



An international survey of Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education

Neil Boland

SUMMARY REPORT

Selected themes and patterns

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Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of IASWECE.

Abstract

This summary report presents selected findings from an international survey conducted during the centenary year of Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education. Drawing on responses from educators, assistants, leaders and trainers across a wide range of countries and contexts, it offers a descriptive account of participation, respondent demographics and frequently reported needs and challenges.

The survey responses point to several areas of concern for participants, including children's developmental and social needs, family contexts, digital media, collegial and organisational conditions, training, resources and wider questions of sustainability. These findings are presented primarily through graphs and brief summary comments and should be understood as an initial contribution to ongoing reflection and dialogue within the international Steiner/Waldorf early childhood community.

This public summary does not provide a full thematic analysis of written responses or regional differences. In particular, responses to the open-text question on how IASWECE can best support early childhood work are not discussed here, as they require more detailed review.

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1. Project information

This summary report presents initial findings from an anonymous international survey conducted during the centenary conference of Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education at the Goetheanum in Dornach, Switzerland, in April 2026. The survey gathered responses from educators, assistants, leaders and trainers working in a wide range of countries and contexts, with the aim of developing a broad picture of current experiences, needs and challenges in Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education at a significant point in its history.

This report is intended for public circulation as a concise descriptive summary of selected survey findings. It focuses on participation, demographic patterns and structured survey responses, and does not provide a full analysis of regional differences or written responses. Open-text responses, including those concerning how IASWECE can best support early childhood work, require fuller thematic analysis and will be addressed separately in later reporting for IASWECE and the wider international Steiner/Waldorf early childhood community.

Throughout this report, the term Steiner/Waldorf is used in line with IASWECE guidelines. The term educator refers broadly to those working with young children, while early childhood settings is used to describe workplaces, recognising that terminology varies across countries and educational contexts.

Background and rationale

The survey was developed through collaboration between IASWECE and Dr Neil Boland of Auckland University of Technology. Its purpose was to gain a broad, contemporary picture of Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education across different countries, cultures and traditions, with particular attention to the needs and challenges currently being experienced by practitioners, assistants, centre leaders and trainers.

The centenary of Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education in 2026 provides a meaningful moment for this research. It is both a time of celebration and an opportunity for reflection: to acknowledge the achievements of the past hundred years while also considering the conditions, questions and possibilities that may shape the future of the movement. As Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education continues to develop in diverse cultural contexts, educators are constantly working within changing social, pedagogical and organisational conditions in which family life, digital media, educational expectations and children's developmental profiles are all becoming more complex.

The survey focused specifically on participants' needs and challenges, in order to identify areas where support may be helpful. It did not set out to document what is working well, existing strengths, or aspects of practice that do not require additional support. The findings should therefore be read as a partial picture: one contribution to a broader understanding of Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education, alongside established

practices, professional expertise and the many ways this work continues to be sustained and developed.

Gathering perspectives during an international centenary conference offered particular value. The conference brought together people from many countries and contexts, including some who may have limited opportunities to take part in international professional dialogue. The survey was intended to include a wide range of voices, including practitioners from newer or less widely represented contexts, teaching assistants, leaders and trainers. This breadth of participation contributes to a more nuanced picture of Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education as it is currently practised and experienced.

The survey findings will contribute to ongoing professional dialogue within IASWECE and the wider international Steiner/Waldorf early childhood community. They may help inform future professional development, training priorities, collaborative projects and further research. In this way, the project aims to support a more connected, responsive and future-oriented international early childhood movement.

2. Design of the survey

The survey was conducted as an anonymous online questionnaire, accessible by computer or mobile device. It was launched at the IASWECE centenary conference in Dornach, Switzerland, and remained open for two weeks from 8 April 2026. During this period, 372 responses were received from participants at the conference and from other locations worldwide.

It was offered in 16 languages: Chinese (Simplified and Traditional), Czech, Dutch, English, Estonian, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish and Swahili. Responses were also submitted in Croatian, Finnish, Polish and Ukrainian. Responses provided in languages other than English were translated into English using Microsoft Copilot and, where needed, checked by native speakers. This supported the review of responses across the dataset, although some nuances of wording may not be fully retained in translation.

The survey consisted mainly of multiple-choice questions, in which participants could select one or more answers. These structured responses are presented descriptively, mainly through simple graphs accompanied by brief summary comments. The comments identify the most frequently selected responses and draw attention to visible patterns in the data. Some questions included an *Other* option where participants could add brief written comments.

The survey also included one open-text question asking how IASWECE could best support early childhood work. Responses to this question were extensive and are not discussed in this public summary, as they require more detailed review.

In questions offering an *Other* option, not all respondents provided additional written detail. As a result, the number of written comments considered may be lower than the total number selecting *Other* in the charts.

Because the survey was distributed at an international conference and remained open for a short period, the sample cannot be taken as representative of all Steiner/Waldorf early childhood educators internationally. It is better understood as a broad international listening exercise, offering an indication of recurring concerns and support needs across a diverse group of respondents.

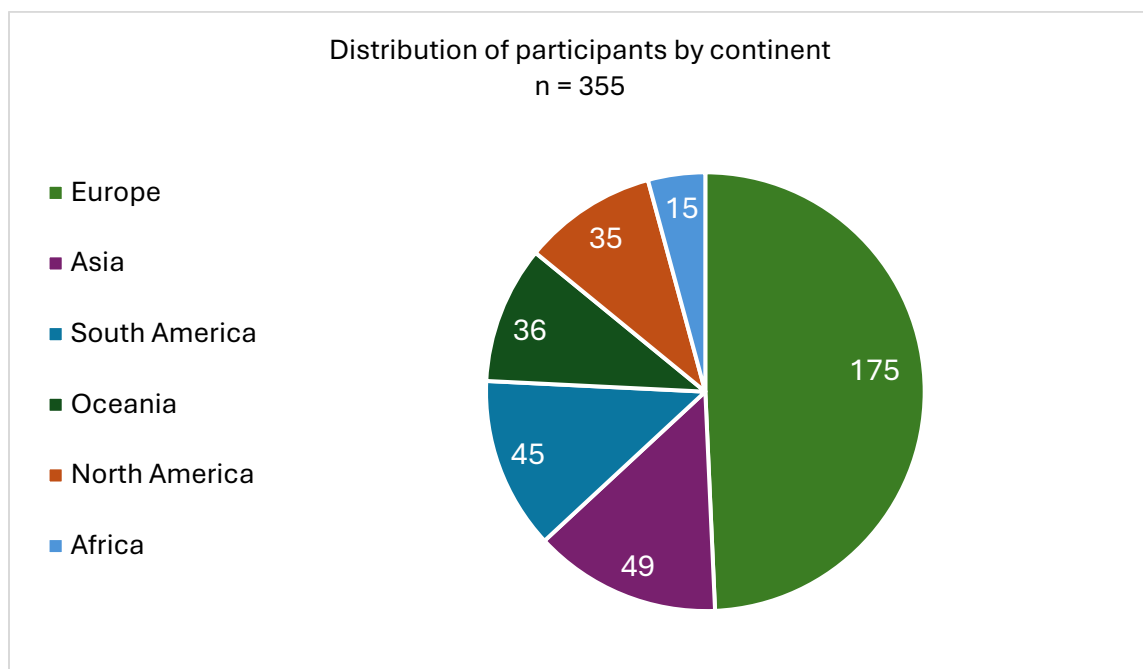
3. Demographic snapshot

Basic demographic data were collected to provide an overview of the participants. These included country of work, current role, level of experience, ages of children taught (where relevant) and details of training. The results are presented here in graphical form and are largely self-explanatory.

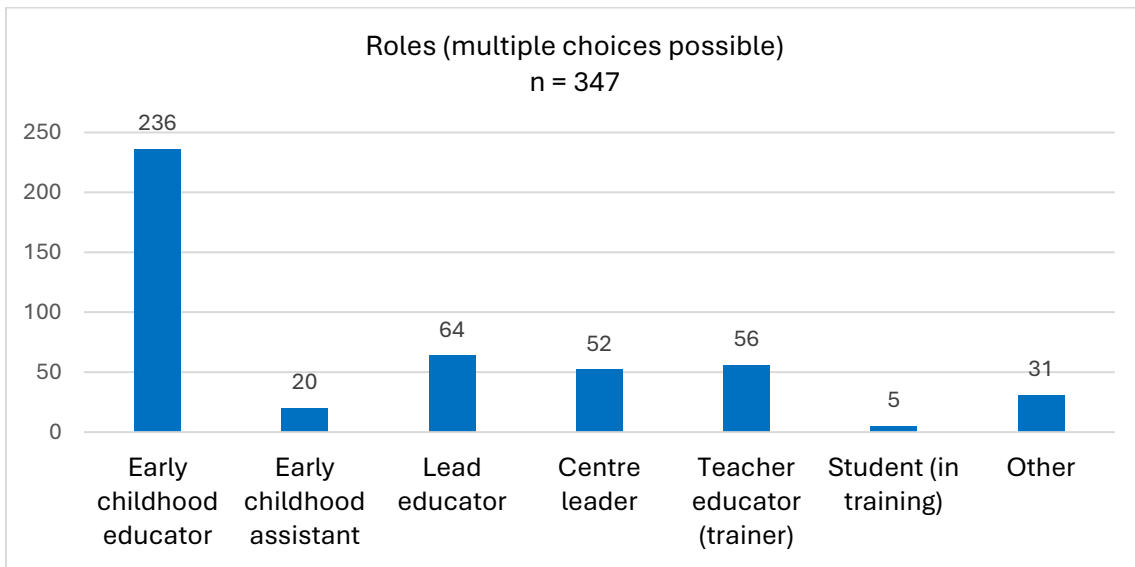
In the following graphs, ‘n’ shows the number of people who responded to each question or are represented. For questions where multiple answers could be selected, the total number of responses may be higher, as participants could choose more than one option.

In which country do you currently work?

A full list of participants by country can be found in the Appendix (page 22). This graphic gives an overview by continent.

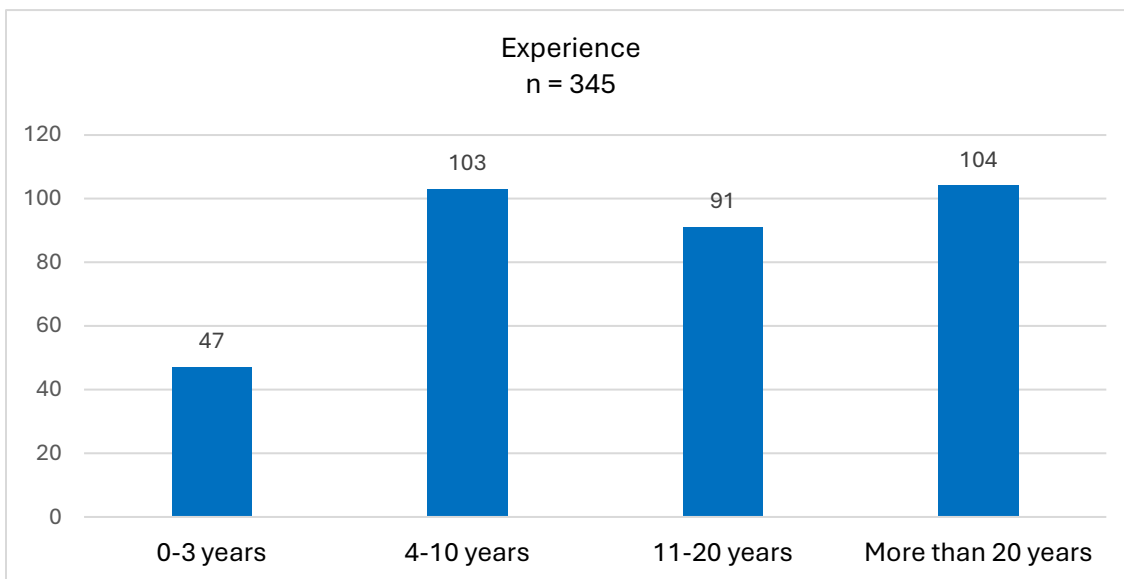


What are your current roles?

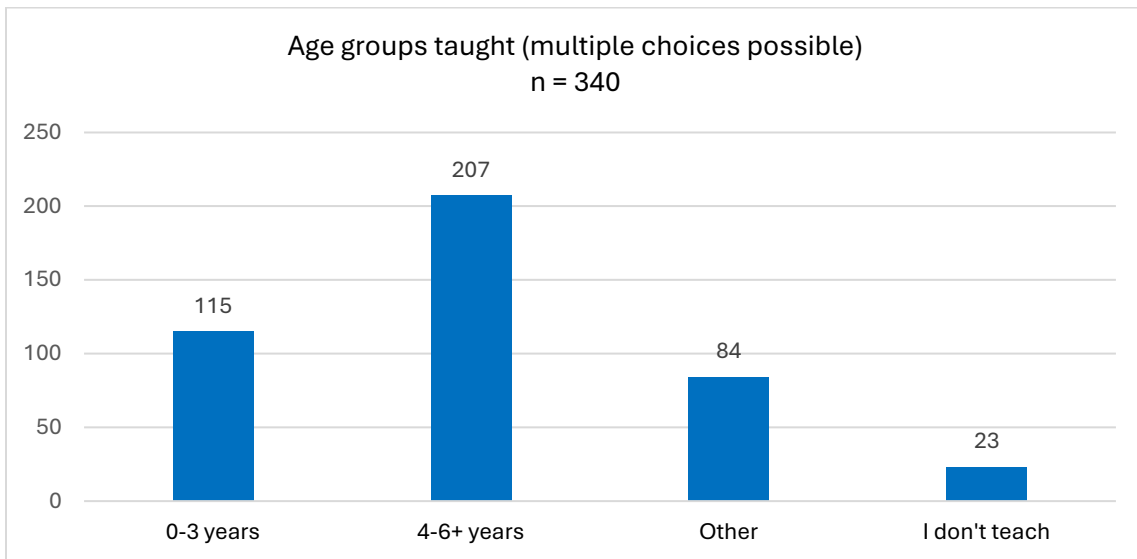


Respondents who selected *Other* reported a range of additional roles, including governance and ownership positions (e.g. proprietor or trust member), home-based early childhood provision, mentoring and facilities management.

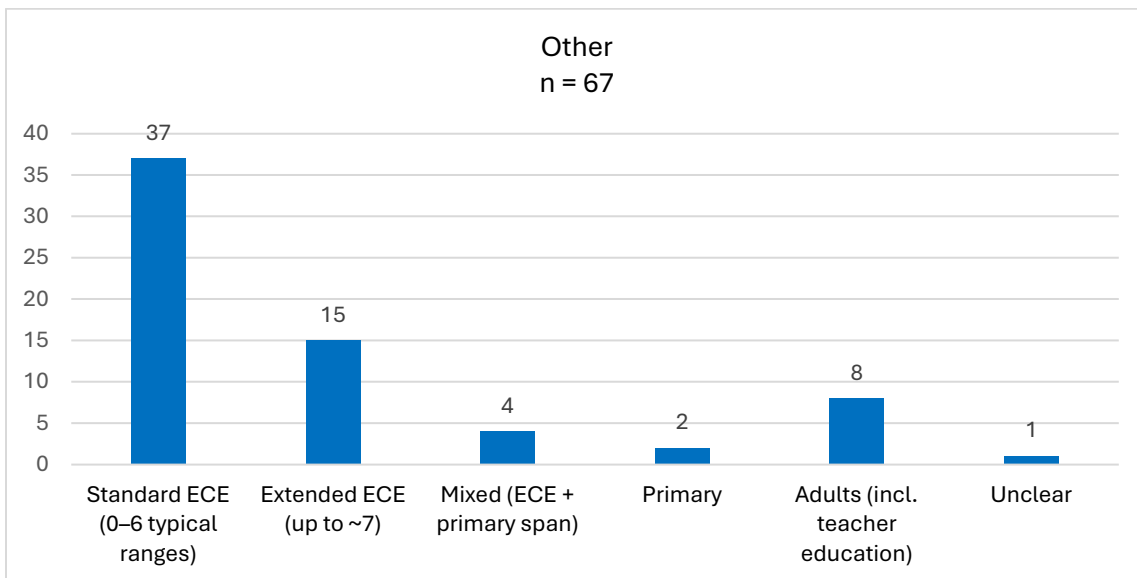
How many years have you worked in Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education?



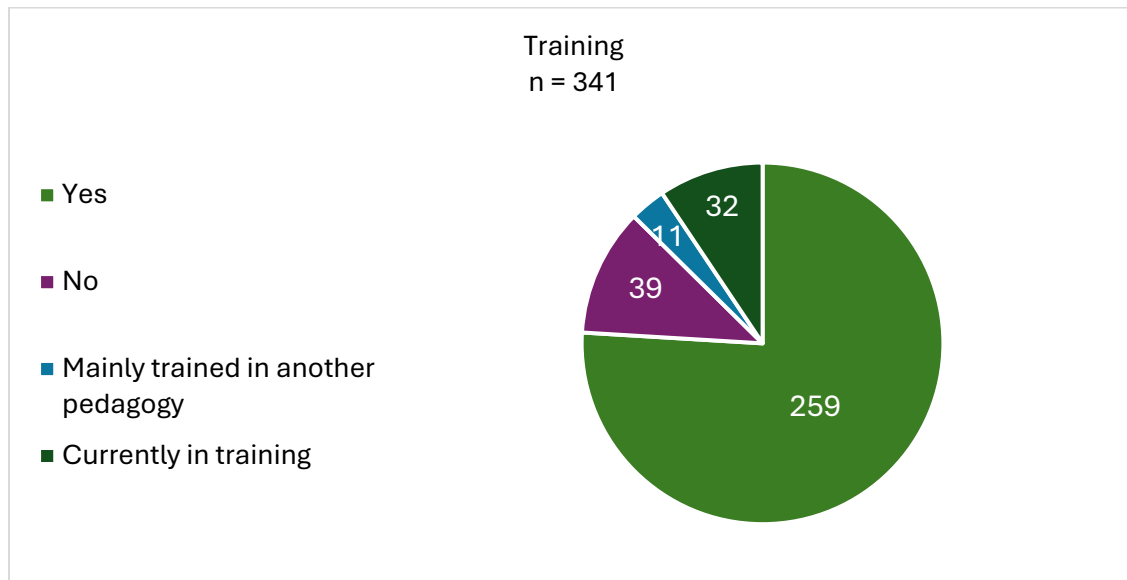
What age are the children you teach?



Of the 84 respondents who selected *Other*, 67 provided additional detail. The large majority of these responses reflect variations within typical early childhood education age ranges, rather than fundamentally different age groupings.



Have you completed formal Steiner/Waldorf early childhood training?



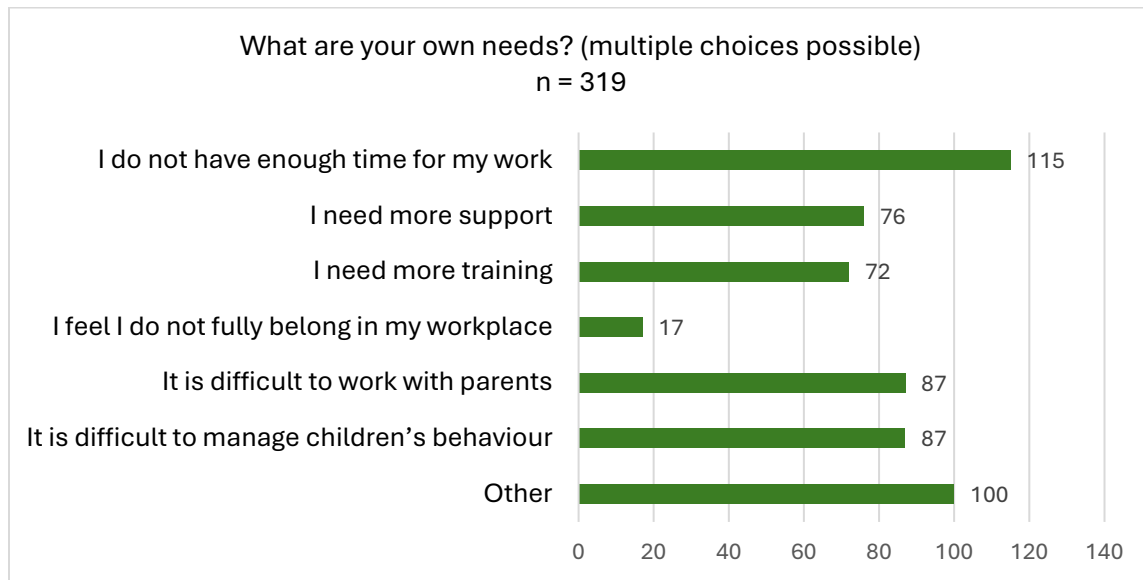
The large majority of respondents (over 75%) indicated that they had completed formal Steiner/Waldorf early childhood training, suggesting a strong presence of trained practitioners within the survey group.

4. Educators' needs

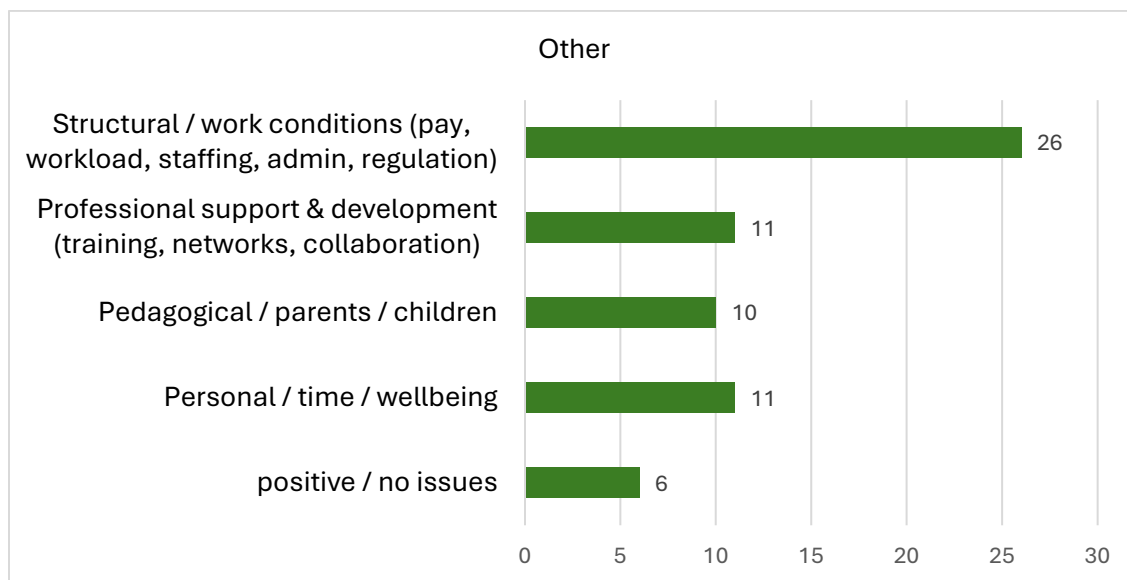
This section gives the initial results of the various questions which were asked of educators, their own needs, when working with children and with colleagues and what were their biggest challenges.

As noted in the introduction, the survey was designed to focus on participants' needs and challenges in order to identify areas where support may be helpful. It did not specifically explore what is working well, existing strengths, or aspects of practice that do not call for additional support. Consequently, the findings offer a partial perspective, foregrounding particular areas of experience rather than providing a comprehensive account of Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education. These results are therefore best understood as one contribution to a wider picture that also includes established practices, professional commitment and the many ways in which the work continues to be sustained and developed across diverse contexts.

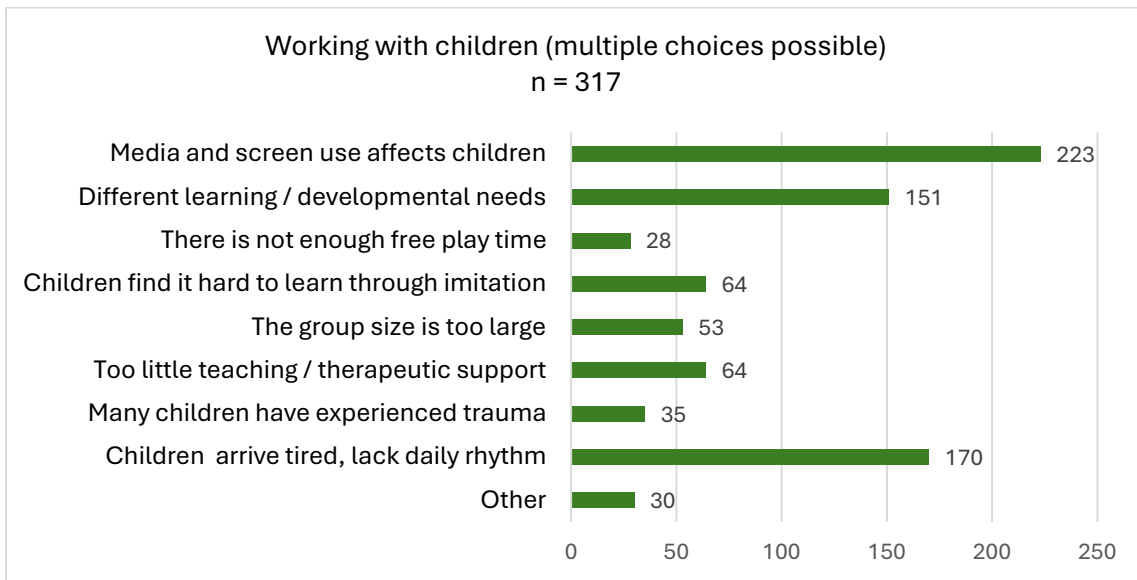
Your own needs



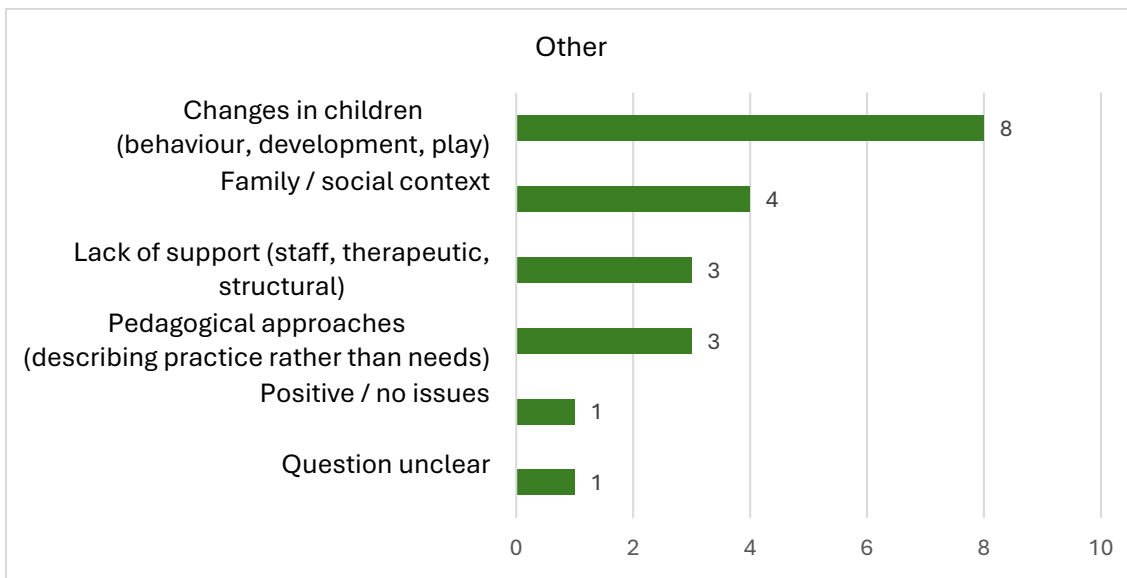
The most frequent issue identified by educators was a lack of time to do all that their jobs entail, followed at some distance by challenges posed by parents and by children's behaviour. Of the 100 respondents who chose *Other*, there were 64 entries which are grouped as follows:



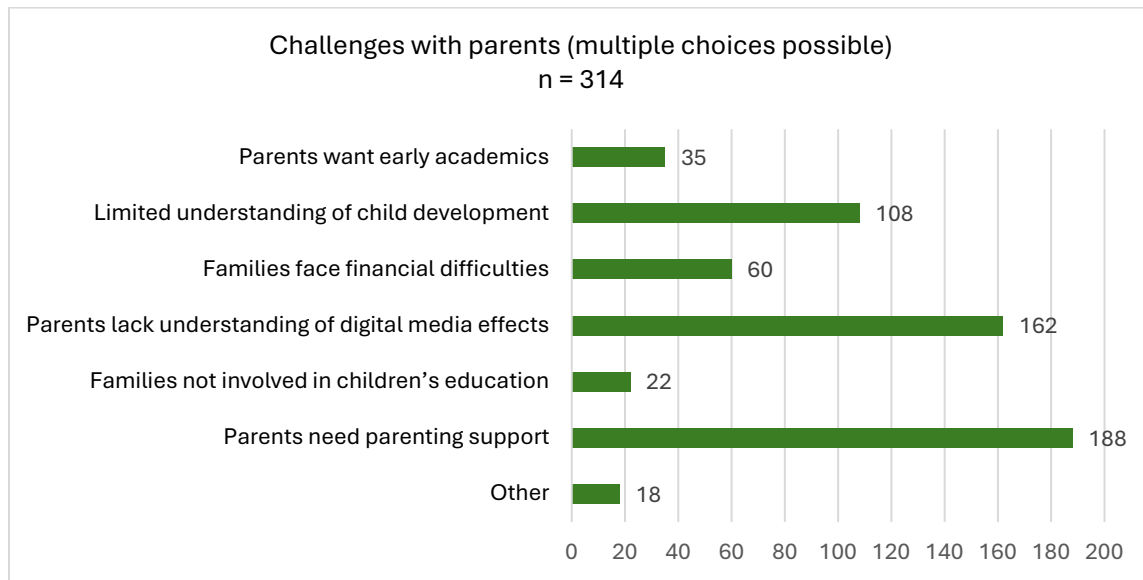
Working with children



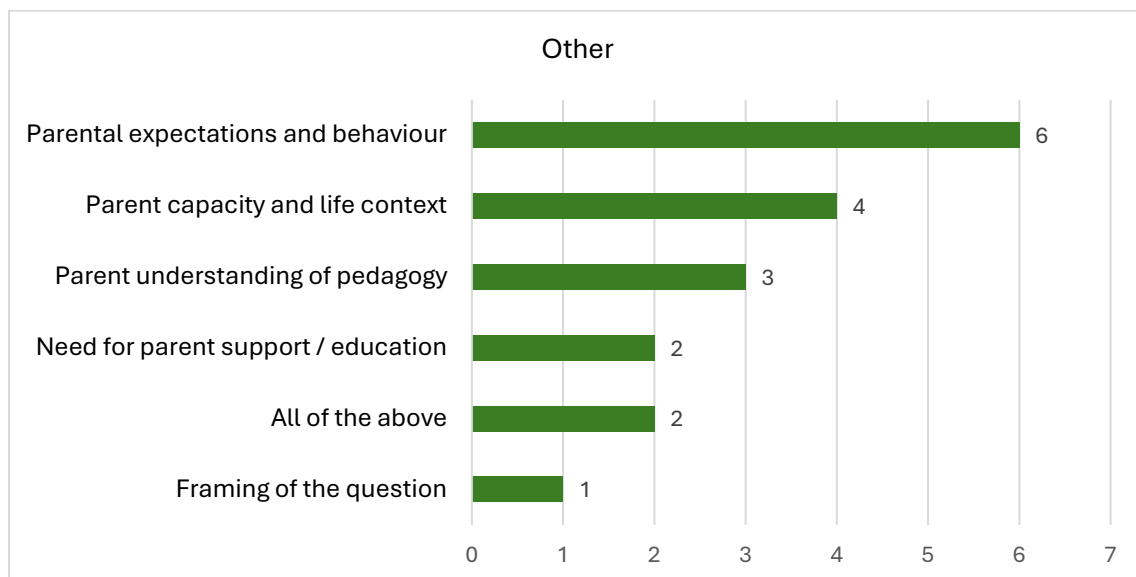
The effects of media and screen use was the most frequently identified issue when working with children, the second being children arriving tired and lacking a daily rhythm, itself possibly allied to screen use. Of the 30 respondents who indicated *Other*, there were 20 entries.



Working with families and parents

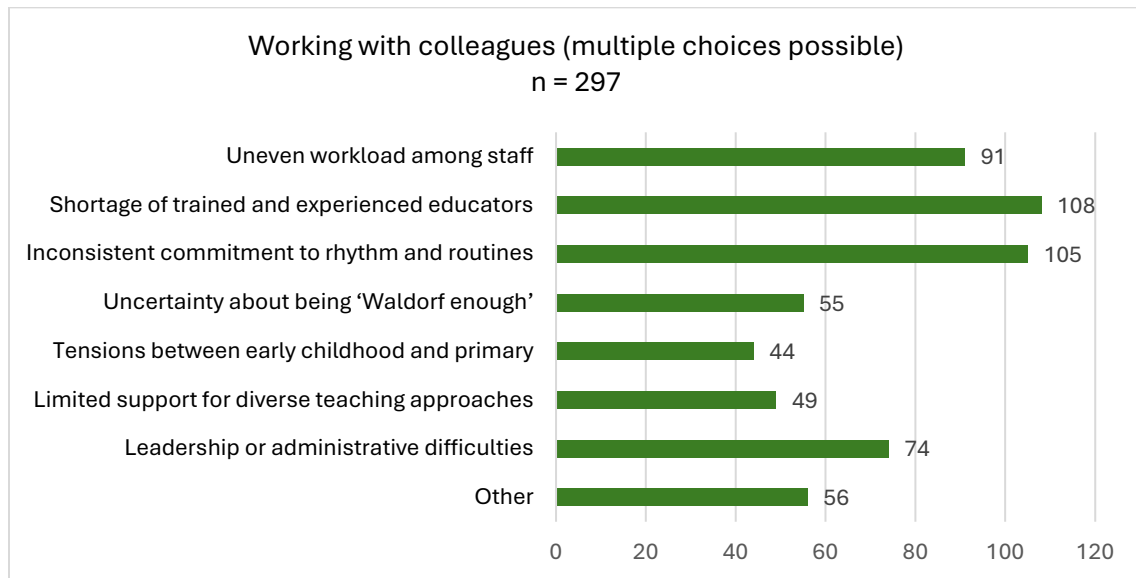


Here the need for parental support was the most frequent issue, along with the effects of digital media on children. The entries under *Other* can be grouped as follows:

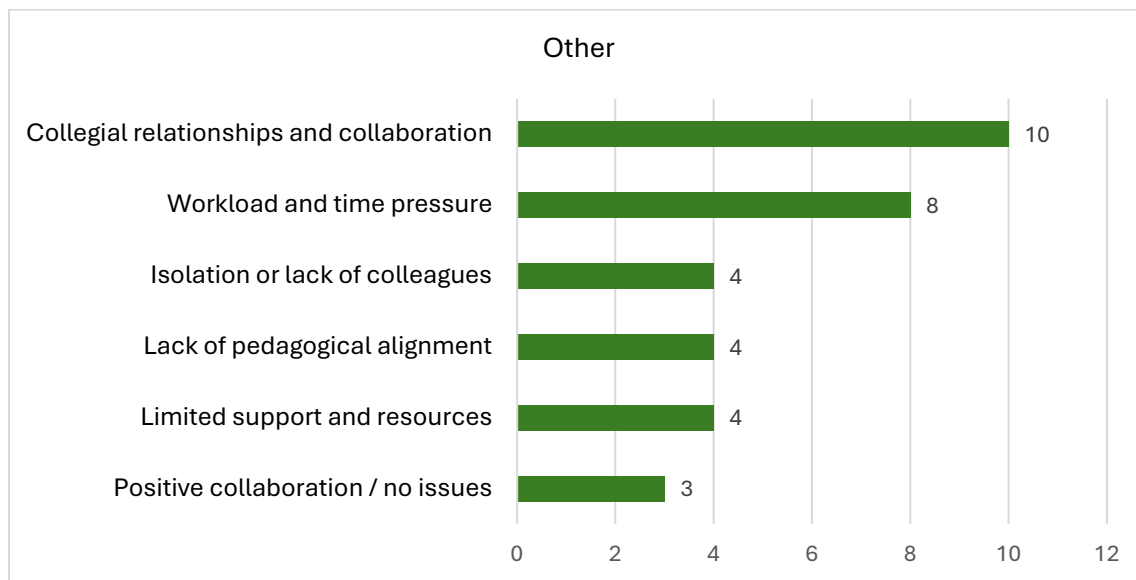


These *Other* responses highlight two related areas of challenge which are worth noting. The first is that of patterns of parental expectations and behaviour can include experiences of overinvolvement, heightened sensitivity to feedback and differing expectations regarding the role of the educator, suggesting that this relational dynamic can be complex and demanding to navigate. The second draws attention to the broader issue of family life, noting the frequency of pressures on parents such as lack of time, general stress, as well as increasingly complex personal and social circumstances and how that can shape ways in which parents can engage with their children's education.

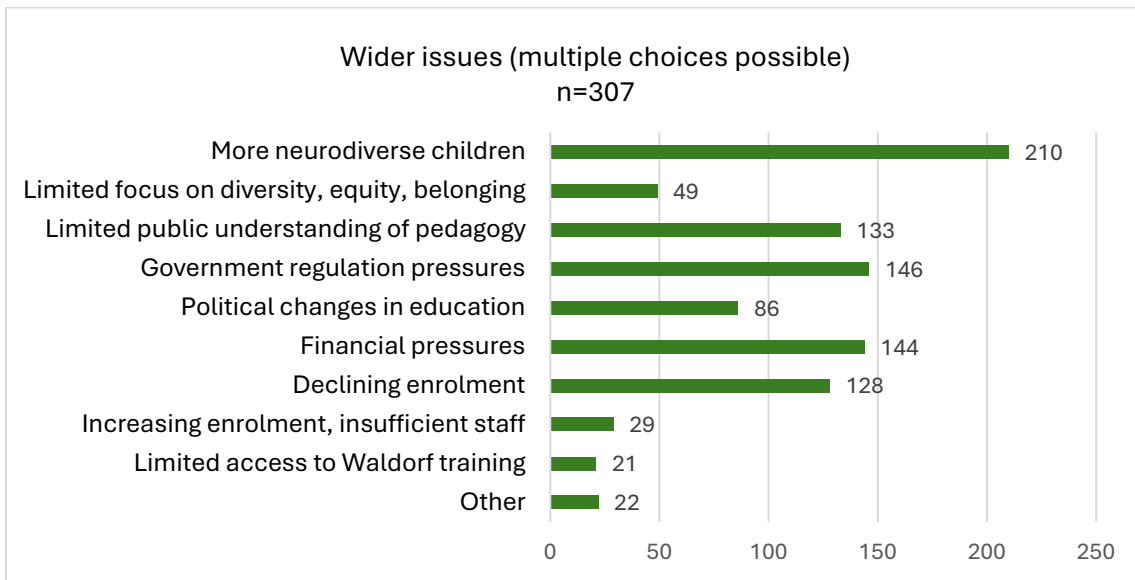
Challenges when working with colleagues



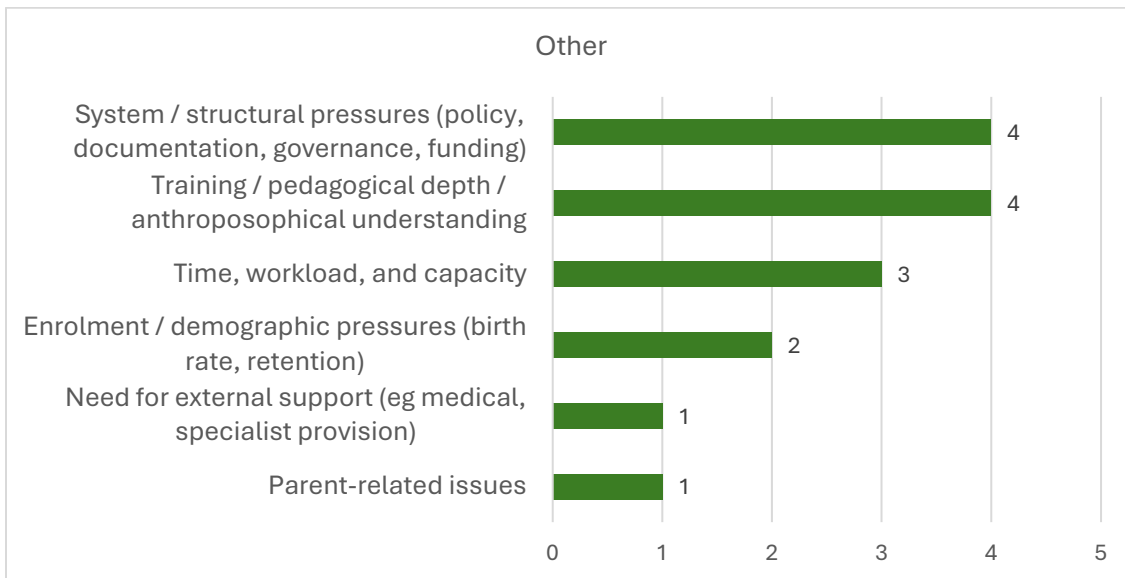
The two most frequently identified issues here, which are possibly linked, are a shortage of suitable staff and inconsistencies between colleagues in working with rhythm and routines. There were 33 responses to *Other* challenges. They can be grouped as below.



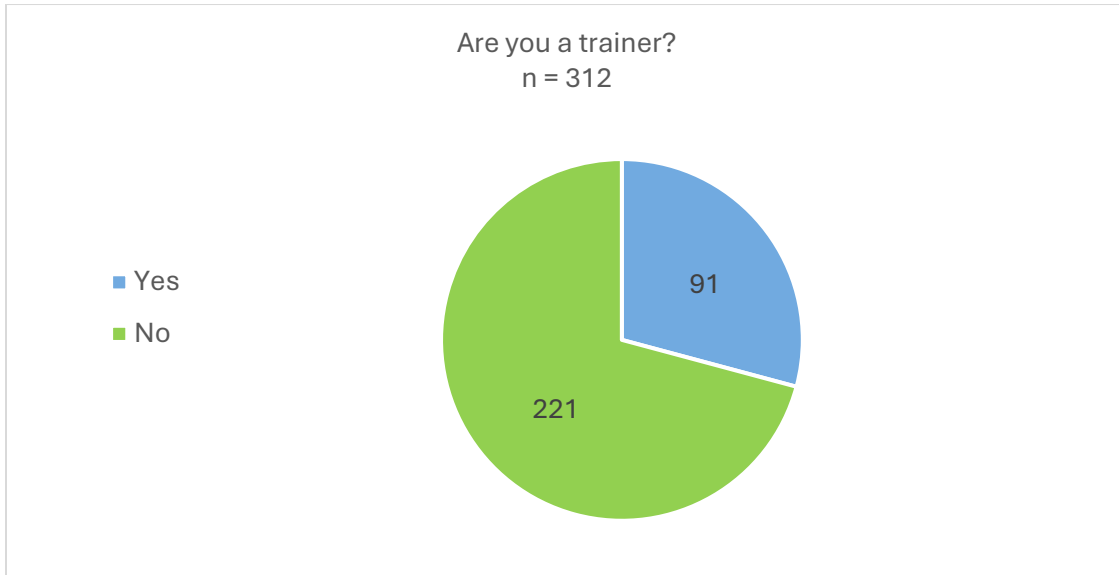
Wider issues facing Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education



The challenge reported far ahead of others was the increasing number of children presenting with diverse developmental, behavioural or learning profiles, including neurodivergence. There were 15 responses to *Other* challenges.



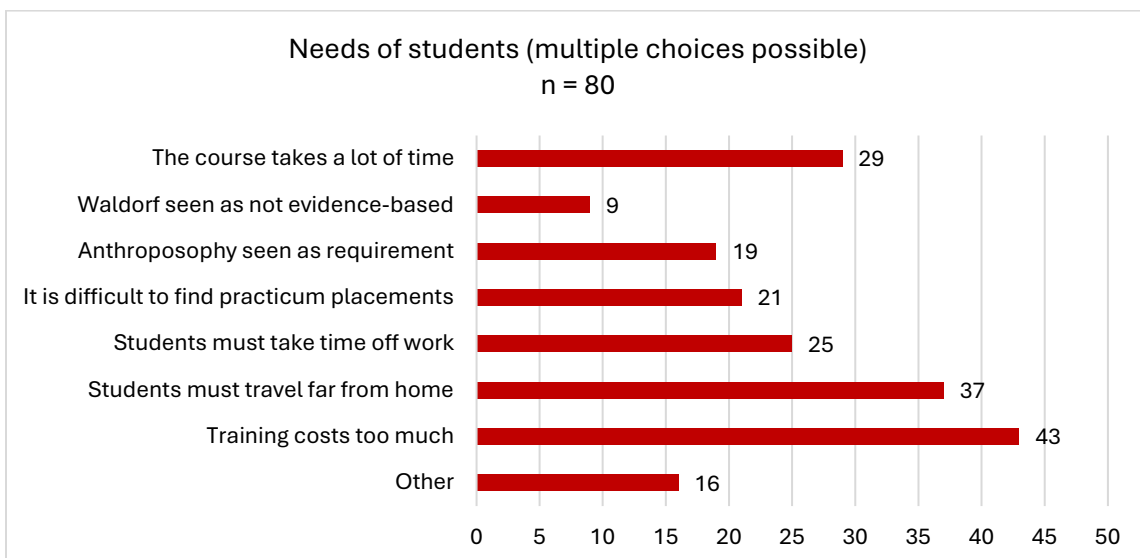
5. Trainers' insights



This section presents responses from those involved in training and supporting future practitioners, offering a complementary perspective on the issues identified in practice settings. In total, 91 respondents indicated that they were involved in training teachers. Of these, 80 submitted responses, including partially completed surveys where substantive answers were provided. As a result, response counts vary across individual questions.

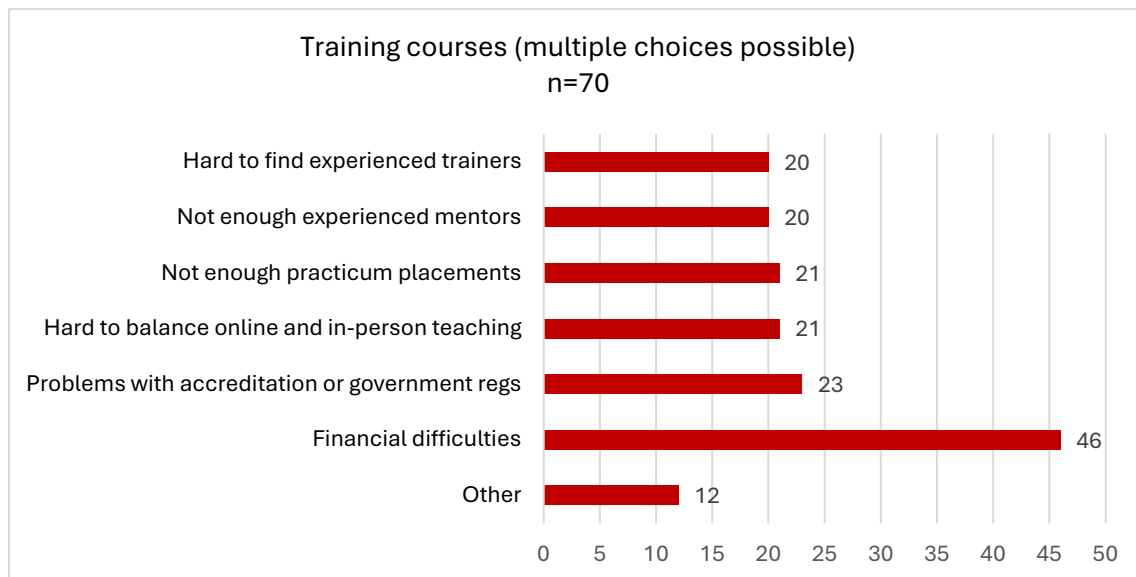
Although fewer in number, these responses provide insight into how current challenges are reflected in the preparation and ongoing support of future educators, and therefore into the conditions shaping the development of Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education internationally.

What challenges do students face?



The most frequently identified issues for student educators in the view of their tutors were the costs of training and the need to travel often large distances. Responses under *Other* were relatively few (n=10) and dispersed. A small number referred to general constraints related to time, workload and personal or contextual factors (n=4). Isolated responses also noted issues relating to funding or salary (n=1), pedagogy or anthroposophy (n=1) and reference to an alternative model (Lifeways) (n=1), while a small number were neutral or did not indicate a clear concern (n=2).

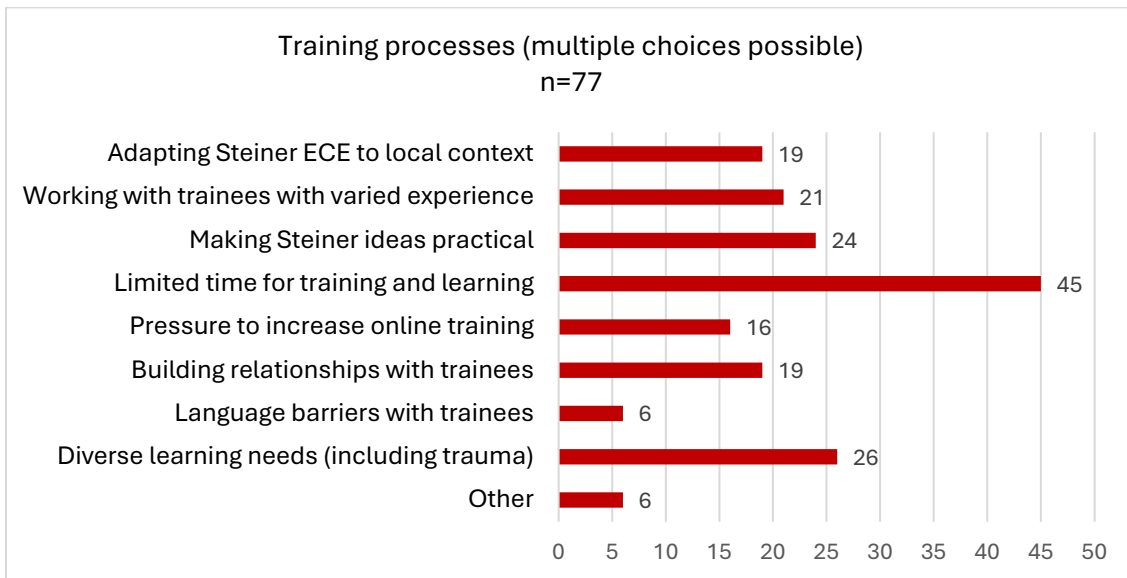
What challenges does your training course face most often?



Financial viability is clearly the most serious concern for the courses themselves, with others ranking equally. Responses given under *Other* (n=10) showed a clear pattern, with half (n=5) relating to the length of study and the difficulty of sustaining commitment over time. Participants most often referred to limited availability, the challenge of combining full-time work with training and the overall burden of continuing education alongside professional and personal responsibilities.

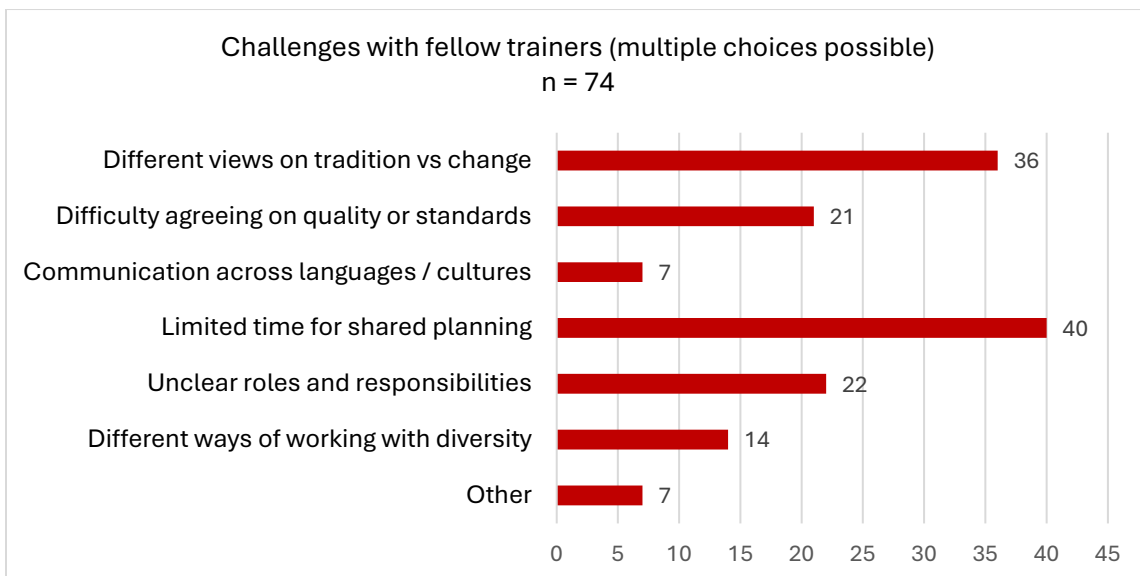
The remaining responses were more dispersed. Individual responses (one case each) referred to difficulties in maintaining attendance and commitment, limitations in programme depth, financial dependence on external support and the ongoing development of Steiner/Waldorf education in specific national contexts.

What challenges do you meet most often within the training process?



A general lack of time was the most identified issue here, by some distance, although it is perhaps worth noting that the breadth of student educators' learning needs (including trauma) was the second most frequent entry. The six respondents who selected *Other* did not provide further detail.

In your work with fellow trainers, what challenges do you meet most often?



Lack of time was also the most frequently identified issue when working with other trainers. The second was negotiating the tradition–innovation continuum within the training programmes. Two additional comments were recorded, one voicing concerns about differing levels of connection to anthroposophy among colleagues and the other noting positive collaboration.

6. Next steps

This summary report is an initial contribution to ongoing reflection and dialogue within the international Steiner/Waldorf early childhood community. The responses point to a number of areas that may benefit from further attention, including educator wellbeing, training and mentoring, resources, support for colleagues, and opportunities for international exchange.

The findings also raise broader questions about how Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education can continue to retain a clear and recognisable pedagogical identity while developing the ways it is communicated, researched and supported through professional learning in diverse contemporary contexts.

Further work is needed to explore the survey material in greater depth. This includes closer review of written responses, including the open-text question on how IASWECE can best support early childhood work, as well as the possible examination of differences across regions, roles and levels of experience. Such work may offer a more detailed understanding of the experiences and needs represented in the survey.

In the longer term, this survey may also provide a useful baseline for future study. If similar surveys are repeated at intervals, they could help show how Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education is developing internationally, including emerging needs, areas of progress and the effects of future support initiatives.

7. Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my warm thanks to everyone who took part in the survey and shared their experiences, reflections and perspectives. Your willingness to contribute your time has made this project possible.

The survey represents an important collective effort to understand how Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education is being practised, experienced and developed in diverse cultural, geographical and pedagogical contexts. Many respondents completed the survey during a busy and inspiring centenary conference, and I greatly appreciate the care and thought given to the responses.

I would also like to thank IASWECE and the steering group for their openness to this work and for their support throughout the project.

Your contributions form a meaningful part of an emerging international picture of Steiner/Waldorf early childhood education in its centenary year. They will help inform

professional dialogue, future planning and international collaboration, while also honouring the work of those who have carried this movement over the past hundred years and those who will continue to develop it in the future.

With appreciation and respect for the important work you do every day with children, families and colleagues.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neil Boland". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and slightly larger than the rest of the letters.

Neil Boland

About the author

Dr Neil Boland began in Steiner/Waldorf education as a kindergarten assistant in Japan in the 1980s and went on to work as a class teacher and in high school. He is now Associate Professor of Education at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand and remains active in teacher education internationally. His research and publications focus on Steiner/Waldorf education, teacher education, educational philosophy and practice-led inquiry.

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Appendix

These are the numbers of respondents from each country followed by maps showing the distribution of countries.

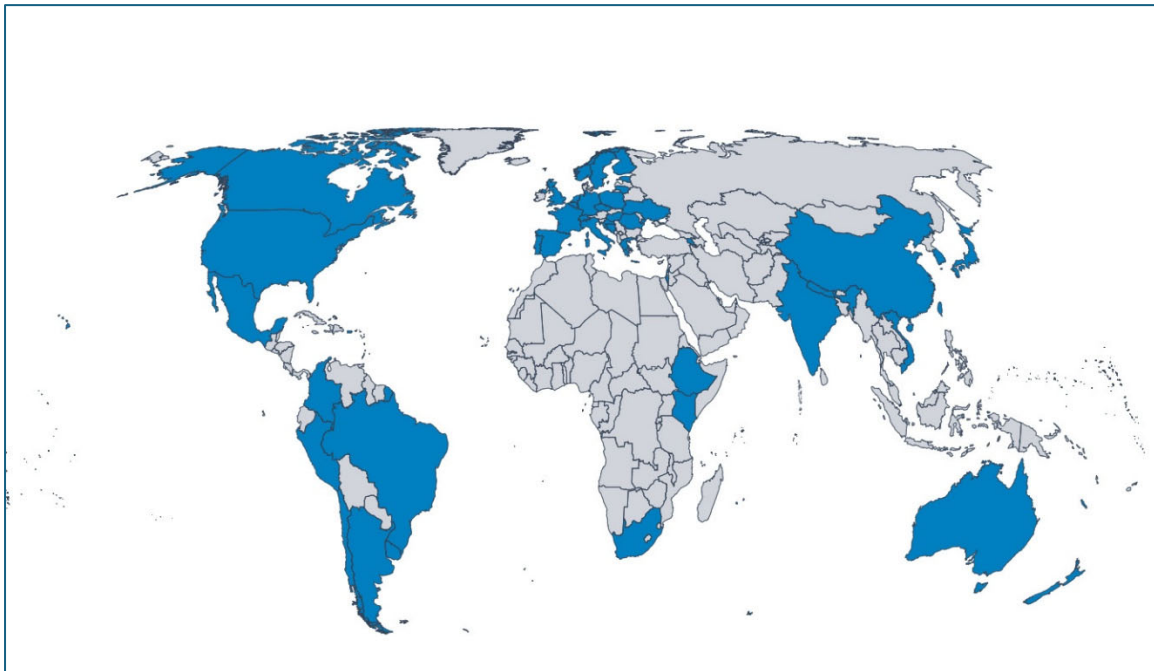
1. Exact numbers

Argentina	13
Armenia	1
Australia	8
Belgium	1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1
Brazil	19
Canada	5
Chile (incl. Rapa Nui)	6
China	14
Colombia	2
Croatia	8
Czech Republic	1
Estonia	2
Ethiopia	1
Finland	19

France	1
Germany	44
Greece	1
Hungary	10
India	7
Israel	1
Italy	8
Japan	12
Kenya	1
Lithuania	5
Mexico	4
Nepal	1
Netherlands	7
New Zealand	28
Norway	6

Peru	3
Poland	1
Portugal	3
Romania	7
South Africa	13
South Korea	2
Spain	8
Sweden	2
Switzerland	14
Taiwan	9
Ukraine	7
United Kingdom	18
United States	26
Uruguay	2
Vietnam	3

2. Global map of participating countries (equal-earth projection)



3. Detail: Participating countries in Europe

