Embargo: TBC

**Study reveals keys to high quality in early years provision**

The latest in a series of reports from the major longitudinal study of early years education has been published today, uncovering the key factors associated with high-quality in childcare and early years settings.

As part of the [Study of Early Education and Development (SEED)](http://natcen.ac.uk/our-research/research/seed/), researchers measured quality in 1,000 childcare settings caring for children aged from two to four years old. The study found that staff training and development, lower staff turnover and accepting a narrower range of ages at the setting were associated with higher quality provision across private, voluntary, nursery class and nursery school settings. A higher average level of staff qualification and having fewer children per member of staff were also associated with higher quality provision in private and voluntary settings

SEED is conducted by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) in collaboration with the University of Oxford, Action for Children, Frontier Economics and is funded by the Department for Education.

**Good quality provision across settings**

The report identifies that although there are small variations in quality according to setting type, overall quality of provision is good across all different types of early childhood education and care settings for two- to four-year-olds included in the study. This includes private, voluntary, nursery classes / schools and children’s centres.

Although the factors contributing to high quality childcare environments varied by the type of setting and age group, there were some which were more consistently associated with higher quality scores and which may be potential targets for efforts to improve the quality of early years provision:

* A higher staff to child ratio (i.e. having few children per staff member). This was particularly important in private and voluntary settings for two-year-olds.
* Higher average staff qualification.
* Staff training and development.
* Lower staff turnover.
* A narrower age range.

**Quality of early years provision has improved over time**

The study also highlights through comparison with previous findings of a DfE-funded study that quality of provision has improved in England over the past 16 years. Some regional variation in quality was observed, partly explained by differences in setting type and their characteristics, although children in deprived areas are equally likely to receive good quality provision as children in less deprived areas.

Dr Svetlana Speight, Research Director at the National Centre for Social Research and the Evaluation manager on the SEED study said: “We have seen from previous SEED reports that early years education has the potential to benefit children from all backgrounds. Today’s research highlights the structural factors which contribute to high quality care and, by extension, the areas to focus on for practitioners who want to improve the quality of their provision. This is particularly important as working families with three and four year olds take up the Government’s funded childcare offer under the new 30 Free Hours policy. Future research from SEED will examine links between the quality of settings and children’s outcomes.”

Professor Edward Melhuish, the report author, University of Oxford, said: “The SEED study shows that the quality of early education provision in England is generally good and has improved following changes in policy. It also "demonstrates the factors that can be changed to improve quality.”

**ENDS**

The report can be downloaded from the Department for Education website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/study-of-early-education-and-development-seed>

For more information or to arrange an interview with Dr Svetlana Speight please contact Sophie Brown: Sophie.brown@natcen.ac.uk, 0207 549 9550 / 07734 960 069.

To arrange an interview with Professor Edward Melhuish please contact the University of Oxford press office:

**Notes to editors:**

The Study of Early Education and Development (SEED) is a major longitudinal study which is following just under 6,000 two-year-olds from across England through to the end of KS1 (age 7). The study is being carried out by NatCen Social Research, working with the University of Oxford, Action for Children and Frontier Economics, on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE).