



# Initial teacher

You're never too old to learn something new, says Sarah Steel, who enrolled for an EYITT course a full 15 years after leaving academic education



Over the past five years I have watched with interest the various initiatives designed to upskill the early years workforce, including the development of the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) qualification. Whilst I welcomed the additional qualification, I did have concerns about the rigour and content of some of the early courses, and I have employed more than one EYP within our group who had a lot of theoretical knowledge, but were unable to apply it in practice and certainly did not have many leadership skills.

## Introducing...

However, last year, when the course was overhauled and the Early Years Initial Teacher Training programme (EYITT) came into being, I decided it was time for me to return to education and develop some up-to-date practical skills. It has been an interesting and rewarding experience, and this is an opportunity to share some of my experiences with NMT readers.

The EYITT is available as a one-year, part-time or work-based course for graduates in any subject. Candidates not only need to have a

grade C in maths and English at GCSE as well as a first degree, but also have to pass the professional skills tests for teachers, which seems a rather bizarre requirement, given that the course does not actually attract qualified teacher status. Yet again, early years is the poor relation, but at least candidates get a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) qualification on completion.

## Fully funded

One of the real attractions of the EYITT programme is that it is currently fully funded, despite many adverts in the trade press, I still think it's a bit of a hidden secret. The course fees of £7,000 are covered by the Government. So, the student doesn't have to pay anything.

On top of that, the setting in which the student works is given a £7,000 grant to support the student's training, which can be used to pay for supply cover whilst they are at university and on placements, as well as funding other forms of support, such as buying books and other learning resources.

So, if any of you have anyone in your settings who has a degree (in anything from graphic design to

mechanical engineering!), then do encourage them to go to your nearest university open days and find out more while it lasts.

## The course

What does the course involve? There are five main elements to the programme, which require students to:

- spend approximately 30 days on campus, attending lectures and seminars on topics relating to assignments and also on the practical aspects of being an early years teacher
- complete three written assignments, which contribute towards two Masters modules. These are 3,000- and 5,000-word practice-focused essays, asking students to examine how theory has informed practice in their own settings
- compile a personal development portfolio during the course, which involves providing evidence to show that you meet the various requirements of the eight Teacher's Standards. This includes observations of your practice and supporting documentation from your everyday work

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# training... at last!



- spend two weeks working in a primary school at Key Stage 1
- spend another week working in a children's centre.

Throughout the course, students are allocated a personal tutor and a mentor to support them in both their practical work and their academic study.

## A personal response

So what's it like? I have to admit that I approached the return to study with some apprehension, as it is at least 15 years since I undertook any formal academic study, but it has been surprisingly enjoyable so far. Of our cohort of about 25 students, three or four are straight out of university, having just completed early years degrees. The rest of the students have either worked in the sector for some length of time or decided on a change of career direction, often sparked by having had children. It's amazing how volunteering in your son or daughter's pre-school can lead to a whole new career path!

The best part has been the attitude of the academic staff, who fully understand the challenges of holding down a full-time job, managing

families, partners and pets as well as undertaking a demanding course. The tone and pace of teaching is grown up and flexible and has mostly been really interesting.

So far topics studied have included;

- the characteristics of effective learning
- working with babies
- phonics and early literacy
- maths for early years
- attachment theories.

So, it is far from a dusty academic course. Instead, it has given us all ideas to take back to our settings and implement. The greatest danger is that your team will get fed up with all the new ideas. So, I am trying hard to drip feed any changes.

## Assessment

Whilst the academic assignments are submitted and marked in a traditional way, students are also required to demonstrate their teaching practice, and mentors and tutors carry out assessments in the workplace. Anyone who has completed an NVQ will be familiar with being observed whilst carrying out an activity. I have to confess this is a new experience for me, and I can now thoroughly relate to the nervousness felt by everyone when an Ofsted inspector is scrutinising you.

My first observation was fairly amusing; it had to be a child-initiated activity and the age group I was working with was under-twos. The children decided that a water activity was what they wanted to do

and about eight of them chose to join in. The rest of my staff team seemed to disappear into the furthest reaches of the outdoor area. So, I ended up trying to engage rather more children than I had intended, and the biggest challenge was trying to keep on top of snotty noses, which seemed to have it in for me!

## Back to the shop floor

For any manager or supervisor of a setting, I can thoroughly recommend the course as a way to dedicate time to 'getting back to the shop floor'. I have always had good intentions to spend more time in the rooms, but this has given me license to do this much more and I have thoroughly enjoyed it. I've also identified several minor niggles which make life more difficult for practitioners within our nurseries, which were relatively easy to sort, once I became aware of them.

The opportunity to spend time in schools and with other agencies at a children's centre was also valuable, and I look forward to seeing how an increased understanding of the next stage of education will inform my practice as we move towards the summer term transition process.

## What next?

The rest of the course looks set to continue to challenge and excite, and I am confident that it will have been 'spare time' well spent. As we complete two units towards a Masters in Education this year, I have found myself looking ahead and considering what else would be required. So, maybe this time next year, I'll be able to let you know what a Masters course is like! ■

- Sarah Steel is managing director of The Old Station Nursery group of six nurseries and out-of-school-clubs in Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire and Berkshire, which she founded, when she was looking for childcare for her own children.

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