



To the CCCs and VCOs

Re: Early Years Practitioners working in special needs pre-schools

Dear Chairperson,

With the requirement for all staff to have a relevant qualification at a minimum of a Level 5 on the NFQ, I would like to clarify what the implications are for early years practitioners who work in special needs pre-schools with children with medical needs and whose role, therefore, is more of a care than an education role.

Some practitioners who don't have a major award at a minimum of a Level 5 on the NFQ but have minor awards relevant to their work have sought an exemption from the requirement to complete a Major Award. Rather than exempting people from this requirement, there is an argument that, because these children are more vulnerable, the qualification requirement should be higher. Allowing lesser qualified people to work in special needs pre-schools with more vulnerable children is an unnecessary risk. There won't be an exemption from the requirement for all practitioners who are opting not to retire in 7 years time, to complete a minimum of a Level 5 major award on the NFQ (or equivalent). However, I am prepared to accept a combination of relevant minor awards (minimum of 6 component awards) as being equivalent to a Major Award for early years practitioners working in special needs pre-schools only, in acknowledgement of their existing specialised training.

Early years practitioners with a Level 7 or higher in Nursing, who work with children with special needs have applied through the Learner Fund to undertake courses at Levels 5 or 6. I don't think that courses at Levels 5 and 6 (5M2009 and 6M2007) are going to add sufficient value for practitioners who have a Level 7 or higher qualification in nursing and they are not, therefore, required to undertake a Level 5 or 6 course. If they choose to do so, they can be supported through the Learner fund

I hope this clarification is of help in dealing with queries

Yours sincerely,

Mary McLoughlin
Acting Director
Early Years and Child Well-Being