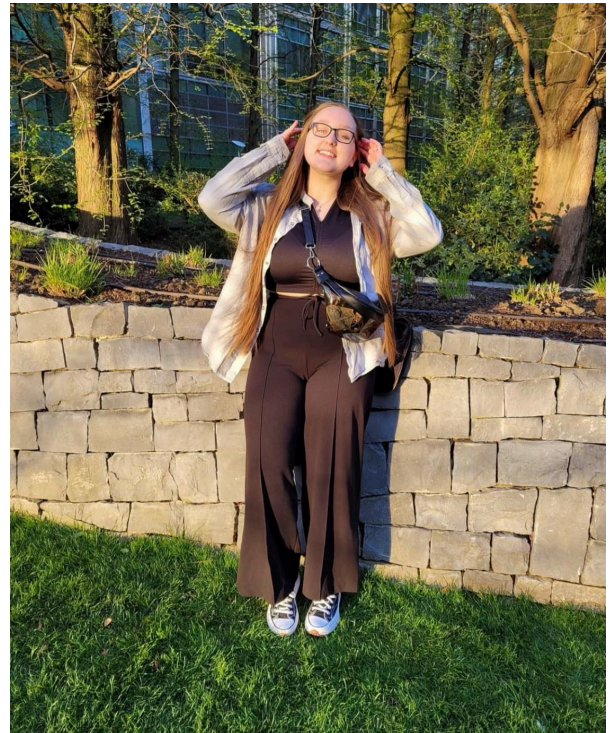


“This is the most rewarding job I’ve ever had,” Charlotte Gant, 23, states with resounding confidence. Behind her, propped up on her desk, is a colourful poster in scribbled crayon, decorated with chaotic stick figures.

Gant was only 10 years old when she decided she wanted to work with children when she grew up, and unlike most at that age, that dream never changed. When she was in college, one of the local nurseries had a booth at a school career fair, giving her the chance to seriously consider a career in childcare. In less than a month, she was hired and began working with the children at Lynton House and still works there today.

The nursery, Gant explains, is separated into rooms for each age group. The children will spend their very first years there and graduate to primary school when they reach the age of five. Each room has a ‘room leader’ in charge of the children, and after four years at Lynton House, she finds herself in charge of the youngest in the building: infants from 3-18 months.



Charlotte Gant in April 2022

“There’s a lot more responsibility when they’re that young,” Gant remarks. None of the babies in the group are old enough to be potty-trained, and most can’t yet dress or feed themselves. “The best thing about working where I do is watching them grow,” she says with a smile. By the time they advance to the next room, they’re walking, talking and even putting coats on by themselves. “It’s absolutely incredible.”

Not every day seems to match the sunshine and rainbows on the nursery wallpaper, though. It takes a certain type of person to look after children so young. The prerequisites? “So much patience, organisation, and excellent people skills.” They’re listed with heavy emphasis and it’s clear that the qualities aren’t just helpful—they’re *essential*.

As the room leader, Gant recalls watching several of her colleagues start working at the nursery with the assumption that the job is relaxed and easy, expecting to cuddle with cute, happy infants all day without a thought. In reality, the entire point of the job is to teach young children before they actually start school.

Even though she *does* get to cuddle with infants a lot of the time, the work has its downsides—some of which have nothing to do with the children themselves. Gant was promoted to the position of room leader at the young age of 19. “Some of the parents had this running joke between them: that I was a ‘baby looking after babies.’” At first, the comments were mildly irritating. She’d been fully trained, had been working with young people her whole life, and felt more than capable of handling the tasks at hand. Overtime, though, she understood where the lighthearted concern was coming from. “They just care about their kids and want the best for them.”

So what does a typical day look like for a supervisor of an infant nursery? *Chaos*, it seems, would be definite. Each day starts and ends with the parents: going over what the children have eaten, how much sleep they've gotten, and any other information the nursery would need to know to look after them throughout the day. Of course, there's the expected snacks, nap-times, playtime and any planned activities, and Gant's personal favourite: garden or outdoor time. One special thing she highlights about the nursery is getting to watch small children explore the world around them.

Perhaps the elephant in the room is the topic of salary. It's no secret that some of the most essential occupations in today's society (healthcare, education, etc.) are among the lowest paid, which feels extremely backwards. After all, if it wasn't for nurseries and those who run them, the same parents questioning the employees' experience would likely be unable to maintain their child-free day jobs. It's despite this necessity that even as room leader, Gant is barely paid ten-quid an hour. "Nursery workers are looked down on, and people often assume that the job is easy...thoughtless." She says. "But for the job that we do, we're not paid the correct amount. At *all*."

It's clear that working in a nursery, as with any environment, has its wayward ups and downs. With the pressure, workload and responsibility at such a peak, it takes a special person to be successful here. "I wouldn't change a single thing," Gant says, smiling at the poster again. "I love this job."

Sourcesheet

Interviewee:

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Other sources:

'Becoming a nursery worker' from pacey.org.uk