

London childcare providers survey 2009

Summary - June 2009

Background

In May 2009, as part of its 4-year London Councils funded *London childcare provider's network* project, Daycare Trust held its first annual London childcare providers survey. The results were presented at the project's first annual London Childcare Providers Forum on 23 June 2009.

The aim of the project is to support parents with access to childcare information, facilitate exchange between childcare providers, across the age range, and to identify issues for policy influencing. The survey forms a crucial role in terms of shaping the project and lobbying the Government and key London bodies, to improve the position of childcare providers and the children with whom they work, especially those facing disadvantage.

The response

The 363 responses to the survey was a larger number than expected. 70% came from childminders, which also reflects their proportionate number in London. Their large response is probably also indicative of their relative isolation, generally working alone in their own homes, and that an electronic survey is a relatively easy way for them to engage. The remaining 110 responses came from a variety of settings, across the age range, and across the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sectors.

In addition to the quantitative responses, we received almost forty sides of narrative comments.

Top issues

Below are the figures for those respondents listing an issue as one of their top five (a breakdown by type of provider is in Appendix A).

	N°	%
1. Implementing the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	226	69%
2. Ofsted inspections	207	63%
3. Improving quality	143	43%
4. Impact of the recession	107	32%
5. Responding to policy change	97	30%

1. Implementing the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Many of the comments were from childminders who felt that there was unrealistic and time consuming paperwork, detracting attention away from childcare. Some also noted that the extra work is not reflected in the pay of childminders as it has to be done in their own time.

2. Ofsted inspections

Many felt stressed and nervous about Ofsted inspections and called out for help meeting the guidelines. Some feel it is too easy to drop down a level (e.g. from good to satisfactory) and that the decision is based on such a short inspection.

3. Improving quality

Many respondents reported difficulty of funding and financial security, in some cases directly affecting children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Some settings cannot afford to employ extra staff to support SEN children, thus pressurising other members of staff. Full day care (social enterprise), full day care (independent) and out of school clubs all reported supporting children with SEN as one of their top 3 issues.

4. Impact of the recession

Respondents report a difficulty in filling vacant places due to parents' redundancy or lower income. Additionally, there is greater competition between providers as government funded day care settings can offer lower prices, and local schools have increased their under-5's facilities.

5. Responding to policy change

Responding to policy change was predominantly an issue for childminders and out of school clubs, with some finding it difficult, and sometimes at risk of becoming counter-productive.

Specific topics

People were asked to mention if the following were an issue, and if so, what particular aspect.

Impact of the recession

Although a small number witnessed an increase in occupancy due to parents returning to work, a significant number reported a decrease. Parents have been reducing the number of sessions their children attend and some low income families have removed their children altogether. Many respondents were suffering from rising costs and owed fees from parents struggling to pay the outstanding amounts. Parents were more reluctant to use childcare facilities as they are finding the fees too high and were seeking reduced fees. Quoting one respondent:

"Parents are cutting down on the number of days they need childcare or considering giving up work all together to look after their children. Secondly, childcare fees had to be kept low in order to compete as the lowest price is most important factor for parents now when looking for childminding places"

Rising rents

Rising rents were mentioned by 84 respondents, with 37% having private landlords, 36% local authority, 13% church/diocesan, and 14% other.

Quality staff

- 54% found staff training and qualifications an issue.

The main problems were funding training and fitting it in around work. One nursery manager felt that training was important but that it was difficult to find good cover staff at a reasonable rate. In more deprived areas there was a lack of qualified (level 3) people applying for positions.

- 53% reported staff pay levels and not being able to afford to increase as another main issue.

Funding cuts have resulted in little or no staff pay increases. Some reported guilt at not being able to pay staff what they feel they deserve. Managers want their staff to further develop their skills, but cannot afford to offer higher pay incentives. Retaining staff was also a problem.

Sustainability and implementing the free entitlement

The greatest cause of financial strain is the impact of the recession (68%), the level of free entitlement funding (34%) and rising rents (17%). There has been a general increase in costs and increase in competition with other providers. Children centres and after school clubs' access to greater funding is resulting in sustainability problems for some small voluntary/community groups. Many reported rising rents, in one case almost doubling in a year.

The most challenging aspects of implementing the free entitlement is the level of funding (51%), implementing flexible entitlement (41%) and implementing the 2-year-old offer (17%). Many report covering costs and getting paid as a key issue, with the implementation of the free entitlement. Some do not therefore offer places to people who want to claim free entitlement.

What boroughs should focus on in the next three years

Training and development

A focus on the quality of training, including professional development for low status staff, more training on the implementation of the EYFS and Ofsted inspections, plus general improved access to training and qualifications were mentioned.

Funding

All sectors reported the need for funding or continued funding for quality and sustainability, including private nurseries, children's centres, voluntary/community groups, playgroups, stay and play sessions and childminders. Some felt that there was an unequal distribution of government grants and funding, with issues of parity of funding between the maintained and voluntary sector and unfair criteria.

Communication, awareness and information

Low levels of communication prevent relevant information being passed on, requiring integration with, and networking between relevant local services. Less jargon and abbreviations may result in more effective understanding.

Variety and extension of activities and groups

Extended services, out of school clubs, holiday activities, teenage youth clubs and projects, street danger and road safety, healthy living and eating, and music sessions were all listed.

Support for parents and providers

Support for parents with low incomes to access affordable childcare and helping them return to work was mentioned by some providers, along with support to providers who have children with SEN in their care, training support and working partnership with local authorities, advice and support with Ofsted inspections, and equal opportunities related to staff and recruitment.

Help for childminders

More publicising of childminders was requested, and contact with local authority workers.

Provider linking at a borough level and engagement with policy

Joint training opportunities (55%), borough provider network meetings (54%), visiting other providers (41%) and borough provider network newsletters (35%) were rated the best ways to link with other providers.

Some felt their existing links were sufficient, and others reported having no links or networks available to them or that they were aware of. Childminders especially found difficulty linking and networking as they can feel isolated, as they often work alone at home. Drop-in sessions were useful and informal meetings and discussions with other childminders.

Other suggestions included:

- Websites or e-mail forums to enable the exchange of information and ideas. This would mean that information could be obtained without leaving the setting, and be accessible at any time.
- Meetings at times when childminders can attend, including evenings and weekends.
- The need for local connections.
- Provision of a crèche or childcare at meetings and training.
- Too much paperwork, especially for childminders as they do not have the same support and team as large settings.
- Better and increased training on the EYFS.

Success stories

Despite the many challenges faced, providers also indicated a great pride and fulfillment in their work, and shared many success stories, around the following key themes:

- Increasing occupancy and improving settings with hard work.
- Improving Ofsted rating or achieving a high Ofsted rating.
- Obtaining good, and enthusiastic staff; Qualified staff and practitioners.
- Children's and carers' achievements where children need extra help.
- Taking initiative for improvements.
- Encouraging and integrating children with English as an additional language.
- Happy children, and happy parents supporting each other.

"We have been able to provide a free place for a 9 year old boy who is in remission from cancer whose family is living on benefits. His aggressive therapies have meant that he has experienced so much muscle wastage that he has had to use a wheelchair. Previously his only play outside school was on computer. Through his outdoor play with us his muscles are improving he has made friends and has discovered a love for exploring in the woods."

"I managed to get a 'good' OFSTED level. When the last manager left I had no staff and we were overdrawn at the bank. I have managed to fund raise a lot of money in the past improving many areas of building for all of our users. The building was in a terrible state, the toilets were completely re decorated. I work in the middle of a very needy estate in London. I wanted all of our users to come into a lovely clean, safe and happy environment, not an old run down building. I have had a lot of success but all of it has been an upward struggle."

"All our FT staff are now qualified to at least level 3 and PT staff are undertaking qualifications. We have 6 degree-level practitioners (including our 3 trained teachers). We have generated a huge amount of enthusiasm for further development and training amongst team members."

"We were concerned about one of our children's hearing and monitored and observed this regularly. No one else seemed concerned including his pre school, so we decided to approach the parents and talk it through with them. They took the child to the hospital for tests and it was confirmed that he needed treatment. The parents thanked us for our observations on their child."

"Encouraging an Albanian child who only spoke in her mother tongue, and watching her become fluent in English within a few months. Sharing her achievements as she became a happy and sociable individual."

"A child showed me an injury he received at home, I followed procedures.. and he and his family were given help. I looked after the child for another two years, while he was on at risk register, and supplied support for the family. They are now a happy family unit with 1 more child."

The full results of the survey plus narrative comments can be found in the **London childcare providers network** project section of www.daycaretrust.org.uk

Top 5 issues for London childcare providers

All

Issue	Number	%
1. Implementing the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	226	69
2. Ofsted Inspections	207	63
3. Improving Quality	143	43
4. Impact of the recession	107	32
5. Responding to policy change	97	30

Full day care (Private):

Issue	Number	%
1. Ofsted Inspections	22	52.4
2. Implementing the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	21	50.0
3. Improving Quality	20	47.6
4. Level of free entitlement funding (single funding formula)	17	40.5
5. Implementing the flexible free nursery offer	15	35.7

Full Day Care (Voluntary):

Issue	Number	%
1. Sustainability of your setting	8	28.6
2. Improving Quality	7	58.3
3. Implementing the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	5	41.7
4. Level of free entitlement funding (single funding formula)	4	33.3
Staffing issues e.g. recruitment, pay and retention	4	33.3
Impact of the recession	4	33.3

Full Day Care (social enterprise):

Issue	Number	%
1. Implementing the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	4	57.1
Working in Partnership with Local Authorities	4	57.1
Supporting children with special educational needs (SEN)	4	57.1
Impact of the recession	4	57.1
2. Improving Quality	2	28.6
Partnership working between the PVI and maintained sector	2	28.6
Level of free entitlement funding (single funding formula)	2	28.6
Sustainability of your setting	2	28.6
Implementing the free 2-year-old offer	2	28.6

Full Day Care (maintained/in children's centre):

Issue	Number	%
1. Sustainability of your setting	10	66.7
2. Improving Quality	8	53.3
3. Level of free entitlement funding (single funding formula)	5	33.3
Outreach work	5	33.3
Implementing the free 2-year-old offer	5	33.3

Childminder:

Issue	Number	%
1. Implementing the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	181	77.4
2. Ofsted Inspections	170	72.6
3. Improving Quality	99	42.3
4. Impact of the recession	90	38.5
5. Responding to policy change	77	32.9

Full Day Care (independent):

Issue	Number	%
1. Improving Quality	3	75
2. Partnership working between the private, voluntary, independent and maintained sector	2	50
3. Supporting children with special educational needs (SEN)	1	25
Understanding tax credits and other help with costs for parents	1	25
Implementing the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	1	25
Level of free entitlement funding (single funding formula)	1	25
Implementing the free 2-year-old offer	1	25
Improving outdoor play	1	25
Staffing issues e.g. recruitment, pay and retention	1	25
Staff needing to gain qualifications	1	25
Impact of the recession	1	25

Out of school club:

Issue	Number	%
1. Implementing the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	7	58.3
2. Ofsted inspections	5	41.7
Understanding tax credits and other help with costs for parents	5	41.7
3. Working in Partnership with Local Authorities	3	25.0
Supporting children with special educational needs (SEN)	3	25.0
Responding to policy change	3	25.0
Staffing issues e.g. recruitment, pay and retention	3	25.0
Impact of the recession; Staff needing to gain qualifications	3	25.0

Holiday club:

Issue	Number	%
1. Ofsted inspections	6	66.7
2. Implementing the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	5	55.6
3. Improving quality	4	44.4
Staffing issues e.g. recruitment, pay and retention	4	44.4
Staff needing to gain qualifications	4	44.4
Sustainability of your setting	4	44.4

Sessional:

Issue	Number	%
1. Implementing the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	11	64.7
2. Ofsted Inspections	9	52.9
3. Sustainability of your setting	8	47.1
4. Improving Quality	7	41.2
5. Working in Partnership with Local Authorities	5	29.4
Level of free entitlement funding (single funding formula)	5	29.4
Improving outdoor play	5	29.4
Staffing issues e.g. recruitment, pay and recession	5	29.4

Nursery School (Private):

Issue	Number	%
1. Improving Quality	2	66.7
2. Ofsted inspections	1	33.3
Implementing the EYFS + Staffing issues e.g. recruitment, pay and recession + Rising Rents + Impact of the recession	1	33.3

Nursery school (voluntary):

Issue	Number	%
1. Improving quality + Sustainability of your setting	1	100

Nursery school (independent)

Issue	Number	%
1. Improving quality	1	100

Primary School with nursery and/or reception:

Issue	No	%
1. Outreach work + Level of free entitlement funding (single funding formula) + Understanding tax credits & other help with costs for parents + Implementing the flexible free nursery offer + Implementing the free 2-year-old offer	1	100