfaction for a minority of male workers and there is, of course, debate about the unjustifiably low status of ECE generally. This should not be viewed as any more of a barrier for men than it is for women, though.

Men work in low paid jobs in a variety of sectors, and for many different reasons. We need to move beyond the idea that all men need 'main breadwinner' salaries, just as we need to stop assuming that all women will be happy in lower paid roles.

It is also unhelpful to focus on low pay as a barrier to male recruitment, because without a magic wand to solve the problem, where does that leave us...in a sector that will never change!

3 Recruiting men to work in ECE is social engineering

If you were designing your ECE provision from scratch, would you populate your workforce with 98% women, demonstrating in the clearest possible way to young boys and girls that outside the home, society entrusts caregiving almost entirely to women?

Or would you create a profession that reflected the diversity of the population; that gave children as broad an experience of caring adults as possible in the early years; and that sought out the best educators and caregivers from all genders, ethnicities, sexualities and cultural backgrounds...giving everyone the chance to contribute to the vital work of supporting the next generation's education and development?

Now think: which of those two positions sounds most like social engineering?

4 Paedophiles are attracted to ECE, and are mostly men

It is essential that we respond to the threat of child abuse constructively, rather than allowing it to become a reason to exclude men from the workforce. Women can and do abuse children too; *child protection should always be our first priority, regardless of staff members' gender.*

So...we need to put in place comprehensive safeguarding policies and procedures, place them at the very heart of our practice, and enforce them universally. Do we need special safeguarding procedures for male employees? No – because that undermines men's capacity to care effectively for children. We need male and female staff to operate on a level playing field, rather than seeing men as 'lesser' and viewing them with suspicion.

5 We need more men in ECE because men and women bring different skills to the table...and because boys need role models

Managers and practitioners who may consider themselves egalitarian in approach, often make statements like these.

Such assertions betray a worrying misreading of men's and women's potential contributions to ECE (see also box 1 above), and of child development. Evidence suggests that children of both genders look to adults of both genders as they construct their own, individualized understandings of the world, and of the constraints and possibilities of their own gendered selves.

As such, a male worker's presence in ECE is, in and of itself, unlikely to achieve much for any child, any more than a female worker's mere presence would: in both cases, what matters is the quality of each individual worker's personality and practice.

We often hear that men are better at the 'rough and tumble', active or outdoor play, and that this is of particular benefit to boys. There is little evidence for either assertion (some women do 'rough and tumble' play and some men do not; some boys are less inclined towards such play, and some girls more so).

Even if all men were 'rough and tumble' specialists (and women not), and all boys favoured such activities (and girls didn't), where would this leave children whose ECE was delivered entirely by women? At the same time, where would it leave children looked after entirely by men – who presumably are 'less good' at the softer, more caring side of ECE work? In both cases, severely lacking, presumably!

We need to recognize men's considerable contribution to, and capacity to contribute to caregiving; ECE providers' discounting, mocking or failing to protect men's/ fathers' caretaking amount to sex discrimination (which overburdens women and mothers with caring responsibilities, and overburdens men and fathers with earning responsibilities).

Surely the ideal scenario is a mixed gender workforce in which staff of both genders are fully competent and confident at the full range of activities and support from which children might benefit? Within that context, men modelling caring masculinities can be seen as important for boys and girls.

6 Parents don't want men looking after their children

Surveys suggest that most parents (in one recent survey, 84%) would be happy to place their children in an ECE setting that employed male workers. Some parents will of course express doubts - the culture we live in is extremely 'maternalist' and there are strong beliefs about women being more 'natural' as caregivers, especially with babies and young children, so it would be surprising if you didn't encounter negativity towards men in your workforce.

But as professionals your duty is to provide children with the best education and care possible; why would you limit their experience of diverse, competent and well-qualified caregivers, based purely on their gender?

If a parent said they didn't want their child looked after by someone of a particular ethnicity, sexuality, religious or cultural background, how would you respond?

Why should gender be any different?

If you would like more support to improve your recruitment of men – including training and strategic consultancy - please email Jeremy Davies, Head of Communications at j.davies@fatherhoodinstitute.org.

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