

Consultation On Draft Code of Practice On Provision Of The Free Entitlement For 3 and 4 Year Olds

- from Daycare Trust's London childcare providers network

Background to Daycare Trust and the *London childcare providers network* project

Daycare Trust is the national childcare charity, working since November 1986 to promote high quality affordable childcare for all. The *London childcare providers network* project is funded by London Councils to facilitate greater access for parents to quality childcare, and to enable providers to share experiences and influence policy, tackling disadvantage at all levels.

In response to a need identified by London childcare providers, and those working with providers, a seminar on the draft Code of Practice on provision of the free entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds was organised on 8 December 2009. This brought together participants from the London boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Croydon, Hammersmith & Fulham, Hounslow, Kensington and Chelsea, Merton, Richmond, Sutton, Tower Hamlets and Westminster, from private, voluntary and maintained sector providers, local authority staff and other London organisation. Numbers were limited to thirty, to enable effective discussions, with a further twenty-five on a waiting list – an indicator of the strong interest in the topic and in opportunities to exchange. The DCSF representative was unfortunately unable to attend, therefore these notes are also a way to feed into the consultation process.

The following issues arose from the seminar, which we believe will be useful to input into the consultation. Also included are some comments on the Early Years Single Funding Formula, which, while not the direct subject of this consultation, is intrinsically linked.

Daycare Trust and the consultation

These notes represent a summary of issues raised by participants, and not necessarily the views of Daycare Trust. The Daycare Trust's own formal national response is being submitted by Daycare Trust's Policy & Research Officer.

General issues

- The limited role of childminders in the provision of the Free Entitlement, and related lack of accredited networks.
- What are the points of entry for nurseries? – do they develop a single point of entry, and what are the costs and benefits, and impact of parents who pay for provision.

Quality

- The issue of quality is key, and why is funding for it optional?
- The supplements for quality seem to vary across boroughs.

Funding

- Concerns about the impact of the offer on sufficiency.
- Some providers do not want to opt out, but are concerned that the rate is too low.
- High levels of deprivation can affect the costs.
- Some parents are not able to afford any additional costs, over and above the free entitlement.
- Wide variation in funds available in different boroughs.
- One children's centre's budget was reducing by 46%.
- Request for clarity about whether the standards fund would continue.

Maintained sector

- In the maintained sectors, some schools are on track, but others are not yet developing the flexibility needed for full implementation.
- Some models of good practice are evolving from some schools – these need to be shared.

Rates set for the Early Years Single Funding Formula, and their impact

In some areas consultation is still in progress, with some providers having a rough idea of the transition rates and others not. Rates vary from £2.74 to £4.00 per hour, with some rates provisional and others set, and some including uplifts.

A key issue within the Code of Practice is whether any charges may be requested from parents, e.g. for lunch, etc – whether the charges can be compulsory or not.

Some PVI's, especially those providing shorter sessions, claim they will close if insufficient funding is available. Some cannot charge top-ups beyond their hours since they are sessional. This greatly impacts on their sustainability if the funding rates are not high enough.

Input into determining the funding formula

In many areas large numbers of settings have participated in consultations, but do feel that some concerns are not heard, and that they are somehow just expected to make it work. Pilots have circulated their best practice, which has been of some help. The terminology used in consultations has sometimes been a hindrance, especially for the PVI sector. We expect that the decision to postpone the introduction of the Early Years Single Funding Formula for another year to provide further pathfinder examples will be warmly welcomed by most of those at the seminar.