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A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF EARLY YEARS DEGREES AND EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

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BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

- As we have just been hearing...
- Degree-level qualifications contribute to the quality of early years provision (and child outcomes) but little knowledge of what constitutes a degree-level qualification for working in the early years
- In England, there is a variety of degrees:
 - Bachelor of Education
 - Bachelor of Arts
 - Postgraduate Certificate in Education or Early Years/Childhood
 - Early Years Teacher Status (replacing Early Years Professional Status)

THE RESEARCH

Two-stage project

- Review of online course descriptors for content and structure of courses
- Analysis of employment pathways



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QUALITATIVE STRAND**

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IDENTIFYING THE DEGREES

- UCAS search based on key titles for degree
 - UCAS search suggestions
 - University websites
 - Differences in search dates
 - Analysis spanned academic years
 - Total 647 courses
- Suitability check
 - Lack of detail, courses no longer offered, variations of the same degree
- Total number of degrees analysed = 320

The screenshot shows the UCAS search results for 'childhood studies'. The page is divided into several sections:

- Subject(s):** A list of related subjects with checkboxes, including Early childhood studies, Child studies, Educational studies, Child development, Youth studies, Child psychology, Youth development, Child care, Early years, and Educational sociology.
- UCAS Logo:** The UCAS logo is prominently displayed at the top of the search results area.
- Search Bar:** The search term 'childhood studies' is entered in the search bar.
- Filters:** A sidebar on the left contains filters for 'University or college (A to Z)', 'England', 'Study year' (2019-2020, 2020-2021), 'Clearing vacancies' (Show all courses, Only show Clearing courses with vacancies), and 'Course level' (Undergraduate, Postgraduate, Conservatoires UK (CUK)).
- Viewing providers:** The main content area shows a list of providers. The first provider is 'Accrington and Rossendale College' with 3 courses: 'Early Years (Childhood Studies)', 'Early Years', and 'FdA Early Years'. The second provider is 'Barnsley College Higher Education' with 2 courses: 'Professional Practice: Early Childhood Studies (Top up)' and 'Supporting Learning and Additional Needs'.

FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS

- A thematic inquiry of a large volume of data
- Enables both structural and interpretive features to be analysed in a systematic way
- Initial familiarisation with the degrees, creating a thematic framework
- Indexing, charting, mapping and interpretation

STRUCTURAL FEATURES

- University
- Title of degree
- Degree type entry
- Details entry points
- Duration
- Fees
- Placement details
- Optional modules
- Suitability
- Age range
- Level of detail

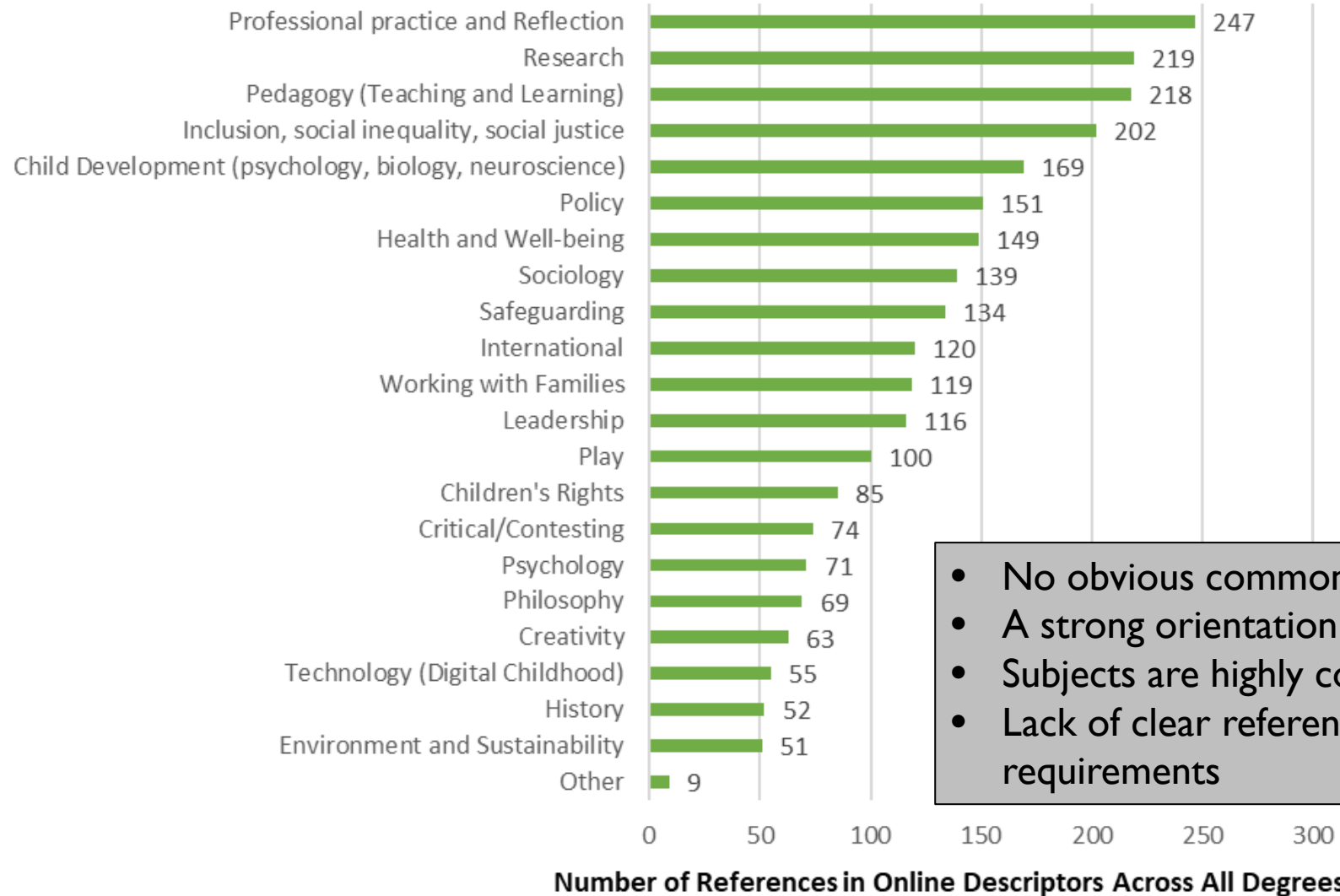
INTERPRETATIVE FEATURES

- International
- Sociology
- Psychology
- Child Development (psychology, biology, neuroscience)
- Professional practice and Reflection
- Play Creativity Health and Well-being
- Environment and Sustainability
- History
- Philosophy
- Children's Rights
- Safeguarding
- Inclusion, social inequality, social justice
- Pedagogy (Teaching and Learning)
- Technology (Digital Childhood)
- Working with Families
- Research
- Policy
- Critical/Contesting
- Leadership
- Other

FRAGMENTATION IN STRUCTURE

- Degree choices are highly fragmented
 - Largely BAs (59%)
 - UCAS points ranged from 16 to 112, with an average of 89
 - Often additions of GCSEs
- Variable practical/workplace arrangements
 - 281 listed details of their practical/work placement arrangements
 - Details varied from stating number of hours, having an employment pathway, to just saying it was required or advisory
- Age specialism is not evidence
 - 108 specified the age range that was to be covered
 - But very variable

FRAGMENTATION OF CONTENT



- No obvious common core
- A strong orientation to future employment
- Subjects are highly connected
- Lack of clear references to statutory requirements

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DEGREES AND EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS:
QUANTITATIVE STRAND**

Sara Bonetti and Felix Bunting, Education Policy Institute

KEY ELEMENTS TO QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

- Data
 - Source: Higher Education Standards Authority (HESA)
 - Students who finished their degree in 2012/13, with longitudinal destinations data in 2016/17 (latest year this data is available)
 - Data is held on students finishing undergraduate degrees, which includes bachelor's degrees, foundation degrees and PGCEs
 - Data is unavailable for courses not registered with HESA because their provision is not university based, such as Teach First
- Course and student characteristics
 - How do early years students and the course types they take differ from students with see in the rest of HE
- Employment
 - What aspects of students and their courses are linked to returns in the job market
- Geography
 - What do we know about the geographical distribution of early years students
 - Where do they live before they study, where do they study and where do they work

EARLY YEARS VS BROADER STUDENT POPULATION

- Students studying EY degrees are significantly older than those doing other undergraduate degrees
- For all undergraduates in the UK, in 2012/13, only 27 per cent of students were over the age of 25
- A large proportion of students has a non-traditional educational background, suggesting these courses are fulfilling a widening participation aim

Age	Percentage of Students
20 and under	3%
21-23	33%
24-26	10%
27-29	6%
30 and older	48%

Entry Qualifications	Percentage of Students
Level 3 academic qualifications	14%
Level 3 vocational qualifications	36%
Level 4/5 qualifications	28%
Degree level or higher	7%
Other	15%

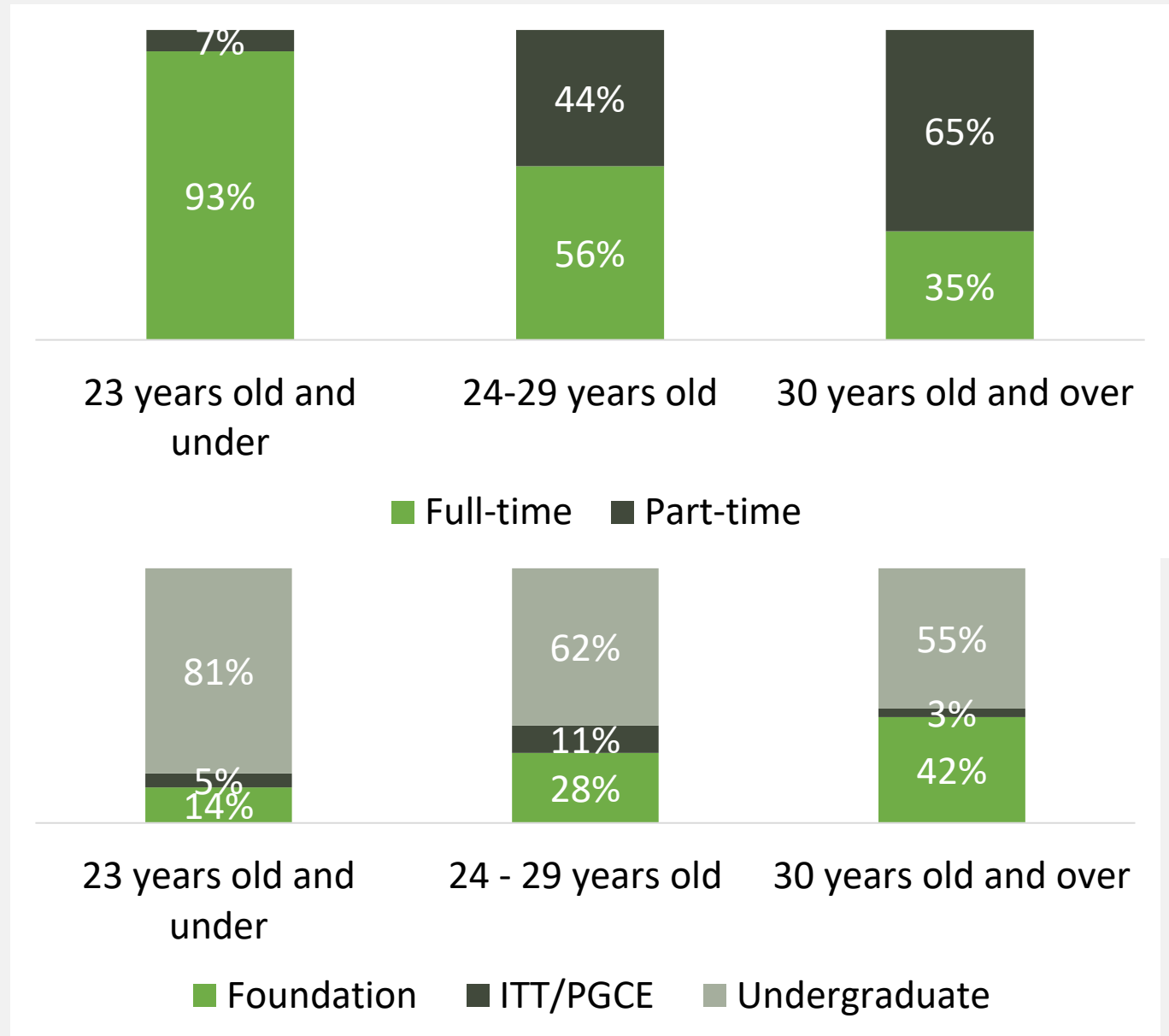
COURSE TYPES

- Far higher proportion of part-time students than average within undergraduate HE courses. In 2012, 24% of UK undergraduates were studying part-time
- Relatively small proportion of teacher training courses (which tend to hold the highest returns)
- 30% of students are studying as part of a foundation degree, compared to a 5% average in England

Course Type	Percentage of Students
Full-time	59%
Part-time	41%
No Teacher Training	84%
Teacher Training	16%
Foundation	30%
PGCE / ITT	5%
Undergraduate	65%

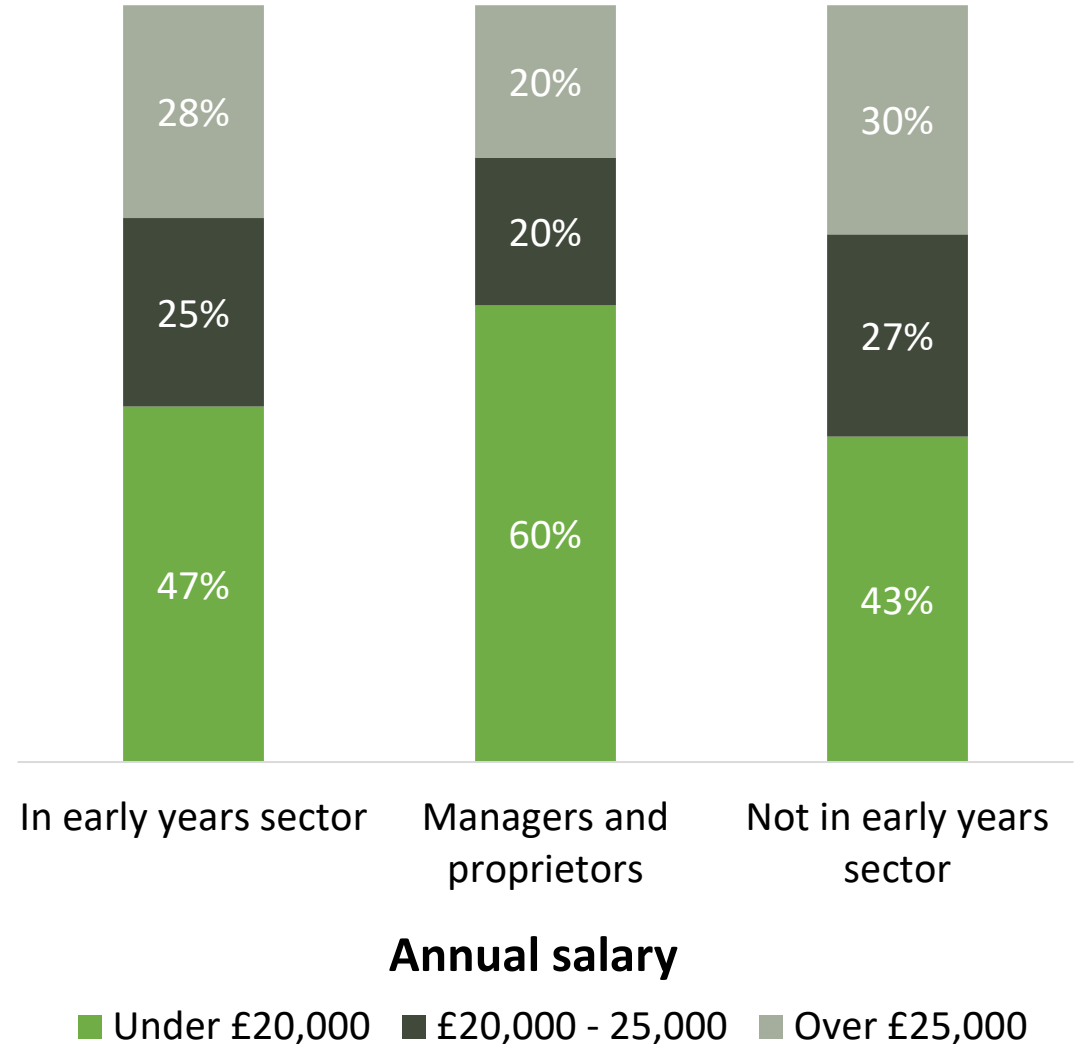
AGE AND COURSES

- Age drives a lot of the ways in which the courses these students study are different to wider HE sector
- Even when looking at the youngest age group, there is still an over-representation of foundation degrees, suggesting age is not the only factor affecting this



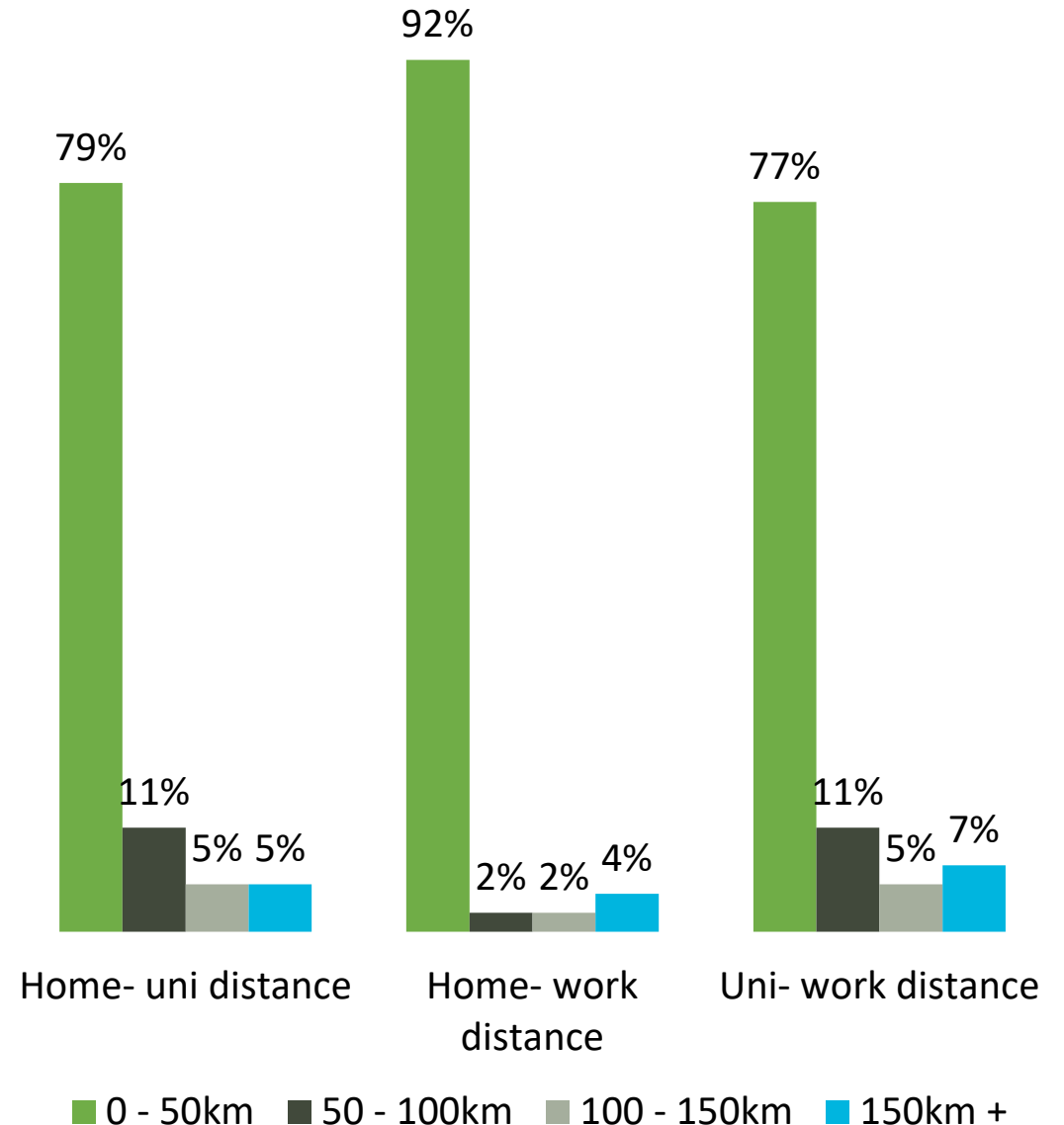
EMPLOYMENT IN SECTOR

- 56% of students go on to work in the early years sector, 15% work in occupations classified as Managers and proprietors (likely to be in EY) and 28% work outside of the sector
- Despite most graduates working in the sector, there is little financial incentive to do so



GEOGRAPHY (I)

- The EY workforce is highly localized, with limited movement at all stages of the process (home-uni, home-work and uni-work)
- The smallest movement levels are seen when considering the distance between home and work, representing many students “moving back” after finishing their course



KEY FINDINGS

- Early years degree choices are highly fragmented
- Degree content and age specialisation are fragmented as are work-placement arrangements, with links between theory and practice not always strong or uniform
- The early years student population differ from the broader student population in a number of ways
- Students' demographic characteristics are linked to the characteristics of the courses they undertake and, in turn, have an impact on their employment opportunities
- The majority of early years graduates find employment with the sector but there is no real financial incentive to stay
- There is a clear salary premium for those accessing early years courses with a more academic-oriented background and for pursuing teacher training
- The early years workforce is highly localised

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The establishment of a national group within the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to review the content and structure of degrees.
- Further research on the induction systems present for those going on to work in early years education, comprising of analysis of the structural and process features of existing models (including international examples). The research should provide a structure for the development of a feasibility study on appropriate models, the organisational and cost implications, to inform national minimum induction standards for the early years sector.
- The publication by Higher Education Institutions of how their courses meet QAA benchmarks in a standard and accessible format to support students' choice.

THANK YOU!