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Changing landscapes in safeguarding babies and young children in England

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The importance of safeguarding children from violence is internationally recognised. However, detecting, intervening and protecting children from abuse both within the family and in institutions is complex. This paper specifically focuses on safeguarding in England and how workforce reform in the early years offers the opportunity to forge new partnerships with families and professionals. These relationships have the potential to support more positive outcomes for babies, young children and families who are ‘in need’ or where the children are at risk of significant harm or abuse has occurred. The paper draws on the findings from research exploring the impact of workforce reform in the early years and how the changes impact upon the wider safeguarding agenda. It will argue that the introduction of an inter-disciplinary graduate professional in the early years has afforded an opportunity to forge new partnerships that have the potential to significantly impact on child maltreatment.

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Keywords: safeguarding; child maltreatment; early years professional; early years policy; working together; early intervention

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1. Introduction

The importance of safeguarding children from violence is internationally recognised. Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) addresses the significance of protection child from harm and Article 39 emphasises the importance of providing services for children who have. Despite extensive evidence about the impact of child maltreatment, actually detecting, intervening and protecting children from abuse both within the family and in institutions is complex. This paper specifically focuses on safeguarding in England and how workforce reform in the early years offers the opportunity to forge new partnerships with families and professionals. These relationships have the potential to support more positive outcomes for babies, young children and families who are ‘in need’ or where the children are at risk of significant harm or abuse has occurred.

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There is some excellent work undertaken by agencies and practitioners across England and this needs to be recognised and lessons learnt and shared. However, working with vulnerable families remains a challenging area and domestic and child abuse still goes undetected, especially in the early years. As the National Society of Cruelty for Children (NSPCC) contend, for every one child who has a Child Protection

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50 Plan (Department for Education (DfE), 2013a) because they are at risk of abuse,
approximately eight cases go undetected (Harker et al., 2013). In the early years
National Statistics on 31 March 2012 (NSPCC, 2013) indicate that 880 unborn children
and 4850 under the age of one in England were subject to a Child Protection Plan
55 because of concerns about their carers' ability to protect them from harm. Additionally,
26.1% of the 382,400 children deemed in need of social care services, mainly because
of abuse, were under five years old (DfE, 2012a). Another 39,000 children under the
age of one were reported as living in families with domestic violence in 2012 (Wave
Trust, 2013).

60 This paper specifically presents the findings that emerged from a national survey
conducted in England between July and September 2012 into the proposed national
changes to graduate leaders in the early years workforce (Nutbrown, 2012). There
will be a specific focus on the vital role of the sector in prevention, early intervention
and support, as well as ensuring that the setting itself safeguards and promotes the well-
65 being of all children using the service. There is abundant literature on the impact of
abuse (see later discussion), but very little about the early years sector and its potential
in this area. It will draw upon the development of the new inter-disciplinary graduate
professional in England with Early Years Professional Status (EYPS). This new pro-
fessional was initially called the Early Years Professional (2006–2013), but renamed
70 as the Early Years Teacher in September 2013 (DfE, 2013b). For the purpose of this
paper, either Early Years Professional or an inter-disciplinary graduate professional
will be used.

It will be argued that those with EYPS have increased knowledge and understand-
ing in all aspects of working in the early years and this has developed their confidence
in working with parents/carers, families, in safeguarding and with other professionals.
75 They have become advocates for babies and young children and are confident in their
role in improving the quality of early years provision. Consequently, Early Years Pro-
fessionals have a growing and vital role in early intervention, detection of abuse and
intervention and are vital players in the wider Working Together agenda (DfE, 2013a).

80 2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this research draws on the work of Bronfen-
brenner (2005) and Lumsden (2012) into the introduction of EYPS by the Labour Gov-
85 ernment in England (1997–2010) (Children's Workforce Development Council
(CWDC), 2006). This research drew on the Bio-ecological Theory of Human Develop-
ment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) to explore the development of the new integrated pro-
fessional identity of the Early Years Professional between 2006 and 2010. The
findings theorised the under-researched Chaotic System present by Bronfenbrenner
90 in his final work in 2005, suggesting that rather than the development being linear it
was –and indeed continues to be – impacted upon by 'chaos' (Figure 1). Arguably,
the Chaotic System offers the opportunity to understand the de-stabilising influence
of wider political and societal issues on policy development, implementation and evol-
ution. It also provides a framework for understanding workforce training and develop-
95 ment and, in relation to this paper, some of the challenges faced in the safeguarding
agenda. Professionals working in early years and children's services need to be able
to navigate the 'chaos' in order to provide high-quality services for children and
their families.

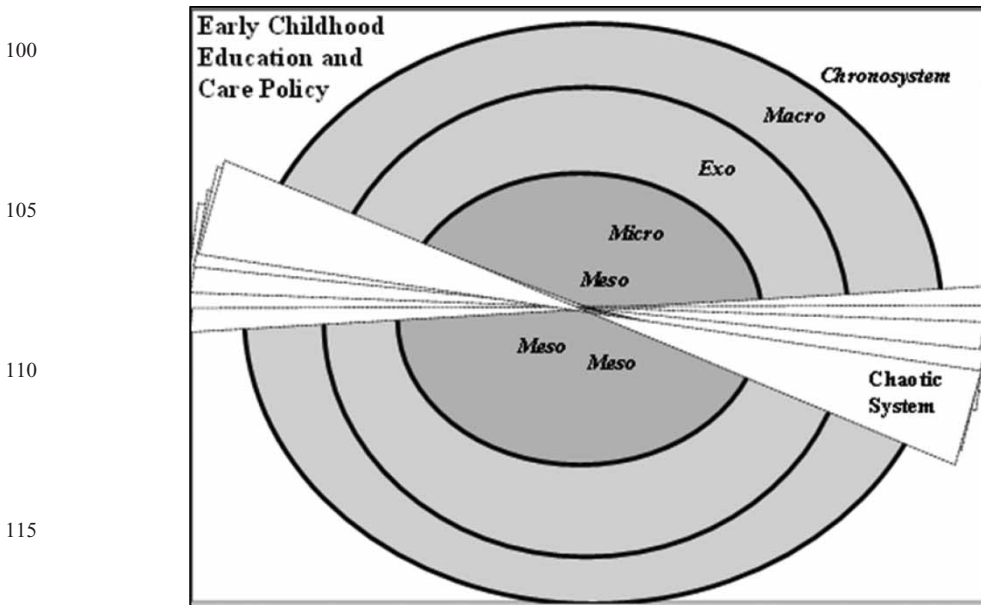


Figure 1. The impact of policy development on early childhood education and care.

This figure is based on the work of Bronfenbrenner (2005) and Lumsden (2012). It illustrates how Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) policy is not linear, rather at every level it is impacted upon by time, the 'Chronosystem' and changes in international, national and local policies and political change, as well as how policy is implemented in different early years settings, the 'Chaotic System'.

3. Background

3.1. Policy context

The Chaotic System provides a useful model for understanding policy development in England that underpins services for the youngest children in social care, education and health. Policy is marked by 'contradictions and incoherencies embedded within' (Ball, 2008, p. 13) and impacted upon by the ideology of the governing political party. It is also impacted upon by one off events, such as the death of Victoria Climbié in 2001 and Peter Hendry in 2009 (Laming, 2003, 2009). Furthermore, policy development in the early years is not divorced from economics (Penn, 2008). In fact, one of the cogent arguments for investing in the early years that has appealed to policy-makers is that it makes economic sense and child abuse and neglect is more likely to be reduced by early intervention than intervention after abuse has occurred (Allen, 2011; Allen & Duncan Smith, 2008; Wave Trust, 2013).

Since 1997, England has been engaged in developing a legislative and policy framework promoting ECEC. Historically education and care had been dealt with by separate government departments and as a move towards a more integrated approach to ECEC, the former Labour Government (1997–2010) made the then Department of Education and Skills (DfES) responsible for both areas (Baldock, 2011). The Department was later

renamed Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and then the Department for Education (DfE) by the incoming Conservative-led Coalition Government in 2010.

The engagement with ECEC has led to a raft of initiatives aimed at improved outcomes for children and young people. These developments included the Child-care Act 2006 (DfES, 2006) which removed the distinction between education and care for children from birth to five. There was also the introduction of the Early Years Professional, a new inter-disciplinary graduate professional who was presented as a leadership professional and ‘change agent’ for the early years (CWDC, 2006). The Early Years Professional role was broader than the traditional teacher in the early years and embraced knowledge from a range of disciplines as well as teaching and learning. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfES, 2007) covering all children from birth to the end of their fifth birthday was also introduced. The EYFS included welfare requirements, the importance of which were reinforced by Tickle in the 2011 review when rightly pointed out keeping children safe is a vital component of the EYFS framework. As part of the changes to the EYFS framework the welfare requirements were renamed the Welfare and Safeguarding requirements (DfE, 2012b).

Consequently, the early years are clearly positioned in this documentation as part of safeguarding landscape. However, if recent policy initiatives are explored further the use of the Chaos System for understanding policy development is highlighted further as it is not always evident that social care, health and early years policy developments in safeguarding have been considered holistically and they certainly have not developed in linear direction. If early intervention is considered, there are a range of reports which support intervening early and the importance of the early years (Allen, 2011; Allen & Duncan Smith, 2008; Field, 2010; Laming, 2003; Munroe, 2011; Tickell, 2011; Wave Trust, 2013). Indeed, the Munroe review (2011) into the child protection system argued that it was better to have a service that was preventative rather than reactive, as well as the importance of professionals, agencies and different services working together. The report reinforced the importance of mechanisms for early identification especially as this led to improved life chances for children.

The early years were seen as one area for early identification; however, the focus was more on the role of schools. The review appeared not to make the links between the ages abuse occurs and workforce reform in the early years. Furthermore, the areas of weakness in social workers training and practice identified in the report, including skills in communicating with children and families, insufficient child development knowledge and applying theory into practice are real strengths of the inter-disciplinary graduate professional in the early years (Lumsden, 2012).

Furthermore, the EYPS standards and the subsequent Early Years Teacher Status standards are the only professional standards to include one on safeguarding children. This standard makes them distinct from their teacher colleagues and also stands them apart from their social work colleagues, whose generic training means ~~there is not specific standard around child abuse. Furthermore, they~~ also need to evidence the ability to work with other professionals and parents and carers effectively.

While there is anecdotal evidence that some of those with EYPS are becoming involved in safeguarding, there is no empirical evidence available. However, the process to develop a critical mass of Early Years Professionals has taken time. This alongside a lack of marketing of the professional role by the Central Government has led to a lack of knowledge by other professionals and parents (Lumsden, 2012).



The Chaotic System is helpful in understanding the development over time and why other professionals may not have realised that a new partner in safeguarding is emerging. Rather than a linear development, it has been subject to political change and despite commissioned evaluative research evidencing the positive impact of the new role, it has not been celebrated or publicised by the policy-makers. Furthermore, there has been a lack of dissemination at a local level and by the new professionals themselves (Lumsden, 2012). The research reported in this paper arguably provides empirical evidence to redress this situation and raise the importance of joining up policy and practice at all levels to embrace the changes that have occurred in the early years sector.

3.2. *Safeguarding in the early years*

While the developments in the early years may have been relatively unnoticed outside the sector, their involvement with the youngest children and their families cannot be underestimated – nor can the responsibility of all professionals working in the early years to work together effectively. They need to be actively engaged in prevention, intervention and support for young children, parents and carers. Furthermore, those working in early years settings have a responsibility to ensure the provision and the well-being and safeguarding of children in their care is of the highest quality. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project (Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, & Elliot, 2003; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2008, 2010) evidences that high-quality provision supports enhanced child development, especially for those most in need. Unfortunately, the quality of provision in the areas of deprivation is not always of the highest quality (Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) 2011, 2012, 2013). While there are improved levels of achievement for the youngest children, children of affluent parents appear to be doing better. Only 48% of children aged four in receipt of free school meals, an indicator of those living in poverty ‘achieve a good level of development’ (National Children’s Bureau (NCB), 2013, p. 8).

Furthermore, if children do suffer harm, the impact for the victim and society are immense and are well documented elsewhere (Wilson & James, 2010; Corby, 2006; Doyle, 2012). There is also increasing evidence of the impact of maltreatment on early brain development and later health. (Widom, Czaja, Bentley, & Johnson, 2012). The Wave Trust (2013) literature review provides clear evidences that the period from conception to age 2 shapes a child’s future (Wave Trust, 2013). Poor attachment, maternal depression and nutrition can lead to poor outcomes for children. Moreover, research suggests that maltreatment is often associated with disorganised attachment and those who have had difficult experiences in the early years are over represented in ‘the criminal justice system’ (Wave Trust, 2013:70). However, as Doyle (2012) rightly argued it is important that we do not look to the attachment issues resulting from maltreatment as the only cause of later life issues.

The Serious Case Reviews into two nurseries in England highlighted factors which created an environment where children could be sexually abused (Plymouth Safeguarding Children’s Board, 2009; Wonnacott, 2013). These included leadership and management, staff recruitment and training and concerns about the standard of practice by the local authority and concerns expressed by students not being acted upon, or proper checks of students undertaken during the training process. The Plymouth report (2009) led to calls for the role of Ofsted to be strengthened and highlighted the lack of knowledge about sexual abuse. Four years later the Wonnacott Review (2013)

highlighted that Ofsted had not taken concerns seriously about the perpetrator and lacked knowledge about sexual abuse.

Ofsted does have an important role in inspecting provision across the early years and social care, though this role is not without a critique, especially more recently as the policy direction of the Coalition Government positions Ofsted as the sole arbitrators of quality (DfE, 2013b). While there is no dispute that an inspection service currently has a role to play in England and that the quality of early years provision has improved, there are still issues around the wellbeing and safeguarding of children in early years settings. The inspection data for the period 1st September 2011 to 31st August 2012 indicated that of the 16,955 early years providers inspected only 2,454 (14%) of providers were outstanding in safeguarding and 449 (3%) were actually deemed inadequate. Equally concerning are the statistics focusing on how 'safe' children felt in settings. Only 2604 (15%) were given 'outstanding' in this area, 3324 (20%) were 'satisfactory' and 387 (2%) were 'inadequate (Ofsted, 2012).

Consequently, there appears to be three main areas of focus for the safeguarding agenda in the early years:

- Setting: developing the quality of early years provision to ensure children experience a safe environment.
- Practice: knowledge and skills required to work with young children and their families to support more positive outcomes for babies, young children and families who are 'in need' or where the children are at risk of significant harm or abuse has occurred.
- Working with others: knowledge and skills to work with other professionals and organisations in all aspects of the safeguarding agenda.

4. Methods

The survey aimed to gather perspectives from Early Year Professionals and Early Years Teachers with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) about proposed national changes to graduate leaders in the early years' workforce included in *Foundations for quality* (Nutbrown, 2012). The respondents were located through the national providers of EYPS and QTS and through an article in a professional magazine.

The survey gathered data about:

- Confidence levels of Early Years Professionals and Early Years Teachers (QTS).
- How the graduate leaders perceived their impact on early childhood education and care.
- Views about a 'new teacher' 0–7 and training needs if this was implemented by Government.

There were a range of *likert* scale questions (May, 2011) and the opportunity to provide further comments on the proposed changes. Statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) was used to process the questionnaire responses and support the statistical analysis. As well as descriptive analysis, where applicable the data were interrogated using chi-square test for independence for any statistical difference between those with EYPS and Non-EYPS. The comments were coded into themes.

295 Ethical approval was provided through the universities ethics procedures and the
 research was underpinned by the British Education Research Association (BERA,
 2011) guidelines.

300 There were 1114 responses to the survey; of the 1108 who answered the question
 about their professional status the majority had EYPS (70%/769). Thirteen per cent
 (148) had both EYPS and QTS. Five per cent (57) of the respondents were Early
 Years Teachers with QTS. Twelve per cent (134) classified themselves as 'other'.
 These included primary school teachers, non-qualified teachers, head teachers, assess-
 305 sors, academics, family workers and childminders. Therefore, 83% of participants
 were classified as 'EYPS' and 17% were 'Non-EYPS'.

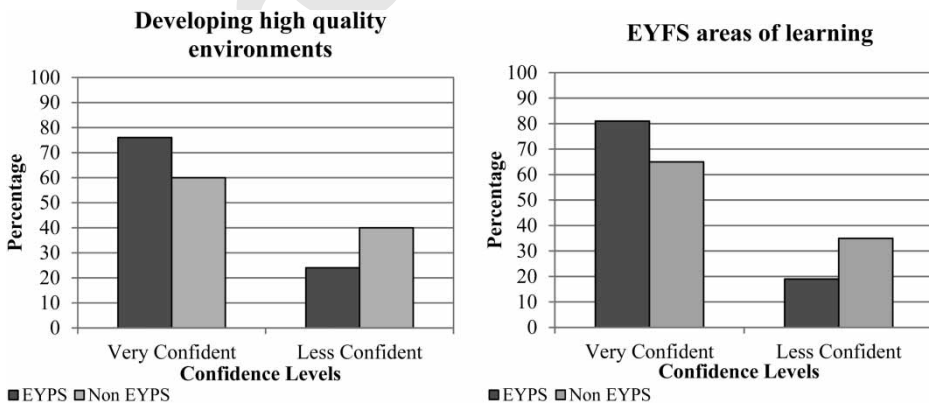
310 For the purposes of this paper, the findings were considered in relation to the three
 areas of safeguarding that emerged from the literature review. They were analysed
 descriptively and using chi-square test of independence

310 5. Findings

315 5.1. Setting: developing the quality of early years provision to ensure children experience a safe environment

315 Respondents were asked about how confident they were in developing the quality of
 provision. High levels of confidence were recorded by 76% of those with EYPS com-
 pared to 60% without. The chi-square test of independence suggested that this finding
 was highly significant ($\chi^2(1 N = 1102) = 18.782, p = .000$). Those with EYPS also had
 very significant levels of confidence in implementing the EYFS areas of learning
 ('EYPS' 81%, 'Non-EYPS' 65%) ($\chi^2(1 N = 1096) = 22.302, p = .000$) (Figure 2).

320 Those with EYPS were significantly more confident in developing policy and pro-
 cedures than those without ($\chi^2(1 N = 1087) = 15.204, p = .000$). Fifty-nine per cent
 were 'very confident' compared to 43% of those without EYPS. They were also more
 confident in their knowledge of health and safety legislation and conducting risk assess-
 325 ments. Of the 1107 responses, 56% of those with EYPS were 'very confident' compared
 to 40% of those without EYPS. The chi-square test of independence suggested that this
 finding was highly significant ($\chi^2(1 N = 1107) = 16.781, p = .000$) (Figure 3).



340 Figure 2. Confidence levels in developing high-quality environments and implementing the
 early years foundation stage (EYFS) areas of learning.

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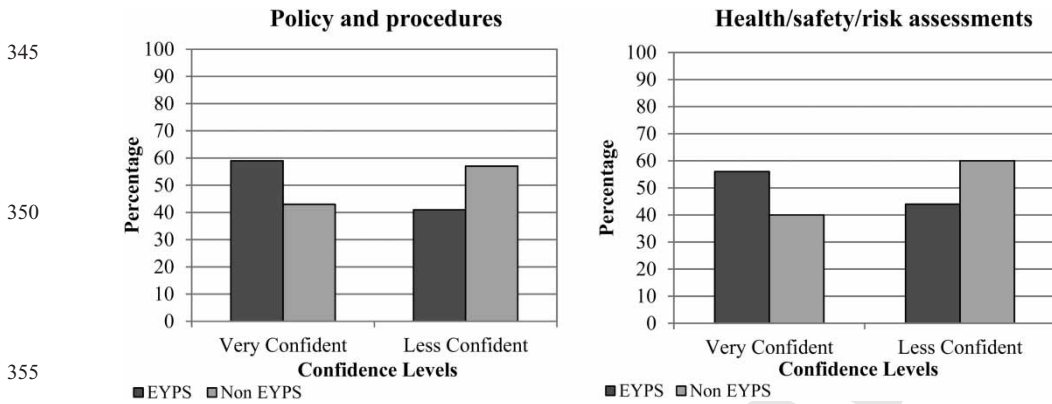


Figure 3. Confidence levels in developing policies and procedures, health and safety legislation and conducting risk assessments.

Table 1. Perceived impact of EYPS on practice.

	High impact	Impact	No impact	Respondents
Implementing the EYFS areas of learning	75% (677)	22% (197)	3% (26)	900
Improved safeguarding practices	70% (631)	25% (226)	5% (40)	897
Developing high-quality early years environments	80% (716)	17% (149)	3% (31)	896
Improved policies and procedures in the setting	71% (633)	24% (220)	5% (40)	893
Improved Ofsted rating	60% (529)	27% (233)	13% (40)	875

Table 1 illustrates how participants perceive their graduate status has positively impacted on setting quality and led to improved inspection outcomes.

5.2. Practice: knowledge and skills required to work with young children and their families to support more positive outcomes for babies, young children and families who are 'in need' or where the children are at risk of significant harm or abuse has occurred

Respondents were asked about confidence levels in relation to knowledge of child development birth to three and three to five. Sixty-six per cent of those with EYPS were very confident compared to 46% of those without. The chi-square test of independence suggested that this finding was highly significant ($\chi^2(1 N = 1069) = 25.529, p = .000$) (Figure 4).

Significantly high levels of confidence of those with EYPS were also found in relation to knowledge about child development for three- to five-year-olds ($\chi^2(1 N = 1086) = 21.292, p = .000$). Eighty-one per cent of those with EYPS were very confident compared to 65% of those without.

Undertaking and evaluating observations saw 72% of those with EYPS indicating high confidence levels compared to 58% of those without. The chi-square test of

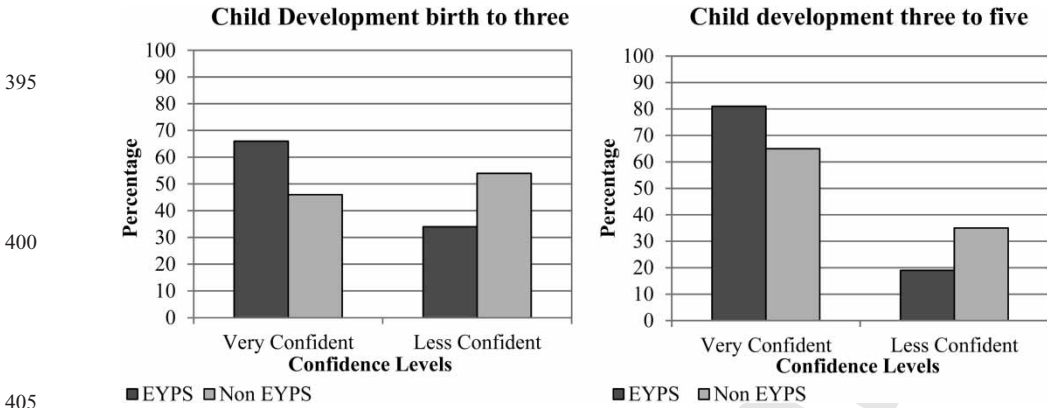


Figure 4. Confidence levels in child development.

independence suggested that this finding was highly significant ($\chi^2(1 N=1103)=15.418, p=.000$). Those with EYPS were also significantly more confident in developing emotional well-being than 'Non-EYPS' ($\chi^2(1 N=1101)=6.214, p=.013$). High confidence levels were recorded by 78% of those with EYPS compared to 70% of those without (Figure 5).

High confidence levels were recorded by 76% of those with EYPS in safeguarding compared to 69% Non-EYPS. The chi-square test of independence suggested that this finding was significant ($\chi^2(1 N=1101)=4.954, p=.026$). However, all respondents were less confident in supporting children 'Looked After' by the Local Authority. Of the 992 who responded to this question, only 31% of those with EYPS and 32% of 'Non-EYPS' indicated high levels of confidence (Figure 6).

Advocating for children saw 55% of those with EYPS as very confident compared to 46% without. The chi-square test of independence suggested that this finding was significant ($\chi^2(1 N=1094)=4.201, p=.040$). However, all respondents were less

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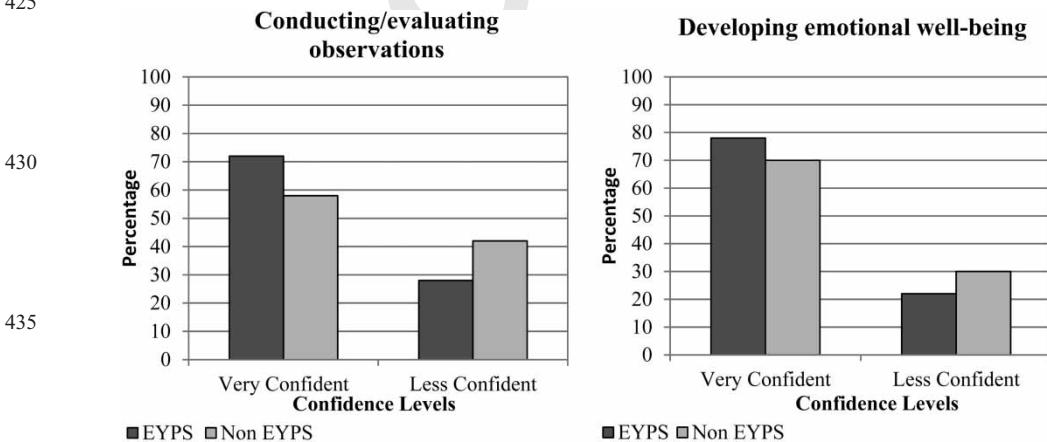


Figure 5. Confidence levels in child observation and developing children's emotional well-being.

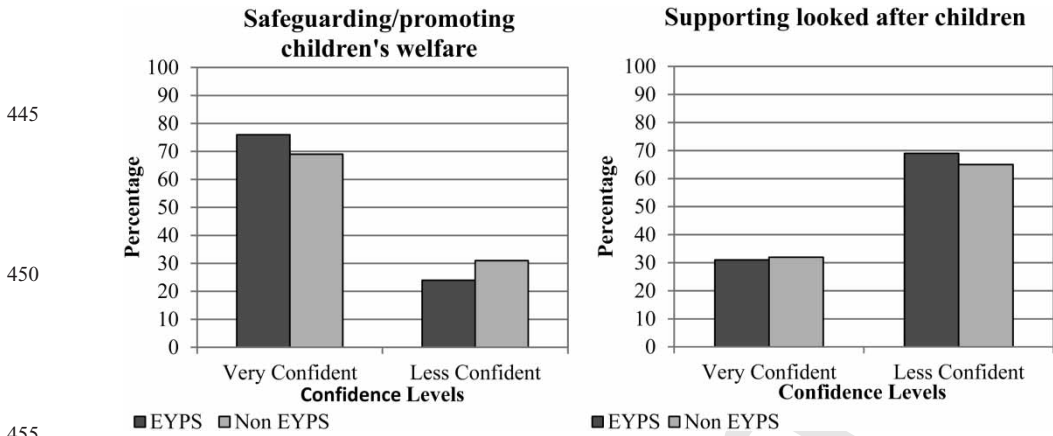


Figure 6. Confidence levels in safeguarding, promoting welfare and looked after children.

confident in supporting children living in poverty, 67% of those with EYPS and 68% of those without indicated they were less confident in this area (Figure 7).

Supporting parents/cares saw 73% of those with EYPS as very confident compared to 60% of those without. The chi-square test of independence suggested that this finding was highly significant ($\chi^2(1 N = 1103) = 13.153, p = .000$) (Figure 8).

Table 2 illustrates how participants perceive their graduate status has positively impacted on their practice.



5.3. Working with others: knowledge and skills to work with other professionals and organisations in all aspects of the safeguarding agenda

Those with EYPS were more confident in working with other professionals. Sixty-four per cent of those with EYPS were very confident compared to 55% without EYPS. The chi-square test of independence suggested that this finding was highly significant ($\chi^2(1 N = 1100) = 5.100, p = .024$) (Figure 9).

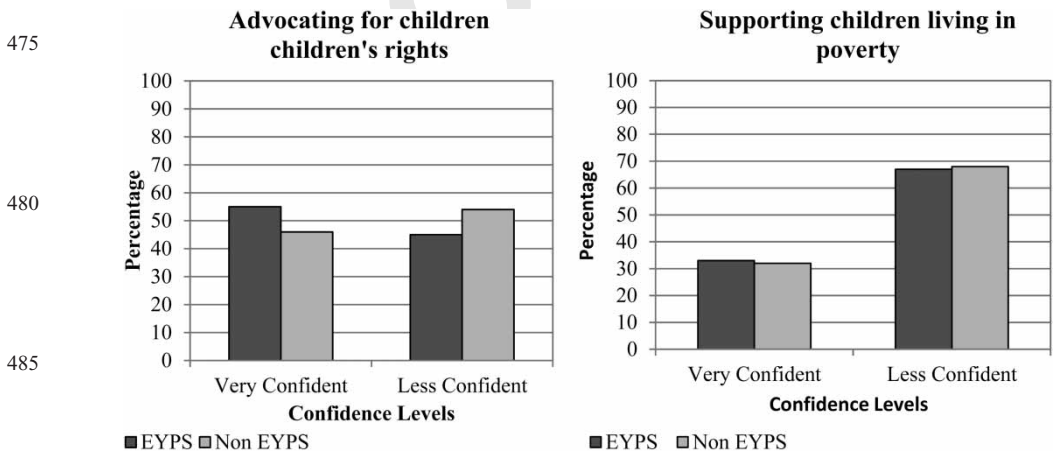


Figure 7. Confidence levels in advocating for children, promoting their rights and supporting children living in poverty.

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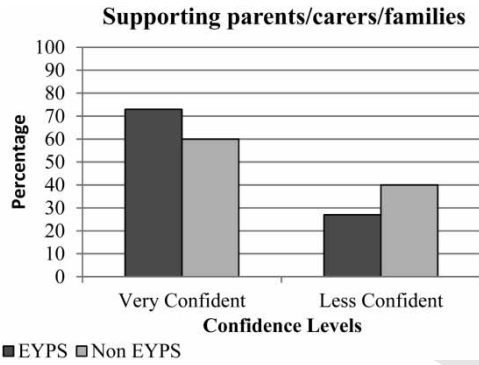


Figure 8. Confidence levels in supporting parents/carers and families.

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Table 2. Perceived impact on practice.

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	High impact	Impact	No impact	Respondents
Improved understanding of child development: 0–3	72% (638)	25% (225)	3% (30)	893
Improved understanding of child development: 3–5	69% (618)	28% (249)	3% (31)	898
Improved observations and planning	75% (681)	21% (187)	4% (34)	902
Improved emotional well-being	70% (624)	26% (234)	4% (34)	892
Improved safeguarding practices	70% (631)	25% (226)	5% (40)	897
Improved knowledge of and support for Looked After Children	45% (404)	45% (397)	10% (92)	893
Children’s rights	69% (616)	26% (236)	5% (40)	892
Improved practice with children living in poverty	46% (407)	45% (403)	9% (84)	894
Relationships with parents/carers and families	74% (667)	22% (193)	4% (38)	898

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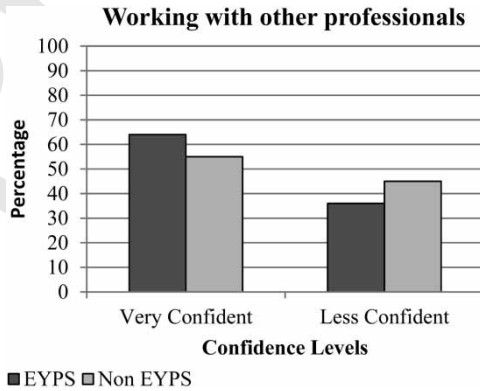


Figure 9. Confidence levels in working with other professionals.

540 Respondents also reported that having EYPS had positively impacted on how they worked with other professionals, 74% of the 895 responded ‘high impact’ and only 4% indicated there had been ‘no impact’.

545 6. Discussion

Since 1997, the early years have become the focus of considerable political attention and investment. This has happened alongside a focus on integrated practice between health, education and social care in relation to working with children and families in need and child abuse. High profile preventable child deaths of supported a refocusing on the importance of professional groups working together more effectively (Laming, 2003; 2009). The emphasis on collaborative working and information sharing is of paramount significance in preventive practice. Different professional organisations do not naturally share information outside their own circle of reference. This is a major problem in coordinating planning for the prevention of abuse and as such has been a problem for more than half a century. Technical reports and commissions of enquiry celebrating holism in child development theory has not translated to holism in service delivery towards safeguarding.

560 Furthermore, while literature in the early years is burgeoning, there is relatively little written on the early years and safeguarding. The discussion of the research findings aims to provide new insights into how the introduction of an inter-disciplinary graduate professional in the early years has enhanced the contribution this sector has to make to the safeguarding agenda.

565 6.1. *Setting: developing the quality of early years provision to ensure children experience a safe environment*

As part of the workforce reform, the Early Years Professional was introduced as a ‘Change Agent’ and leadership professional (CWDC, 2006). This research reinforces findings from evaluations commissioned by the former Department of Children, Schools and Families the quality of provision in settings has been positively impacted upon by workforce reform (Hadfield et al., 2012; Mathers et al., 2011). This research particularly highlights the significant level that the confidence of those with EYPS has been developed and the subsequent impact this has had on their practice. EYPS appears to have supported practice leadership that has enabled the high-quality ECEC environments stressed as being important by the EPPE research (Sylva et al., 2003; Sylva et al., 2008; Sylva et al., 2010) to be developed for children where those with EYPS are employed. These environments are supported by graduate professionals who are significantly more confident in writing policies and procedures, conducting health and safety and risk assessment and delivering the EYFS. All of which they believe have led to improved Ofsted inspections (Table 1).

585 These developments can only serve to strengthen the importance of a well-qualified and graduate-led profession in the early years which should serve to mitigate the characteristics of early years environments identified in the serious case reviews and address issues identified by Ofsted in unsatisfactory settings (Plymouth Safeguarding Children’s Board, 2009; Ofsted, 2012; Wonnacott, 2013). However, there is still considerable work to be undertaken, not all children experience safe environments or are receiving outstanding early years experiences. There is a need for strong leadership to bring about further change and as the Wonnacott review stressed, safeguarding

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590 knowledge should not be the responsibility of one person and that systems and practice
 should be strong to minimise abuse within settings as well.

595 **6.2. Practice: knowledge and skills required to work with young children and
 their families to support more positive outcomes for babies, young children and
 families who are ‘in need’ or where the children are at risk of significant harm or
 abuse has occurred**

600 The confidence level that those with EYPS expressed combined with their perceived
 impact on practice is directly relevant to the wider safeguarding agenda of early inter-
 vention, prevention, detection and practice when abuse has occurred. The research find-
 ings suggest there is a significant difference between those with EYPS and those
 without, in their knowledge of child development, undertaking and assessing obser-
 vations and promoting well-being. They are also more confident in advocating for chil-
 dren and most importantly in safeguarding them. This is especially important as child
 maltreatment can occur across all socio-economic groups; it does as Doyle (2012, p. 9)
 605 points out happen in ‘nice’ families. Arguable therefore, as those with EYPS work
 across a range of settings in varied locations, their relationship-building skills with
 adults and children place them in a powerful position to recognise and act upon situ-
 ations early and identify children at risk of or suffering maltreatment that may have
 gone undetected (Harker et al., 2013). Given the impact of abuse on later life (Wave
 610 Trust, 2013), these findings are particularly important for those children who are on
 the cusp of being deemed ‘in need’ are ‘in need’ or are subject to maltreatment.
 They also reinforce the importance of workforce reform and policy agendas for ensur-
 ing child abuse as everyone’s business (DfE, 2013a).

615 Furthermore, the improved confidence levels and perceived impact related to safe-
 guarding indicates that those with EYPS have been able to lead and change practice.
 The importance of this in the early years cannot be underestimated, given how vulner-
 able babies and young children are. Therefore, the role of graduate professionals being
 advocates on their behalf is vital and the findings from this research suggest that those
 with EYPS recognise this. They indicated that they were highly confident in their role
 620 and impact on children’s rights and, therefore, are more able to challenge practice on
 behalf of the children. However, in doing this, it is essential that their voice is heard
 by other professionals working in children’s services. As previous research has high-
 lighted (Hadfield et al., 2012; Lumsden, 2012), very little has been done to market
 the introduction of a graduate professional in the early years or the workforce reform
 625 that has taken place, yet the significance of these changes for safeguarding cannot be
 underestimated.

Safeguarding is not just about detecting and responding to child abuse, it is about
 intervening early in the lives of children and families. The EPPE research (Sylvia
 et al., 2010) stresses the importance of high-quality environments however, those
 630 facing deprivation and less likely to achieve than their more privileged peers (NCB,
 2013; Ofsted, 2012). However, findings from this research indicate that all respondents
 believe they were positively impacting on the lives of children living in poverty but
 were less confident in their practice. This alongside the findings from Simpson
 (2012) about practitioners understanding of poverty suggests, there are implications
 635 for policy-makers, initial training courses and the need for continual professional devel-
 opment to redress this. The importance of a greater focus on this area cannot be under-
 estimated, given the convincing economic debate that the greatest return is made

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through investment in the early years (Allen, 2011; Wave Trust, 2012). The importance of this is reinforced further, given that all respondents were less confident in their work with children ‘Looked After’ by the Local Authority. Again they saw themselves as impacting on practice however, given the policy focus on early intervention (DfE, 2011), practitioners understanding of poverty (Simpson, 2012) and the challenges faced by a child in care (Cherry, 2013), the findings from this research indicate the need for both further training in these areas and research to explore the reasons for these views.

The ability to build relationships with parents and carers appears to be a real strength of those with EYPS, they were not only significantly confident in this area, but they also believed their impact was high (Table 2). This alongside their perceived confidence and impact of their work in child development and the well-being of children arguably (Figures 4 and 5) provides them with key skills for the safeguarding agenda. They are professionals who can communicate with children and work in partnership with parents effectively.

6.3. Working with others: knowledge and skills to work with other professionals and organisations in all aspects of the safeguarding agenda

The final area that is central to safeguarding is working with other professionals and organisations. The research provides clear evidence that the policy agenda that the Working Together agenda (DfE, 2013a) needs to formally acknowledge the inter-disciplinary graduate leader in the early years. The early years has a key place in early intervention and safeguarding. The research findings highlight that those with EYPS are not only confident in their work in this area, but 98% believed having EYPS had positively impacted on their work with other professionals. However, this needs to be disseminated to all those who need to work together in safeguarding; they need to know about the knowledge and skill base of this the inter-disciplinary professional in child development, child abuse and preventative work, working with parents/carers and multi-professional working. The landscape has shifted in the early years and health and social care have a new partner that can be central in all areas of prevention and intervention with children and families. The increased confidence of those with EYPS and improved practice in working with other professionals is core to the working together agenda in child protection (DfE, 2013a). The challenge now is that others realise this shift has happened and recognise the value of this relatively new graduate professional role and status as an essential part of the multi-professional team working in safeguarding.

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7. Conclusion

The overriding evidence emerging from this research is that those with EYPS are confident in the knowledge base and believe they are making an impact on all the areas pertinent to safeguarding and early intervention. Though, there needs to be a greater focus on their understanding of poverty and working with children in the care of the Local Authority. However, they are professionals who can create safe environments, have a good understanding of child development, are able to advocate for children, work with parents/cares and operate in multi-professional contexts. Yet these developments have not been celebrated on a national level nor recognised in policy documentation.

The 'Chaotic System' provides a framework to understand why there does not appear to have been a holistic approach to the early intervention and safeguarding agenda. Rather policy has been impacted upon by ideology alongside one of events, such as a child death. This research provides very significant evidence that those with EYPS are not just early educationalists preparing children for school. Those with EYPS are inter-disciplinary graduate professionals with knowledge range and skill pertinent to the safeguarding agenda. They have the confidence in their safeguarding practice in and working with parents and other professionals that supports them to work within the 'Chaos System' and make a real impact on practice and outcomes. They have become leaders of practice and 'change agents'. The next step is for others to realise that there is a new partner in the working together agenda who has knowledge and skills not held by others. They are professionals who have the potential to really impact on prevention, early identification and intervention in the maltreatment of the youngest children, not just in families but in early years settings as well.

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Notes on Contributor

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