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EARLY YEARS TEACHERS CALL ON NEW GOVERNMENT TO THINK EARLY YEARS FIRST WHEN PLANNING EDUCATION

Ahead of the election, nursery and early years teachers from across Sussex are urging the new government to listen more closely to the needs of those working in the sector. The comments were made at an education conference organised by Tapestry, the edtech company, which brought together leading practitioners and academics to discuss the state of early years education.

Participants had **three big issues** they wanted the new government to address urgently:

1. Listen more closely to the needs of those working in the sector
2. Improve support and provision for children with special education needs and disabilities
3. Stop the proposed baseline assessment testing of children aged 4 to 5 years

Guest speakers at the conference included Beatrice Merrick, CEO of Early Education, the national membership organisation for the sector, she urged practitioners to respond to the DfE's consultation on EYFS and said:

"It is essential that those working in the early years sector are aware of the Department's consultation on the EYFS and have a chance to give their views. As a national membership charity, Early Education is keen to get out and talk to practitioners across the sector about the implications of the proposed changes and welcomed the chance to attend the Tapestry Education Conference, and meet early years practitioners from across Sussex. Despite the election, I urge all practitioners to get involved in the consultation and ensure their voice is heard."

Dr Helen Edwards, who convened the conference and is the co-founder of Tapestry, said:

"Research shows that early years education provides the essential foundation which helps children to flourish in primary school and beyond. The election promises from all parties are about increasing free access to childcare. However, the focus on funding to support parents and families means that the importance of valuing the professional development of early years staff is at risk of being overlooked. We want to send a message to all those campaigning in the general election that high quality early years provision is a right for all young children. "

The feedback from conference participants come at a critical time for early years education. Nationally the well-being of early years practitioners is at an all-time low with three quarters (74%) admitting to feeling

regularly stressed as a result of the job.¹ The sector also faces acute shortages of qualified early years teachers².

Rebecca Swindells, co-manager of Blue Door Nursery in Seaford, who attended the conference said: *“As a nursery owner I want government to invest in the sector so that all our children get the best start in life. Currently our outgoing costs are spiralling and the inadequate funding levels paid by the current government have created an extremely worrying time for us all in the sector. Children with special educational needs are a particular concern for me: referral times are lengthy, support services offered by local authorities are stretched to breaking point and consequently children, their parents and nursery staff suffer. At the moment the referral to support process takes much too long, leaving parents and carers, as well as nursery staff, without the help they need.”*

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Notes to editors

About Tapestry

Tapestry is an online learning journal which enables educators to capture children’s learning and development throughout the day.

Tapestry has been developed by Foundation Stage Forum Ltd, an educational technology company which was founded in 2012 and is based in Lewes. Tapestry has more than 17,000 accounts and is used in more than 40 countries.

Using sophisticated digital technologies, Tapestry is changing the way children’s learning journeys are recorded in early years education also helping practitioners to use their time as effectively as possible. Tapestry is also transforming the way parents and carers stay in touch with what their young children are doing throughout the day and helps to strengthen the link between young children’s development at home and in their early years setting.

Tapestry is the brainchild of technologist Steve Edwards and his early years practitioner wife, Dr Helen Edwards. They are deeply involved in the early years sector and previously created the successful Foundation Stage Forum which has more than 30,000 members. Tapestry is also a sponsor of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Childcare and Early Education.

For more information visit: <https://tapestry.info>

¹ The Pre-school Learning Alliance 2018 - https://www.evalliance.org.uk/sites/default/files/minds_matter_report_pre-school_learning_alliance.pdf

² Save the Children research 2018 - <https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/news/media-centre/press-releases/england-faces-acute-shortage-of-nursery-teachers>