

*Technical Paper 3 – June 1999*

## **Contextualising EPPE: Interviews with Local Authority Co-ordinators and Centre Managers**

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# **The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education [EPPE] Project**

**A longitudinal Study funded by the DfES  
(1997 – 2003)**

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## **Technical Paper 3 – June 1999 Contextualising EPPE : Interviews with Local Authority Co-ordinators and Centre Managers**

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# **Technical Paper 3**

## **CONTEXTUALISING EPPE: INTERVIEWS WITH**

### **LOCAL AUTHORITY CO-ORDINATORS AND CENTRE MANAGERS**

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# **Effective Provision of Pre-school Education**

## **“EPPE”**

### ***Overview of the Project***

This series of 12 reports describes the research on effective pre-school provision funded by the UK Department for Education & Employment (DfEE). Further details appear in Technical Paper 1 (Sylva, Sammons, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart 1999). This longitudinal study assesses the attainment and development of children followed longitudinally between the ages of 3 and 7 years. Three thousand children were recruited to the study over the period January 1997 to April 1999 from 141 pre-school centres. Initially 114 centres from four types of provision were selected for the study but in September 1998 an extension to the main study was implemented to include innovative forms of provision, including ‘combined education and care’ (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 1997).

Both qualitative and quantitative methods (including multilevel modelling) have been used to explore the effects of individual pre-school centres on children's attainment and social/behavioural development at entry to school and any continuing effects on such outcomes at the end of Key Stage 1 (age 7). In addition to centre effects, the study investigates the contribution to children's development of individual and family characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, language, parental education and employment. This overview describes the research design and discusses a variety of research issues (methodological and practical) in investigating the impact of pre-school provision on children's developmental progress. A parallel study is being carried out in Northern Ireland.

There have been many initiatives intended to improve educational outcomes for young children. Will these initiatives work? Will they enable children to enter school ‘more ready’ to learn, or achieve more at the end of Key Stage 1? Which are the most effective ways to educate young children? The research project described in this paper is part of the new emphasis on ensuring ‘a good start’ for children.

## **PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTS OF EARLY EDUCATION IN THE UK**

There has been little large-scale, systematic research on the effects of early childhood education in the UK. The ‘Start Right’ Enquiry (Ball 1994; Sylva 1994) reviewed the evidence of British research and concluded that small-scale studies suggested a positive impact but that large-scale research was inconclusive. The Start Right enquiry recommended more rigorous longitudinal studies with baseline measures so that the ‘value added’ to children's development by pre-school education could be established.

Research evidence elsewhere on the effects of different kinds of pre-school environment on children's development (Melhuish et al. 1990; Melhuish 1993; Sylva & Wiltshire 1993; Schweinhart & Weikart 1997; Borge & Melhuish, 1995; National Institute of Child Health Development 1997) suggests positive outcomes. Some researchers have examined the impact of particular characteristics, e.g. gender and attendance on children's adjustment to nursery classes (Davies & Brember 1992), or adopted cross-sectional designs to explore the impact of different types of pre-school provision (Davies & Brember 1997). Feinstein, Robertson & Symons (1998) attempted to evaluate the effects of pre-schooling on children's subsequent progress but birth cohort designs may not be appropriate for the study of the influence of pre-school education. The absence of data about children's attainments at entry to pre-school means that neither the British Cohort Study (1970) nor the National Child Development Study (1958) can be used to explore the effects of pre-school education on children's progress. These studies are also limited by the time lapse and many changes in the nature of pre-school provision which have

occurred. To date no research using multilevel models (Goldstein 1987) has been used to investigate the impact of both type of provision and individual centre effects. Thus little research in the UK has explored whether some forms of provision have greater benefits than others. Schagen (1994) attempted multilevel modelling but did not have adequate control at entry to pre-school.

In the UK there is a long tradition of variation in pre-school provision both between types (e.g. playgroup, local authority or private nursery or nursery classes) and in different parts of the country reflecting Local Authority funding and geographical conditions (i.e. urban/rural and local access to centres). A series of reports (House of Commons Select Committee 1989; DES Rumbold Report 1990; Ball 1994) have questioned whether Britain's pre-school education is as effective as it might be and have urged better co-ordination of services and research into the impact of different forms of provision (Siraj-Blatchford 1995). The EPPE project is thus the first large-scale British study on the effects of different kinds of pre-school provision and the impact of attendance at individual centres.

## OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODS

The EPPE project is a major study instituted in 1996 to investigate three issues which have important implications for policy and practice:

- the effects on children of different types of pre-school provision,
- the 'structural' (e.g. adult-child ratios) and 'process' characteristics (e.g. interaction styles) of more effective pre-school centres, and
- the interaction between child and family characteristics and the kind of pre-school provision a child experiences.

An educational effectiveness research design was chosen to investigate these topics because this enabled the research team to investigate the progress and development of individual children (including the impact of personal, socio-economic and family characteristics), and the effect of individual pre-school centres on children's outcomes at both entry to school (the start of Reception which children can enter between the ages of 4 and 5 plus) and at the end of Key Stage 1 (age 7 plus). Such research designs are well suited to social and educational research with an institutional focus (Paterson & Goldstein 1991). The growing field of school effectiveness research has developed an appropriate methodology for the separation of intake and school influences on children's progress using so called 'value added' multilevel models (Goldstein 1987, 1995). As yet, however, such techniques have not been applied to the pre-school sector, although recent examples of value added research for younger ages at the primary level have been provided by Tymms et al. 1997; Sammons & Smees 1998; Jesson et al. 1997; Strand 1997; and Yang & Goldstein 1997. These have examined the relationship between baseline assessment at reception to infant school through to Key Stage 1 (age 7 plus years).

School effectiveness research during the 1970s and 1980s addressed the question "Does the particular school attended by a child make a difference?" (Mortimore et al. 1988; Tizard et al. 1988). More recently the question of internal variations in effectiveness, teacher/class level variations and stability in effects of particular schools over time have assumed importance (e.g. Luyten 1994; 1995; Hill & Rowe 1996; Sammons 1996). This is the first research to examine the impact of individual pre-school centres using multilevel approaches. The EPPE project is designed to examine both the impact of type of pre-school provision as well as allow the identification of particular pre-school characteristics which have longer term effects. It is also designed to establish whether there are differences in the effects of individual pre-school centres on children's progress and development. In addition, the project explores the impact of pre-school provision for different groups of children and the extent to which pre-schools are effective in promoting different kinds of outcomes (cognitive and social/behavioural).

## The 8 aims of the EPPE Project

- To produce a detailed description of the 'career paths' of a large sample of children and their families between entry into pre-school education and completion (or near completion) of Key Stage 1.
- To compare and contrast the developmental progress of 3,000+ children from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds who have differing pre-school experiences including early entry to Reception from home.
- To separate out the effects of pre-school experience from the effects of education in the period between Reception and Year 2.
- To establish whether some pre-school centres are more effective than others in promoting children's cognitive and social/emotional development during the pre-school years (ages 3-5) and across Key Stage 1 (5-7 years).
- To discover the individual characteristics (structural and process) of pre-school education in those centres found to be most effective.
- To investigate differences in the progress of different groups of children, e.g. second language learners of English, children from disadvantaged backgrounds and both genders.
- To investigate the medium-term effects of pre-school education on educational performance at Key Stage 1 in a way which will allow the possibility of longitudinal follow-up at later ages to establish long-term effects, if any.
- To relate the use of pre-school provision to parental labour market participation.

## The sample: regions, centres and children

In order to maximise the likelihood of identifying the effects of individual centres and also the effects of various types of provision, the EPPE sample was stratified by type of centre and geographical location.

- Six English Local Authorities (LAs) in five regions were chosen strategically to participate in the research. These were selected to cover provision in urban, suburban and rural areas and a range of ethnic diversity and social disadvantage. (Another related project covering Northern Ireland was instituted in April 1998 [Melhuish et al. 1997]. This will enable comparison of findings across different geographical contexts.)
- Six main types of provision are included in the study (the most common forms of current provision; *playgroups*, local authority or voluntary *day nurseries*, *private day nurseries*, *nursery schools*, *nursery classes*, and centres *combining care and education*. Centres were selected randomly within each type of provision in each authority.

In order to enable comparison of centre and type of provision effects the project was designed to recruit 500 children, 20 in each of 20-25 centres, from the six types of provision, thus giving a total sample of approximately 3000 children and 140 centres<sup>1</sup>. In some LAs certain forms of provision are less common and others more typical. Within each LA, centres of each type were selected by stratified random sampling and, due to the small size of some centres in the project (e.g. rural playgroups), more of these centres were recruited than originally proposed, bringing the sample total to 141 centres and over 3000 children.

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<sup>1</sup> The nursery school and combined centre samples were added in 1998 and their cohorts will be assessed somewhat later; results will be reported separately and in combined form.



Children and their families were selected randomly in each centre to participate in the EPPE Project. All parents gave written permission for their children to participate.

In order to examine the impact of no pre-school provision, it was proposed to recruit an additional sample of 500 children pre-school experience from the reception classes which EPPE children entered. However in the five regions selected a sample of only 200+ children was available for this 'home' category.

The progress and development of pre-school children in the EPPE sample is being followed over four years until the end of Key Stage 1. Details about length of sessions, number of sessions normally attended per week and child attendance have been collected to enable the amount of pre-school education experienced to be quantified for each child in the sample. Two complicating factors are that a substantial proportion of children have moved from one form of pre-school provision to another (e.g. from playgroup to nursery class) and some will attend more than one centre in a week. Careful records are necessary in order to examine issues of stability and continuity, and to document the range of pre-school experiences to which individual children can be exposed.

## **Child assessments**

Around the third birthday, or up to a year later if the child entered pre-school provision after three, each child was assessed by a researcher on four cognitive tasks: verbal comprehension, naming vocabulary, knowledge of similarities seen in pictures, and block building. A profile of the child's social and emotional adjustment was completed by the pre-school educator who knew the child best. If the child changed pre-school before school entry, he or she was assessed again. At school entry, a similar cognitive battery was administered along with knowledge of the alphabet and rhyme/alliteration. The Reception teacher completed the social emotional profile.

Further assessments were made at exit from Reception and at the end of Years 1 and 2. In addition to standardised tests of reading and mathematics, information on National Assessments will be collected along with attendance and special needs. At age 7, children will also be invited to report themselves on their attitudes to school.

## **Measuring child/family characteristics known to have an impact on children's development**

- 1) Information on individual 'child factors' such as gender, language, health and birth order was collected at parent interview.
- 2) Family factors were investigated also. Parent interviews provided detailed information about parent education, occupation and employment history, family structure and attendance history. In addition, details about the child's day care history, parental attitudes and involvement in educational activities (e.g. reading to child, teaching nursery rhymes, television viewing etc) have been collected and analysed.

## **Pre-school Characteristics and Processes**

Regional researchers liaised in each authority with a Regional Coordinator, a senior local authority officer with responsibility for Early Years who arranged 'introductions' to centres and key staff. Regional researchers interviewed centre managers on: group size, child staff ratio, staff training, aims, policies, curriculum, parental involvement, etc.

'Process' characteristics such as the day-to-day functioning within settings (e.g. child-staff interaction, child-child interaction, and structuring of children's activities) were also studied. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) which has been recently adapted (Harms, Clifford & Cryer 1998) and the Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett 1989) were also administered. The ECERS includes the following sub-scales:

- Space and furnishings
- Personal care routines
- Language reasoning
- Activities
- Interaction
- Programme structure
- Parents and staffing

In order that the more educational aspects of English centres could be assessed, Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart & Colman (unpublished) developed four additional ECERS sub-scales describing educational provision in terms of: Language, Mathematics, Science and the Environment, and Diversity.

## **Setting the centres in context**

In addition to describing how each centre operated internally, qualitative interviews were conducted with centre managers to find out the links of each setting to local authority policy and training initiatives. Senior local authority officers from both Education and Social Services were also interviewed to find out how each local authority implemented Government early years policy, especially the Early Years Development Plans which were established to promote education and care partnerships across providers in each local authority.

## **Case Studies**

In addition to the range of quantitative data collected about children, their families and their pre-school centres, detailed qualitative data will be collected using case studies of several "effective" pre-school centres (chosen retrospectively as 'more effective' on the basis of the multilevel analyses of intake and outcome measures covering the period baseline to entry into reception). This will add the fine-grained detail to how processes within centres articulate, establish and maintain good practice.

The methodology of the EPPE project is thus mixed. These detailed case studies will use a variety of methods of data gathering, including documentary analysis, interviews and observations and the results will help to illuminate the characteristics of more successful pre-school centres and assist in the generation of guidance on good practice. Particular attention will be paid to parent involvement, teaching and learning processes, child-adult interaction and social factors in learning. Inevitably there are difficulties associated with the retrospective study of process characteristics of centres identified as more or less effective after children in the EPPE sample have transferred to school and it will be important to examine field notes and pre-school centre histories to establish the extent of change during the study period.

## **ANALYTIC STRATEGY**

The EPPE research was designed to enable the linking of three sets of data: information about children's attainment and development (at different points in time), information about children's personal, social and family characteristics (e.g. age, gender, SES etc), and information about pre-school experience (type of centre and its characteristics).

## **Identifying individual centre effects and type of provision at entry to school**

Longitudinal research is essential to enable the impact of child characteristics (personal, social and family) to be disentangled from any influence related to the particular pre-school centre attended. Multilevel models investigate the clustered nature of the child sample, children being nested within centres and centres within regions. The first phase of the analysis adopts these three levels in models which attempt to identify any centre effects at entry to reception class.

Given the disparate nature of children's pre-school experience it is vital to ensure that the influences of age at assessment, amount and length of pre-school experience and pre-school attendance record are accounted for when estimating the effects of pre-school education. This information is also important in its own right to provide a detailed description of the range of pre-school provision experienced by different children and any differences in the patterns of provision used by specific groups of children/parents and their relationship to parents' labour market participation. Predictor variables for attainment at entry to reception will include prior attainment (verbal and non-verbal sub scales), social/emotional profiles, and child characteristics (personal, social and family). The EPPE multilevel analyses will seek to incorporate adjustment for measurement error and to examine differences in the performance of different groups of children at entry to pre-school and again at entry to reception classes. The extent to which any differences increase/decrease over this period will be explored, enabling equity issues to be addressed.

After controlling for intake differences, the estimated impact of individual pre-school centres will be used to select approximately 12 'outlier' centres from the 141 in the project for detailed case studies (see 'Case Studies' above). In addition, multilevel models will be used to test out the relationship between particular process quality characteristics of centres and children's cognitive and social/behavioural outcomes at the end of the pre-school period (entry to school). The extent to which it is possible to explain (statistically) the variation in children's scores on the various measures assessed at entry to reception classes will provide evidence about whether particular forms of provision have greater benefits in promoting such outcomes by the end of the pre-school period. Multilevel analyses will test out the impact of measures of pre-school process characteristics, such as the scores on various ECERS scales and Pre-School Centre structural characteristics such as ratios. This will provide evidence as to which measures are associated with better cognitive and social/behavioural outcomes in children.

## **Identifying continuing effects of pre-school centres at KS1**

Cross-classified multilevel models have been used to examine the long term effects of primary schools on later secondary performance (Goldstein & Sammons, 1997). In the EPPE research it is planned to use such models to explore the possible mid-term effects of pre-school provision on later progress and attainment at primary school at age 7. The use of cross classified methods explicitly acknowledges that children's educational experiences are complex and that over time different institutions may influence cognitive and social/behavioural development for better or worse. This will allow the relative strength of any continuing effects of individual pre-school centre attendance to be ascertained, in comparison with the primary school influence.

## **THE LINKED STUDY IN NORTHERN IRELAND 1998-2003**

The Effective Pre-school Provision in Northern Ireland (EPPNI) is part of EPPE and is under the directorship of Professor Edward Melhuish, Professor Kathy Sylva, Dr. Pam Sammons, and Dr. Iram Siraj-Blatchford. The study explores the characteristics of different kinds of early years provision and examines children's development in pre-school, and influences on their later adjustment and progress at primary school up to age 7 years. It will help to identify the aspects of pre-school provision which have a positive impact on children's attainment, progress, and development, and so provide guidance on good practice. The research involves 70 pre-school centres randomly selected throughout Northern Ireland. The study investigates all main types of pre-school provision attended by 3 to 4 year olds in Northern

Ireland: playgroups, day nurseries, nursery classes, nursery schools and reception groups and classes. The data from England and Northern Ireland offer opportunities for potentially useful comparisons.

## **SUMMARY**

This “educational effectiveness” design of the EPPE research study enables modelling of the complicated effects of amount and type of pre-school provision (including attendance) experienced by children and their personal, social and family characteristics on subsequent progress and development. Assessment of both cognitive and social/behavioural outcomes has been made. The use of multilevel models for the analysis enables the impact of both type of provision and individual centres on children's pre-school outcomes (at age 5 and later at age 7) to be investigated. Moreover, the relationships between pre-school characteristics and children's development can be explored. The results of these analyses and the findings from the qualitative case studies of selected centres can inform both policy and practice. A series of 12 technical working papers will summarise the findings of the research.

## EPPE Technical Papers in the Series

Technical Paper 1 – An Introduction to the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project  
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The Early Years Transition and Special Educational Needs (EYTSSEN) is a linked project which draws on data from the EPPE study . EYTSSEN Papers :

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# Contextualising EPPE: Interviews with Local Authority Co-ordinators and Centre Managers

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report looks at the impact of recent government initiatives on early childhood care and education for 3 to 5-year olds in the full range of pre-school centres. The report is based on interviews conducted with 135 heads of pre-school settings and 12 local authority co-ordinators in six local authorities between April 1998 and March 1999. The study shows that the main impact has come from:

- The Desirable Learning Outcomes (DLOs) (SCAA, 1996): First introduced in 1996, the DLOs have been extremely influential in determining the curriculum to be delivered by centres receiving government funding for four-year-olds.
- Section 10 inspection arrangements: Introduced to ensure the quality of educational provision for nursery classes and nursery schools under local education authority provision (Section 10 of the School Inspections Act, 1996).
- Section 5 inspection arrangements: Introduced to ensure the quality of educational provision for the private, voluntary and independent sector provision (Section 5 of the Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Act, 1996)
- Increased collaboration: In 1997 the Government required local authorities to devise Early Years Development Plans (EYDP) in collaboration with the state, private and voluntary sectors to be in place from 1 April 1998.
- *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (1998): The publication of new regulations and funding for a childcare strategy for children 0-14.
- The Revenue Support Grant and the Specific Grant for four-year-olds and other pre-school children: Providing new funding arrangements.
- The Standards Fund (1998): Introduced to support the training of early years staff (50% met by the local authority).
- The 25 Early Excellence Centres: Establishing a network intended to act as a model for cross-sectoral partnership. So far, 23 have been designated.
- The involvement of qualified teachers: Local authorities have been required to address this issue in their EYDPs.

Early childhood care and education have experienced a period of rapid change and a central aim of the study has therefore been to establish the extent to which this has had an impact on the centres within which the EPPE study is taking place. We have found that the earlier policy initiatives, for instance, the Desirable Learning Outcomes (DLOs) and arrangements for inspection and funding have had the main impact. The EYDPs have had a major impact at the local authority level but this has not been so apparent at centre level. Other policies are only just beginning to have an effect and this is at a point when most of the children in the EPPE study are leaving to enter primary schools

Local Authority co-ordinators have generally reported positive advances towards greater communication, co-ordination and quality assurance within their local authorities. Only in one authority did there appear to be more specific problems than solutions. Here, providers were concerned about the funding of the newly integrated structures developed under the



EYDPs and they were especially concerned that the current level of funding needed to be sustained, and should be improved in the future.

All of the co-ordinators approved of the underlying principles that informed the new initiatives but most of them felt that the changes they were being expected to manage were happening too quickly. Most of the authorities seemed to be coping because they had already achieved some degree of collaboration before the new policy initiatives came into place. The co-ordinators and their local authorities were rising to the challenges that they faced regardless of the uncertainties which they felt lay ahead of them.

### **1. Response to the change**

The area perceived to be of greatest stress, was the over-emphasis on provision and education for four-year-olds. This focus appears to have raised conflict between service providers. Problems have been concerned with; provisions for 3-year-olds; admissions policies within local authorities; what has often been perceived as the unfair advantage schools have in encouraging parents to send their children to school at four; and the requirement to deliver a curriculum leading to the DLOs for four-year-olds. All these were seen as major changes over the period of the EPPE study. The inspection arrangements associated with the DLOs, and the integration of care and education have also been seen as major changes to the way the private, voluntary and daycare sectors have worked in the past. These issues are seen as less of a problem by the education sector, and by nursery classes and nursery schools which already had established patterns of inspection along the lines of the school system through DfES registration. There seems to be more conflict in rural areas between providers relating to admissions, collaboration, falling roles, the distances to get to training and regarding parental choice. Authorities which had a history of integration and innovation appeared to be on a fast-track to implementing their initiatives.

At local authority level, where co-ordinators had the benefit of seeing the 'big picture', through being an instrumental part of the EYDPs, they especially valued the emphasis on quality, which the new initiatives were requiring them to focus upon. Inspection data were being used to monitor quality and to plan future training. However, there was widespread recognition that these were 'early days' and that there was a long way to go before they would see the level of improvement that they would like in the training of staff and inspectors, and in terms of integration between care and education.

Daycare managers reported the greatest change, followed by managers of nursery schools, playgroups and private nurseries. There was no suggestion that nursery classes were integrating care into their settings in the same way that education was being defined and monitored through the DLOs and the system of inspection. The nursery schools, while set within an educational framework, were more likely to perceive change because they faced greater demands for more flexible childcare provision, for after-school care, the introduction of under-threes and because five of them were designated Early Excellence Centres. Nursery schools have also been under threat of closure in some authorities.

Playgroups generally perceive the changes associated with the DLOs and Section 5 inspections as putting them under undue pressure. Playgroup managers often referred to the impact of becoming more 'formal' in their approach to children. They were frustrated with the increased paperwork and found the pressures of inspection difficult, some did not feel

'qualified' to undertake their new role. Most of the playgroup managers commented on the role of playgroups as play oriented, informal provision. In contrast some of the private nurseries said they welcomed the DLOs because it made their practice 'less formal'. Daycare and playgroup managers reported the highest level of change to their centres as a result of recent initiatives, but the daycare managers were more positive in their comments. They were more positive about the DLOs, the emphasis generally on curriculum, and in particular the emphasis on further training.

## **2. Enrolment and admissions**

All the local authorities had planned carefully for their under-fives provision. There was little evidence of any expansion of provision for under-fives but there was some evidence of the reconfiguration of services to meet the demands and shortfalls in particular areas of each authority. In this respect the EYDPs were most effective, two of the local authorities had discovered that some of their lowest provision was in high multi-ethnic areas and they were keen to rectify the situation.

In terms of admissions and enrolment, the private sector in our sample was most likely to be affected by falling roles. This was followed by the playgroups and daycare and the least likely to be affected were nursery classes, followed by nursery schools. However, to some extent, nearly all of these existing providers were experiencing a loss of their 4-year-olds as primary schools were creating additional places. Many settings were resorting to enrolling younger children to keep their numbers. The child population of most of the centres was becoming younger. Parents reported a number of reasons for taking their 4-year-olds to reception classes, the main ones being to secure admission to the school of their choice and to obtain full-day, free provision. Some managers claimed that some playgroups and private nurseries were closing down as a result of the reduced numbers of children or the increased pressures associated with the curriculum and inspection.

## **3. Greater collaboration?**

Most providers welcomed the initiative to create greater integration of care and education as well as the concept of partnership between providers across their local authorities. Five of the six local authorities reported increased collaboration between providers with particular benefits to the voluntary and private sectors who had had very little 'voice' before the EYDPs at local authority level. At the centre level only 50 centres reported being involved in any way with the EYDP. This is not surprising given the short time that has elapsed since the initiatives were first implemented, almost everyone agreed that these were 'early days'. For the EPPE study this suggests that the EYDPs were not, generally speaking, having very much impact at the centre level. It was only the nursery schools that reported a relatively high level of effect (63%), this is likely to be partly accounted for by the fact that five of them became Early Excellence Centres recently. Some of them are also used by the local authorities to 'lead' change in combining care and education, after school care and in changing their intake age of children and their opening times. The greatest impact on settings was from those areas where policy initiatives had begun in the mid-1990s.

## **4. Aiming at quality**

Local authorities were coordinating quality assurance by monitoring inspection reports and offering training. However some providers were dissatisfied with the level of pre- and post inspection support they received, particularly in the private and voluntary sectors. The local

authorities saw training as the key route to improving quality, but they expressed the view that it was the greatest challenge for them given current resources and the large number of early years educators who needed sustained, upgraded training.

The interviews with the 135 managers revealed that key terms such as 'assessment', 'teaching', 'play', 'work' and 'learning' are interpreted as meaning different things. This constitutes a serious problem and the interpretation of many of these concepts affects perceptions of quality and affects perceptions of and reactions to current policy initiatives. While it is difficult to assess the direct impact this has on children's experiences, it is important because some providers perceived assessment as synonymous with testing, and others clearly interpreted 'having to' teach children as neglecting play centered (and more child-initiated) methods for (teacher initiated) worksheets. This contrasted greatly with other providers who offered detailed accounts of assessment procedures which were supplemented with profiles and to delivering the DLOs through a developmentally appropriate curriculum. This does suggest that until there is more uniformity in training children will continue to receive different experiences in different kinds of provision.

## INTRODUCTION

Technical Paper 3 reports on two interviews (see appendices for copies of interview schedules) conducted during April-August 1998, and February-March 1999. One interview was devised for local authority early years co-ordinators in our study. The other was for the managers of the 141 pre-school centres in the extended EPPE study. The aim of the two interviews is to provide contextual information for the EPPE research project which is being conducted in pre-school centres in our 5 regions (six local authorities) in England. We are studying changing centres (at a time of rapid policy development) and not static ones, and because of the diversity in pre-school provision, different providers might be experiencing the impact of policy in different ways. Members of the DfES EPPE project Steering Committee were eager for us to provide an account of how recent changes in local authority under-fives provision might be affecting the 141 centres that we are studying. The main 'changes' were likely to be the result of recent initiatives concerning Partnership Plans and increased collaboration across pre-school services, the introduction of the Desirable Learning Outcomes (DLOs) and inspection arrangements, new funding arrangements and plans for training (see Appendix for the two semi-structured centre and local authority level interview schedules). For readers who are not familiar with recent English Early Years policy initiatives, a brief explanation has been provided at the beginning of the report in the executive summary.

## SAMPLE AND PROCEDURE

The semi-structured interview schedules and the direction of the study were agreed with the DfES. Co-ordinators in our six local authorities (LAs)<sup>2</sup> were sent copies of the interview schedule prior to being interviewed in the period April – August 1998. The local authority co-ordinators were interviewed face-to-face in their authority by the same interviewer (a member of the Central Research Team). Each interview lasted between 1 - 3 hours, depending on the number of respondents present. Their responses were recorded, transcribed and returned to the co-ordinators to allow them to check any inaccuracies during September and October 1998. All but one of the authorities took the opportunity of making minor editorial changes to the transcriptions at this stage. A total of 12 co-ordinators were interviewed, all were senior members of staff in their authority, with direct responsibility for overseeing early years services and implementing change in early year provision.

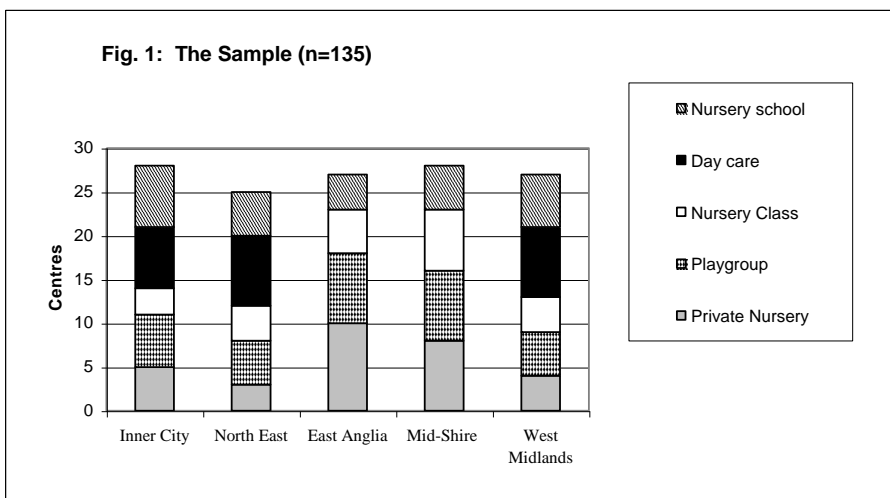
Local Authority	No. of Early Years Co-ordinators	Education background	Social Services background
T	3	2	1
V	2	1	1
W	1	0	1
X	1	1	0
Y	3	2	1
Z	2	1	1
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>

Telephone interviews were conducted with centre managers in the EPPE project in two stages by one interviewer. In the first stage 108 out of a total of 114 managers from four types of provision; nursery classes, local authority daycare centres, playgroups and private nurseries were interviewed between April to early August 1998. In September 1998 the EPPE project was extended to include a fifth type of provision, nursery schools, and the same interviewer conducted telephone interviews with all 27 nursery school headteachers during a period of four weeks between February-March

<sup>2</sup> Co-ordinators responses are coded below according to the authority they were speaking from (T, V, W, X, Y or Z).

1999. The information collected from both sets of managers is comparable because the interviews were all conducted within a working period defined by the 1998-1999 Partnership Plan frameworks. Of the 27 nursery schools in our sample 5 are designated Early Excellence Centres and 7 can be described as fully integrated, combined (care and education) nursery schools (some nursery schools are in more than one category). A copy of the interview schedule had been sent to each centre manager before the initial telephone contact was made. In the majority of cases it was the head of centre who gave the final interview although where this was not possible a member of staff was designated by them (in 11% of cases). At least one in three interviews were tape-recorded.

The centres were selected to provide a representative sample across the five regions making a total of 141 centres of which 135 (96%) were able to respond (n=135) (see FIGURE 1 below, frequency tables are also provided in the Appendices). The final sample in this study included 30 Private Nurseries (PNs), 32 Playgroups (PGs), 23 Nursery Classes (NCs), 23 local authority Daycare Centres (DCs) and 27 Nursery Schools (NSs). The designation of the respondents was 40 managers, 45 headteachers, 27 play group leaders, 7 teachers, 4 deputy managers, 3 playgroup supervisors, 2 chair of governors (pgs), 1 nursery officer, 1 private nursery school owner, 1 nursery nurse, 1 head of nursery, 1 nursery co-ordinator, 1 pre-school worker and 1 joint manager of a nursery cooperative.



All the information received from the interviews has been analysed and triangulated with the information contained in the 1998-1999 Early Years Development Plans and from the interviews conducted with the local authority co-ordinators in each of the 6 local authorities.

## THE PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF RECENT NATIONAL INITIATIVES

The recent initiatives were generally considered beneficial by Local Authority (LA) co-ordinators who referred to very positive effects upon local initiatives. The co-ordinators' reported that early years staff were generally feeling more valued, and receiving a much needed boost to their morale. The additional funding made available by Government was also appreciated especially where this resulted in additional staffing. However, there were concerns that a good deal more resourcing would be required if the policies were to be fully implemented and sustained. One co-ordinator expressed special concern regarding the practice of allocating funding according to the 4-year-olds in the maintained sector, while the authority's needs related to their work in all their settings. She

argued that all sectors are now funded from the Local Authority but they are not allowed to 'top-slice' to cover the extra work.

While the integration of education and care at the authority level is clearly advanced, some concern was expressed regarding the difficulties to be faced in establishing integrated provision on the ground.

*We're just at the beginning (Z4) (Z=local authority and 4=No. of the question responded to).*

It was also clear that, historically, some authorities and centres have spent much longer developing integrated provision than others have.

*There are now lots of local initiative but it is not integrated yet, as it is still too early (X4).*

*Integration at the local level is a time consuming and a challenging developmental task. (W4).*

Many of the co-ordinators considered the issues surrounding the development of provision for 4-year-olds had dominated the work so far and a number of them referred to their concerns regarding the relative neglect in provision for the under-3s. The literacy hour (1997, National Literacy Strategy, HMSO) was specifically mentioned by most co-ordinators as having distracted attention from the wider issues of integration and quality.

The opportunities to review provision and to consult more openly across all the sectors and with parents/carers has been welcomed and was generally seen to be successful although the co-ordination has clearly presented something of a challenge for many authorities:

*All these different layers of planning involving different people for some parts and others for all are very difficult to co-ordinate! (V2).*

References were made to the development of collaborative frameworks within the authorities as well as with those working outside and the overlap, which sometimes occurred across the work of different committees in the same authority. However, it was felt that the focus on *quality* within authorities was very valuable and that there were a number of key issues associated with standards, that people shared concern over, across the various sectors of provision. However, some co-ordinators felt that the lack of status accorded to early childhood workers, their care worker training, and the deep divisions in services had still to be acknowledged sufficiently. In this respect it is interesting to note that local authority co-ordinators' reactions to some of the issues in our questionnaire were responded to differently by those with a social services or voluntary sector history compared to those with an education background. In some cases, for instance, over the issue of teacher involvement in all early years settings there was open disagreement during the interview.

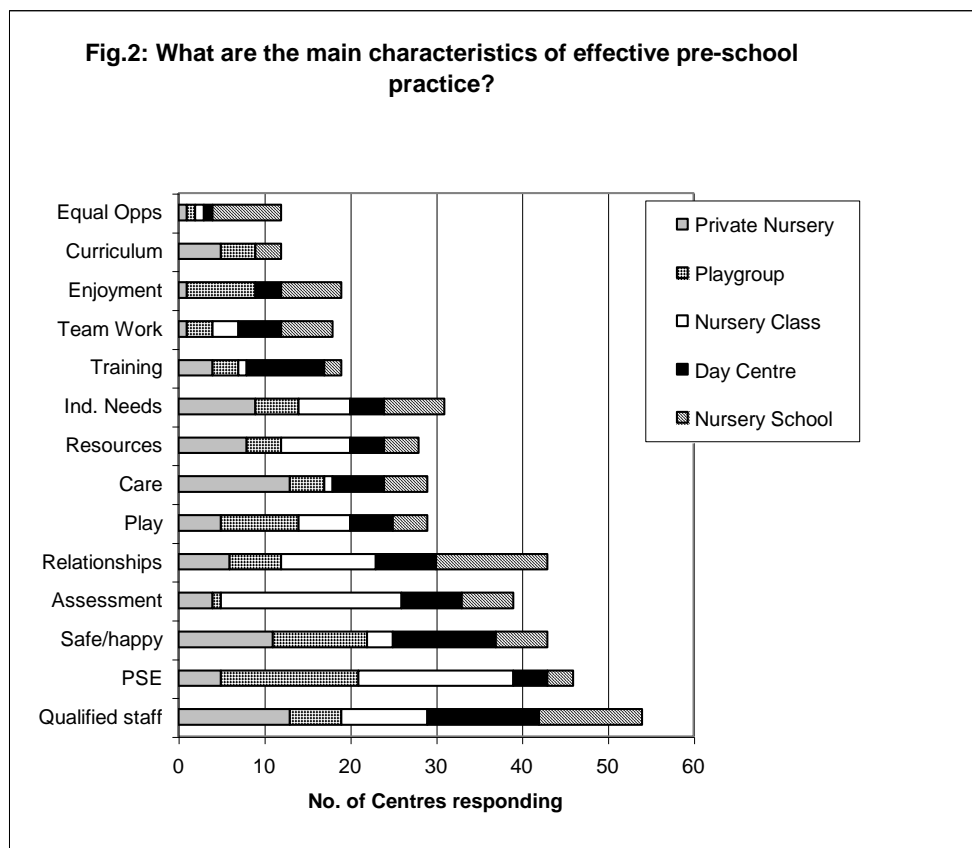
When the co-ordinators were asked about the relative contribution made by national and local initiatives they suggested that:

*Where there is successful integration, it's due to long-term relationships and not due to recent initiatives by Government as it's too early (V4).*

We were concerned to identify and understand the perceptions of quality held by centre managers in the five kinds of provision we are studying; we suspected that their responses might be determined by different priorities. We therefore asked them to tell us what they considered were the main characteristics of effective nursery practice. The responses related to both the service provided and the child outcomes (see FIGURE 2 below). The day care centre managers tended to refer to the need for 'qualified staff' and argued that ongoing 'training and staff development' should be provided to ensure a sound knowledge of the needs of young children and child development. References were made to the need for INSET and for non-contact time. The managers of Private Nurseries also emphasised the need for qualified staff and for 'safe' provision for the children's 'individual needs'. Perhaps surprisingly, they were also the most likely group to emphasise 'care'.

*A good nursery is only as good as the staff that are in it. So you need to employ qualified experienced staff who always want to move forward, who are enthusiastic, think about what they do, they actually want to be where they are (PN).*

The nursery school respondents referred to the need for 'qualifications', 'good relationships' and 'enjoyment', as well as equality of opportunity and provision for 'individual needs'.



*I think it's getting people over the front door initially and just welcoming them in. and seeing that they're part of the nursery. That building up of relationships and trust and a good feeling about them using the centre, all those kind of things. The actual practice of what happens in the nursery well, we could talk about that one for a long time couldn't we, but that's what I feel initially. You can't have effective nursery practice until you have built up that initial relationship with people that are going to come in and use the centre. (NS)*

The playgroups and nursery classes tended to emphasise the 'social, personal and physical development' of the child. More of the playgroups emphasised a commitment to learning 'through play and exploration' as well as to providing 'enjoyment'.

*'In ours it's a friendly environment and the safety of the children and as I say the learning through play. We don't force any of them...The social side is very important in our group. One of our priorities to learn and to help the children and guide the children in their social skills because that's very important' (PG).*

Nursery classes, which are strongly embedded within the culture of primary schools were the most likely to refer to the need for 'planning, observation and assessment', and to the need to develop; 'good relationships between children, parents and staff'. They were less likely to prioritise care, enjoyment or safety, this might be because they are taken-for-granted through day-to-day regulation.

*'Good planning for all areas of development; social, emotional, and physical, and intellectual. All the education is based on first hand experience actually seeing things and doing things, obviously the individual needs of children. Keeping in touch with parents, health visitors and social workers' (NC).*

Only 12 (under 9%) of the centre managers referred to the need for 'a well developed curriculum' (5 PN, 4 PG, 3NS). However, later in this report (see below) it is clear that DLOs which were implemented earlier than other initiatives have had one of the deepest effects on centre practice.

In all 95 (70%) of the centres told us that they had not changed in their approach to any of these key areas as a result of recent initiatives. Many felt that they had always had *'those kind of aims and objectives in mind anyway'* (PN). Thirty six (27%) of the centres said that they had changed although only 15% of NS felt that they had done so.

*Yes we have. It's not all doom and gloom because I think we've changed for the better (DN).*

*Staff training has become a big priority. Experience now no longer counts. It's certificates on the wall now that count so you have to work towards that and all staff have to be committed and the educational side has now, if you like, really become compulsory (PG).*

*It's been a centre for many years that responds positively to change and the whole work of the centre is developing and evolving all the time. I honestly find it really difficult to tell you what I think is linked to recent initiatives in particular, because inevitably those impinge on how you perceive the situation. (NS)*

When we asked managers if their centres had changed at all as a consequence of the recent national initiatives 56 (41%) said no and 75 (56%) said yes (see FIGURE 3 below). We asked them what the key changes were and 51 (38%) reported curriculum planning and assessment related to the Desirable Learning Outcomes (DLOs), 27 (20%) said OfSTED and 30 (just 22% but 38% of playgroups) referred to funding, changes to admissions and the subsequent changes in the age and number of children attending their centre (Figure 4). Interestingly, those near primary schools complained of admissions issues while those playgroups in rural areas without a nearby primary school did not comment on this. Only 10 centres referred to the integration of daycare centres with education (7 DC, 3NS). Three nursery schools referred to their becoming Early Excellence Centres.

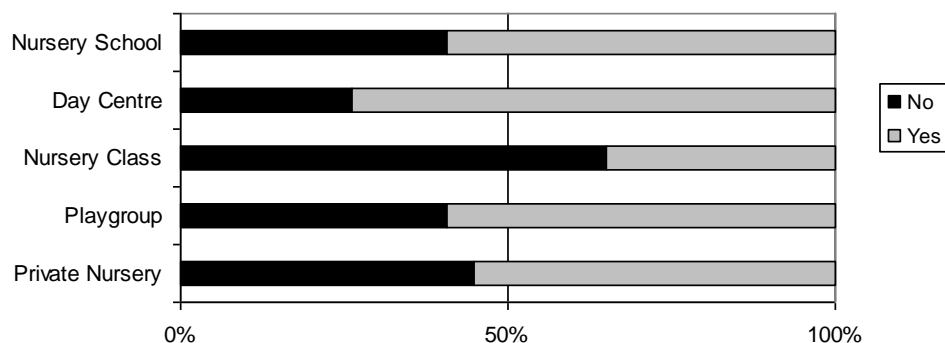


The two big differences is the amount of paperwork and it's slightly more formal (PN).

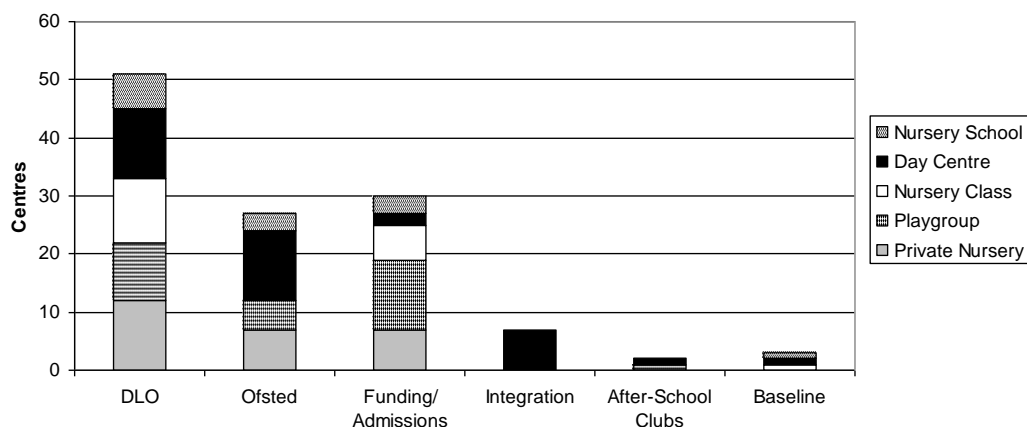
We have found some of the school nurseries are taking the children a bit younger so they've got them there to get the money when they're 4. We've actually had parents come in and say that they've taken the place because they have more or less been told that if they take the place they're more or less guaranteed a place at the school. If they don't take the place there's no guarantee they can have the place at the school (PG).

The main issue has been OfSTED inspection because of the curriculum guidelines, observations and record keeping (DC).

**Fig.3: Has your centre changed as a consequence of recent national initiatives?**



**Fig.4: What has been the key issue in these changes for your centre?**



## EXPANSION IN PROVISION AS A RESPONSE TO THE INITIATIVE

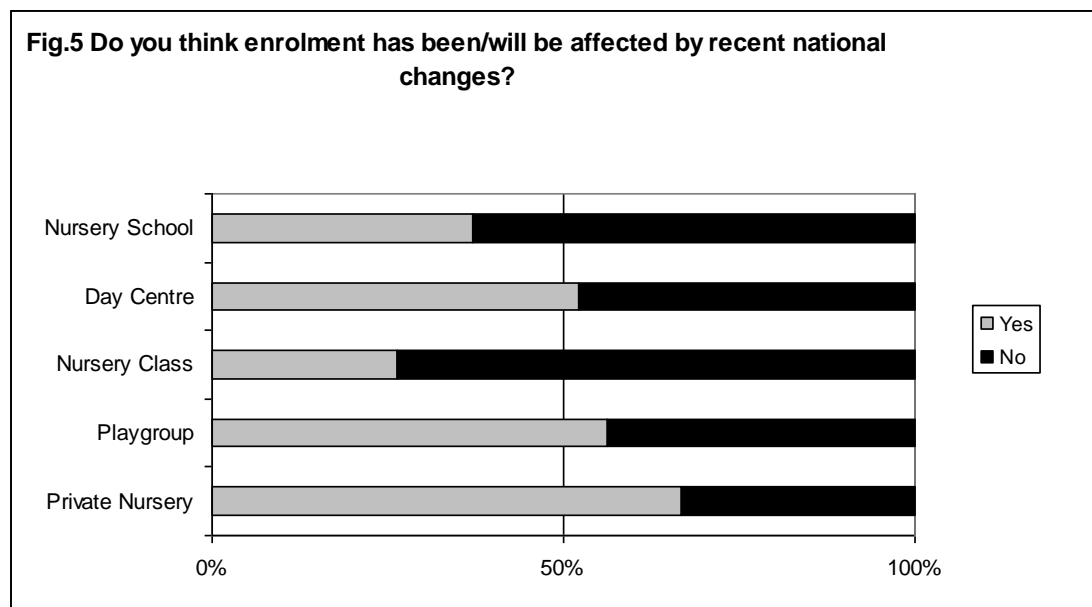
According to the co-ordinators most of the authorities have plans to increase nursery provision but little or no progress has been made at all in the period 1997/98. Please see the Table in the appendices. In some regions, where provision has increased in one sector it has been matched by a contraction in another so some difficulties have been reported that are seen to pose threats to the partnership. One co-ordinator reported that 80% of their 4-year-olds were now in reception classes (V5). In every case this was seen as problematic, and to the voluntary sector in particular.

*This has had an effect on playgroups – who are finding it difficult to recruit children of 3 years old and over (Y5).*

Nursery school and playgroup populations are therefore significantly younger than they used to be (by one whole year) – which is considered to be detrimental:

*Other provisions decreased because of admitting rising 5s – we used to do this only in the summer term (X5).*

Our telephone interview data provided further evidence of these concerns. We asked the centre managers if they considered that enrolment had been, or would be, affected by recent national changes (for example the Early Years Development Plan (EYDP)). Sixty four of them told us Yes (see FIGURE 5), 47 of the managers said that they are losing 3 and 4-year-olds to state nurseries.



Some children are attending both state and private nursery provision (split placements) and one of the private school managers expressed concern about this. Managers of private nurseries, playgroups and day care centres are therefore admitting younger children to fill up their nurseries. The question of admissions emerged as the most controversial issue affecting centres and the relationships between them. Private nurseries and playgroups frequently said that schools are obliging parents, against their better judgement, to take up places early with the threat that if they do not the place may not be available when their child becomes of statutory age.

*In September we will have no 4-year-olds at all. But we will have to fill up as soon as we can. So of course the next term when there are some 4-year-olds anyone from the outside won't get in. I am sure it's the same all over. We can't keep places for 4-year-olds. We depend on the money that comes in each month from our fees so we have to fill up as soon as possible.... So the way that it's going is that we get phone calls from parents of 4-year-olds when they get their vouchers but we can't take them because we're full of 2 year olds (PN).*

*Many parents don't want to send children to school but they report the schools as saying that when the child is 5 there won't be a place for them. Headteachers deny they are doing this. Grant maintained schools are doing what they want (PN).*

We heard many more comments of this nature:

*We had a dad came in and said 'I would like her to stay here a little bit longer' because we only take 16 children. The schools have got like 30 odd and he said she was just starting to build her confidence and everything up and she has just turned 3, the little girl, and he said 'I would have liked to have kept her here but I'm getting it free there.' There was an emphasis on the free part. ...The ones we get are the ones that haven't got the money so it's a shame because she would probably have done a lot better if she'd stayed here a few more months. Built her confidence up and then gone into a class with 30 odd children (PG).*

*Increased provision has affected the numbers applying for places. We have more 3-year-olds in the nursery. If the LEA don't fund 3 year olds it will have a radical affect. We have taken in more 3 year olds than we would have liked to keep the nursery full (NC).*

*Children are leaving younger and we are losing 4-year-olds like anything. It's had a very bad effect. They are here a shorter time so there's less time to build up relationships; some are only here a term. Schools are offering places and saying if the parents don't take it they won't get in later. There are 2 points of entry in September and January, so the children are very young even at the right time. Some schools have 1 point of entry. Schools are taking children in for ½ the day as they need to fill places (DC).*

One particularly damaging effect of this is that a range of provision is being lost entirely in some inner city and rural areas. Two of the co-ordinators referred to the positive effects of the new initiatives on childminders and the development of childminding as a business.

*Childminders are increasingly seen as 'equals (Y5).*

*After School Club & Holiday Schemes (for 4-8 yrs) are also being developed (Y5).*

## **PROGRESS BEING MADE IN PARTNERSHIP/COLLABORATION**

The general perception among the co-ordinators seemed to be that things have improved significantly and that the new structures provide a basis for further development:

*There is a clear realisation that everyone has to work together to do any real, local development work (V7).*

According to the co-ordinators, playgroups and schools do appear to be working better together in most of the authorities. One LEA co-ordinator reported on the high level of collaboration with the voluntary sector, where many school sites have playgroups (T4). But in one authority it was

suggested that there was still insufficient recognition on the part of those employed within the maintained sector that private and voluntary sector could offer the same quality of provision (V4).

There was evidence of disagreement and a clear tension between some of the co-ordinators drawn from education and those drawn from the social services. The staffing structure in at least one authority was currently considered insufficient to support the partnership adequately in transforming the ideals into action:

*The infrastructure is creaking at the seams (V3).*

Although fifty of the centre managers had been involved in setting up a partnership, the majority of respondents said that they had had no involvement. Others reported attending meetings and receiving information, but there was clearly some confusion about what the term 'Partnership' actually meant.

*We've attended endless meetings. We're members of a nursery link group and they have been very much involved in it (PN).*

*There is a local partnership... I have noticed I've had more communication from them, when meetings were and agendas and things like that. Whether that has come about because there is more interest in partnerships I'm not really sure (NC).*

*...it's quite an exciting time being a part of what I consider is still the beginning stages of it. It makes you more aware of that wider world out there (NS).*

In total 48 respondents told us that they weren't consulted (40%PN, 41%PG, 35%NC, 35%DC, 26%NS) and 72 (53%) said that they were, 12 said they had received information and 3 told us that they knew nothing about partnerships. (1 PN, 1 NC, 1 DC). In terms of the impact of the partnership on the centres themselves there was little enthusiasm and some respondents would have welcomed the opportunity to contribute more:

*Yes, but not how I would have liked to have been consulted. I would have liked to have been able to sit down and draw up a draft as well, not be sent a draft. I think it's something we all need to draw up together (DC.)*

*It's a bit of a farce really. We keep getting mail about it and we keep going to meetings but really I have felt we haven't made the slightest difference. The LEA and schools have done what suited them, I don't think it has even particularly suited the children. It has been the staff at schools that Heads have been more concerned with. I can understand where they're coming from. But I really feel we are at the bottom of the heap and we really go along with it or get out of it. And so far we're going along with it (PN).*

When we asked how their centres had been affected by the introduction of partnerships 104 (77%) respondents said their centre had not been affected at all, whereas 17 (63%) of the nursery schools told us that they were affected.

*We're very much involved in providing training for other providers and that is clearly a very important part of the work of the Partnership as well, supporting and disseminating good practice across the Partnership.*

Of the other 15 managers who said their centres had been affected there were a variety of responses e.g.

*There is more paper work (PN).*

*There is a poor relationship with local schools because of the snatch and grab over admissions (PN).*

*'The LEA is paying for a teacher to work in the playgroup for a term' (PG)*

As one headteacher of a Nursery class said:

*It's very early days to say whether it has been effective or not. We've only just got the final draft of the final document.*

One manager of an inner city day care centre said:

*Yes we have been consulted. They're asking for a higher standard. They are asking for a hell of a lot more that we can achieve with the funding that they give us at this moment in time (DC).*

When we asked the managers how the Early Years Development Plans (or the plans being made for one) affected their centre and centre staff 76 (56%) said that they had *not* (or *hadn't yet*). Twenty two told us that the main effect has been changes in admissions relating to the new funding for 4-year-olds (5PN, 5PG, 8NC, 2DC, 2NS). Nine said the introduction of Desirable Learning Outcomes and OfSTED. Four referred to staff training relating to SEN and appraisal and 3 daycare centre and 5 nursery school managers referred to the integration of childcare into education. Two playgroup leaders commented on the Plans helping to make 'things clearer' and one emphasised how it had highlighted the need for training.

*Frankly it's put a lot of pressure on the staff. No training was offered. We've had to step into a different mode of teaching. We're not teachers, we're child care workers and now we've stepped up a grade and we've had to train ourselves and it's just put a lot of pressure on us. And the focus puts pressure on the children as well, because now we're talking about, everybody's looking at, what these children can achieve instead of letting these children play to achieve. And also the workload has increased. There's more paper work so we are spending a lot of time on writing reports and tick charts. That time could be used doing something else with the child. I'm not saying it isn't a good thing because it is, but when people are going to make changes they need to first of all look at the amount of money they are willing to put into this to make these changes (DC).*

*Being part of the Partnership has really led to involvement in looking at the Development Plan and feeling that this time we were very much involved and I was involved in reading the draft and writing bits into the plan so that we felt much more involved in putting the plan together. Obviously the knock on effects for the centre and staff are I suppose again more of the development of good practice across the whole of the city.*

The very significant contribution being made to the Early Years Development Plans by a limited number of individuals working within voluntary and private sector organisations was stressed by the LEA co-ordinators. Many local advisors/educators have been active in developing partnership forums but these have, in the main, been generated from pre-existing groups. Unfortunately, in one authority we were informed that this has had the effect of *reducing* the collaboration that was previously in place. The reasons given are revealing:

1. *We already had an Early Years sub-committee which had all sectors, 5 inter-agency panels in each area, there were playgroups on school sites, partnerships between schools and nurseries.*
2. *Due to the price tag on children there is more competition.*
3. *The Pre –school Learning Alliance lost its service level agreement (LEA’s lump sum to them so they feel unsupported) – and not enough 4-year-olds.*
4. *Schools charge PLA to have playgroups on site whereas they didn’t do this before – more formalised? (X6).*

Experiences and perceptions do appear to be very mixed, in different authorities different groups/agencies have been effective in developing greater co-operation/collaboration. In one authority the private sector was seen as having gained significantly from the increased information that they were getting, and the fact they had more ‘voice’ and more impact on policy (T6). In another authority the ‘equality’ of the partnership was questioned and a lack of consultation with private nurseries was considered to have had a negative effect as:

*Nursery expansion has led to suspicion on admissions (V6).*

*The last ¾ meetings of EYDP have been dominated by admissions policy – ¾ schools already want not to be restricted by this (V7).*

The dissension over admissions policies is seen by the co-ordinators as a major problem affecting the quality of provision directly as parents are considered to be ‘pressured’ to send their children to school. In one authority they had questioned the parents on why they sent their children to a school instead of a pre-school. Apparently the parents had very diverse reasons, and not all of them were negative:

*Parents do it because they want more childcare, or will achieve more; for example, the reasons given include, ‘I want my child to be in the school play’; ‘friendships’, ‘fear of not getting a school place’. Parents are in need of good information so they can make good choices (V7).*

When we asked centre managers what implications there were for their centre in the move towards collaborative working 53 (39%) said they were unaware of this initiative or that there had been no change for their centre (17 PN, 17PG, 11NC, 7 DC, 1 NS). Nine managers said there were barriers and ill feeling between the private nurseries and state nurseries relating to funding, that there is a ‘*them and us attitude*’. Seven respondents from playgroups said they had been working with local pre-schools and had made links with school nursery classes. Two of the managers had received information from the Pre-school Learning Alliance about meetings. Another manager said that pre-school and playgroups are forging links, but not schools:

*There’s no real collaboration. They forget we’re here. Primary schools look down on us (PN).*

The responses from nursery schools were notably upbeat by comparison.

*We see ourselves very much in an advisory role. People are looking to us to take a lead. We have the private sector nurseries, the pre schools, the EY departments, family centres, all are looking to us for advice. To see how we do it really (NS).*

The conflict over securing 4-year-olds and related funding is proving to be a major barrier to partnership development:

*Everyone should be more open, not watching their backs. It should be child directed not number directed (PN).*

In response to our questions about what might help them move further in the direction of partnership and collaboration 51 managers thought that exchange visits between nurseries to share expertise and good practice, and finance to pay for cover, would help collaborative working across sectors. Sixteen managers thought that structured and documented meetings would help. Twenty three managers considered collaboration to be irrelevant, unhelpful or they did not know what would help them move in this direction. 16 managers of nursery schools and another 16 managers of nursery classes said increased resources to buy time and cover for staff to facilitate exchange visits and to share expertise would help. Two nursery school managers referred to the need for more space for training. Five nursery school managers referred to the need to develop better relations with other sectors although 5 NSs (combined centres) were notably upbeat about the implications for the future of their working more closely and sharing INSET with colleagues in the private sector.

*I think the development of the relationship with the private sector is growing enormously quickly and probably because we've provided some very good training and it's been free and people have become involved and therefore recognised what we've got to offer and we're learning from them as well. So I think that part is fine. I think it's an historical thing with the departments in all local authorities that people have got their own budgets and their own departments and I guess that in the long term we need to move to Early Years departments before we really get the people to work collaboratively.*

## **QUALITY ASSURANCE: ARRANGEMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Registration and inspection is considered by LEA co-ordinators to be playing a major role in quality assurance, both the annual inspection under the Children Act 1989 for the Voluntary, Private and Independent sectors and OFSTED inspections were cited as being influential. References were also made to analyses carried out at authority level to find the strengths and weaknesses identified in OfSTED reports in Early Years sections, in education nurseries and reception units. While joint standards are clearly being established across sectors, and education departments are taking the dominant role, there was little evidence and acceptance of central responsibility and for supporting those being inspected. Owen and McQuail (1997) highlighted similar problems when they reported on their evaluation of the first phase of the voucher scheme. The structures varied between authorities and within authorities according to the sector.

*The PLA say they do their own (X9).*

*The private / voluntary sector are left to their own devices – but an offer of support is made to them in case of difficulty (W9).*

*There is no centralised mechanism for maintaining quality in day care, it's more localised (Z9).*

One authority had developed a quality framework for self-evaluation to be adapted for use by everyone (X9). Performance indicators are being developed and at least one authority was also trying to define quality with kitemarks – 'like Sheffield' (Z9).

Baseline assessment training and baseline itself is also considered influential in the education sector (Z9, V9), and training more generally was seen to be playing a major role in improving quality:

*LEA nursery schools (don't have LMS) were trained a lot. Done a number of research projects with nursery schools and units – EEL and others. Using all these elements to share this with more settings and an EEL element in 3 day inset (Z9).*

We asked centre managers if the new baseline assessment schemes would affect their centres and 92 (68%) managers said 'no' or 'not applicable', and 29 (22%) said 'yes' they would. The other 14 said they didn't know. It is perhaps unsurprising that those settings with younger children were less likely to have considered baseline assessment.

The issue of assessment is often confused with testing and many of our respondents demonstrated this. One respondent from a private nursery said:

*We are trying to make our records as accurate as we possibly can do. So in a way we are testing, though in a fun way (PN).*

Managers of nursery schools and nursery classes, who often have a direct link to the primary school, reported the greatest involvement with baseline assessment.

*Yes. The baseline assessment was a very onerous process for the reception class teacher this year and the authority are proposing that the nursery teacher will be part of doing it. I don't know the detail of that yet (NC).*

*We've always been involved in that. We actually do baseline assessment just before our children leave and the results go up to the reception classes and they are then checked again but we feel we want to work together with our reception colleagues because of the information that we have on our children at the end of a year with us. So we have been involved in the Birmingham baseline for a number of years now (NS)*

One reception teacher, who had received training, and had 'already done the ones (children) who are going into main stream in September', was extremely critical:

*I think it's absolutely disgraceful it doesn't tell you anything about the child. Nothing to indicate what their creative abilities are. There's no art, no music hardly anything, if anything, on science. It's number and writing. Very little on maths I think the only mathematical thing is position. I've done it with my children and it doesn't bear any relation to the abilities of those children and where I think they are or where they will be going. But it has to be done and that's it. I will do the baseline assessment but along with that I will carry on doing the profile and the record sheet I'm doing at the moment because those together with the baseline will give a much fuller picture to the parents. There is nothing to say if a child has a medical problem or if the children have English as a second language (NC).*

LEA co-ordinators consider the review and development function of inspections to be especially important in quality assurance:

*Early Years Training co-ordinator analyses OFSTED reports for particular needs and IATS (Inspection, Advice and Training Services) informed of these needs and respond to them (V9).*

When we asked centre managers about the implications of the inspection arrangements for practice in their centres 48 (36%) respondents said there were no implications at all, and 19 of these were managers of nursery classes (83% of the NC total). It may be that nursery classes inspected through primary inspection get a different focus as *part* of a bigger institution. While no specific



question was asked, a small number of respondents did express concern about some inspectors' level of experience and their apparent lack of understanding of young children.

*Inspectors compared 3 year-olds with the DLOs in October! Never taught this age group, one took a handful of jigsaw pieces and said; 'how many are there?' - to a 3 year old!*

A number of respondents cited clear changes that were made in response to inspection, 44 (33%) referred to curriculum planning and 19 (14%) to the assessment, evaluation and recording of children's work and progress. Fourteen (10%) referred to the increased paperwork and photocopying. Many respondents also referred to the stressful nature of the inspection process. One play group leader expressed despair, as she was finding the inspection process particularly difficult to understand and manage:

*We are supposed to give the children 2½ hours of education a day. We are not qualified to do it. The OfSTED pack is mind-blowing. There is lots of paper work to do. I can't do it. I read it and it doesn't make sense. I don't feel qualified (PG).*

*It's very hard when you feel that people are making judgements on you who perhaps may not have the necessary background (NS).*

Respondents in nursery classes reported little change:

*We had an inspection in January. It was a whole school inspection and the nursery was inspected alongside the school. There were a few minor changes. We had already put in place a bilingual NNEB so we didn't have any major changes (NC).*

One day-care manager provided some insight into the organisational difficulties they perceive:

*When OfSTED come they are just focussing on the 4-year-olds so it makes it difficult when you have to do a curriculum for all the children that you cater for. So I devise one curriculum for the 2 to 5 year olds. I don't break it down. You just scale everything down for the 2-year-olds, and step up a gear for your 4-year-olds. When you get OfSTED down it won't suit them. They expect you to do two sets of plans. That is time consuming. With the local authority they need to sit down with all their registration officers and come to one format (DC).*

We asked centre managers if the new funding arrangements would affect their centre and 27 (20%) said 'Yes', or that 'it might do' (11 PN, 7 PG, 1 NC, 4 DC, 4NS) while 86 (64%) said 'No' and 21 didn't know. Of those suggesting there would be an affect, 2 managers in private nurseries said they are better off in the following ways:

*We are better off because we are keeping our 4-year-olds for next term. The funding for 4-year-olds in January increases the children's sessions so it is a benefit (PN).*

*It has been made easier. We now apply to the LEA, which has eased paperwork. We are non-profit making and the extra cash helps (PN).*

Some playgroup leaders said that there were benefits from the new funding which included being able to offer more realistic salaries and therefore to keep staff for longer, to buy more equipment and to lower fees.

Others were concerned about a drop in finance:

*We are taking in younger children. The ratio is different – fewer children less money (PG).*

Several respondents referred to the timing of the claim system leaving them out-of-pocket:

*We can't reduce fees because not enough children qualify. Some children will be with us for 1 term only once they are 4 and we won't get funding. We can't plan the budget with funding in mind because we never know (PG).*

*At present the government pay 50% of the fees for parents who are on benefits. They pay this back termly so we are out of pocket (PG).*

*On the 14 August we had to state who we had on role. Last week we took on 3 new children. We can't claim for them until September. We won't get the money until November. The timing is wrong (PN).*

*Very difficult. I did a head count today but I have children starting in 2 weeks time. What about funding for them? I am out of pocket (PN).*

The delay in funding was also mentioned by a primary headteacher:

*There is a financial loss for those children we will admit in September. We won't get the money for them until January (NC).*

The issue of funding for 3 year olds was also raised repeatedly:

*If they start funding 3 year olds they might stay and wouldn't go to nursery (PG).*

One playgroup leader described the affect that funding, and the link between funding, inspection and the Desirable Learning Outcomes, was having on her playgroup as follows:

*Ideally I think we'd like to get rid of the 4-year-olds now, because they have different demands from the little ones and we are better at being a playgroup, and so if we did get rid of the 4-year-olds we wouldn't have any funding. We're definitely not a nursery school so it is never mainstream funding anyway. The LEA has also gone over to a once a year intake so they disappear in September and any 4-year-olds that might emerge, well they could be 4 in October of course, but usually it's not until the last term of the year that they turn 4 so the funding is never for the whole year. This year it's only been for the last term (PG).*

Only 4 of the nursery school managers believed that the new funding arrangements would affect them, but in response to the question one of the managers said:

*They might affect us in the sense that one of the gaps in provision in this area is for our under 2's and we're looking for a partnership with a voluntary body to set up some provision for under 2s so that would affect us. The funding we've had from the DfES for the EEC has certainly affected the centre and it's increasing the training we are doing for other providers and it's also given us the responsibility to disseminate good practice in other ways as well. We're actually providing targeted training for other providers in their own settings as well as here. We're looking constantly for funding opportunities so that we can actually develop the work that we are doing (NS).*

## TRAINING

The integration of training for the maintained and the private and voluntary sector is considered especially constructive by LEA co-ordinators. But authority training strategies are at different stages of development (see appendix) and this clearly reflects the different standards of prior provision and the different levels of new resourcing available from the Standards Fund:

*Private Sector can now access and do use our inset – some free, some fee (Y5).*

The training provision on offer seems to be extremely varied. In one authority training has been provided by an advisory teacher and an established multi-agency training group. LEA funding was also being released to support training. One authority referred to two 'senior managers' who had been released for two days a week for two terms (Z4), another authority had created an Early Learning document and video training pack for all providers – *'an example of introducing quality to all centres but not integrating care and education'* (V4). In one authority:

*Everyone with 4-year-olds gets 3 day modular training – in every kind of provision (1 person from each centre), we have used a cascade model to share good practice.*

One authority referred to a 'contract' between providers and Local Authority funding for training – so that training is *'of a particular standard'* (W9).

While the LEA co-ordinator comments and the nursery school manager comments were generally positive, the centre managers from other sectors were far from satisfied with the new initiatives for staff development. It may be that the co-ordinators are more optimistic because they have sight of the forward planning. Many of the nursery schools had established INSET provision and many of our respondents were themselves involved in providing training. The other managers reported that the main implications for staff development are:

- *The cost and difficulties of providing cover to release staff to attend daytime courses.*
- *The reluctance of some staff to attend twilight sessions because of problems with child care for their own families, because they are too tired after a long working day or because in rural areas they often have to travel a distance to reach the training venue.*
- *The high cost of courses particularly for those in the private sector and play groups. Most managers provide INSET and rely on the expertise of existing staff to share good practice.*
- *Managers of playgroups spoke of the reluctance of some staff to attend courses, particularly long standing members of staff who do not consider additional training necessary. Some managers too thought their staff sufficiently qualified already although they were a small minority.*
- *Managers of nursery classes spoke of the frustration of attending training that is now open to all providers and can be simplistic and repetitive (aimed at the lowest trained). Some play group leaders thought courses were sometimes too hard.*

Most managers said their INSET was ongoing and that staff are keen to attend courses and update their skills and qualifications. Managers mentioned specific training staff have received in the areas of baseline assessment (6NC, 1NS) and with respect to the Desirable Learning Outcomes (3PN, 3PG, 5NC, 5DC, 5NS).

Three private nurseries, one nursery school, and 6 playgroup managers referred to members of staff who had upgraded their NVQ qualifications. A few respondents commented that they had shared training with other providers and this had been valuable. 14 managers (1PN, 3DC 10NS) reported attended training using the LEA's Early Years policy document which they then shared with their staff through their own INSET. Ten nursery school managers referred to their own training and 6

references were also made to the strategic approach through School Development Plans (SDP) and individual development.

The challenges faced by different sectors are illustrated in many of the managers comments:

*We're just spending more on it which means there's less being spent elsewhere (PN).*

*A headache really because my staff, well one's been here for 25 years and one for 12 years and they have a wealth of experience but at nearly 60 they don't really want to retrain. So there's a lot of resistance on their part and I don't think it's fair if I go on the training all the time and leave them to run the place. So I suppose it would be different if we were all younger. We've been on one training all together. We closed the playgroup for the day and that was nice and also quite eye opening...We really go to keep them happy because we don't feel it's a great need for us (PG).*

*Well basically there's no money in the LEA. We have really been on very few courses myself and the nursery nurses. As a whole school staff there hasn't been money for going off on training days. Having said that we did have one day where our cover was paid for by the LEA which was about the baseline assessment so we did have one free course (NC).*

*We have staff who've done their NNEBs like 5, 6, 10 years ago. The only other training that was offered was the one-day Inset training that we get from the LEA. So unless you've got the NNEB or your child care qualification the people don't tend to go on any further qualification because you come to a level in child care where you come to a level when you become an organiser and that's it. But now that we're teaching the children people want to go on and get teaching qualification but there's no money. I am training my staff and I am encouraging them to do courses and we will offer any support we can. In some cases we'll pay for half the course and offer them time to go off and study (DC).*

When we asked what would help them improve the training on offer 63 managers said more funding, to cover the cost of good quality training courses and to pay for cover. Concern was also expressed about the quality of cover available. Time was also mentioned by almost all of this group. (12PN, 17PG, 14NC, 9DC, 11NS). Eight of the nursery school managers said funding was specifically needed to provide training opportunities for Nursery Nurses, 4 said that the situation was the same for Learning Support Assistants and non-teaching staff and that the lack of funding for these workers made joint training difficult to run. Two respondents spoke of a lack of parity for nursery nurses and one mentioned their lack of career structure. Ten respondents referred to the need for shared training with other providers (3 PN, 3 PG, 1 NC, 1 DC, 2NS). Another 16 respondents said there should be more courses run by the LEA providing information about when and where this was happening well in advance to support early planning (6 PN, 1 PG, 1 DC, 8NS). Some respondents expressed concerns about the quality and coherence of some of the training while others were very positive about their ongoing inservice training. However, as we've mentioned earlier Table 8 (see Appendices) suggests that the LEAs see this as an area for substantial development over the coming years. Several managers across the range of provision (except for nursery classes and nursery schools) were anxious to have another tier of qualification above the National Vocational Qualifications in child care and education. They commented on the gap between the NVQ and teaching qualifications.

## **THE INVOLVEMENT OF QUALIFIED TEACHERS IN EARLY YEARS PROVISION**

The LEA co-ordinators reported on the progress being made in terms of increasing the involvement of qualified teachers in early years provision. The experience varied across the authorities and they

were also developing different approaches to the problem. Apart from increasing the number of teachers working within settings, the development of partnerships between schools and other providers, and the support provided by advisors and training programmes were cited in response to probing on the issue (see appendix). Throughout the interviews it was interesting to note that the co-ordinators with a social services background tended to be less enthusiastic about teacher involvement, and in one authority there was open disagreement between the two respondents that were interviewed. In another authority the (social services) co-ordinator asked: *'Why do we need teachers if our settings have passed (sic) their OfSTED?'* Progress appears to be quite limited, although some opportunities are clearly being exploited when they arise (see Table in the appendices).

*We are struggling in some settings to keep teachers in nurseries, but this might change after schools strategic review which might make more pupil numbers in some schools and therefore more teachers (T10).*

In one authority, because the schools had rejected their admissions policy, the LEA had provided £180,000 cushioning money for the loss of 4-year-olds:

*Schools should not (now) have to lay teachers off but should have teachers with more time so theoretically there is a possibility of outreach work with the voluntary/private providers e.g. comparable recording systems, curriculum etc. (V10).*

## **THE EFFECT OF NEW INITIATIVES ON PARENTAL CHOICE**

While 52 (39%) of our centre managers told us that parents now had more choice, 32 (24%) said that they had less (12 PN, 8 PG, 6 NC, 6 DC) and 41 (30%) said that it hadn't changed.

Yet again the issues surrounding the uptake of 4-year-olds in schools were significant:

*I think it's getting much harder when children get to 4 for parents because there is a huge pressure to take them out and put them into state education, be that the nursery class or be that the reception. I think there is a big pressure on parents particularly when your choice is limited as it is, and if you get the offer of what's considered to be a good school and you've got no guarantee that place is going to remain there for 6 months, then parents are obviously under pressure to take it. I think in many respects their choice has been limited more because they don't have the option that they want really in terms of keeping children in nursery education or day care that bit longer (PN).*

*I think personally they've got less now. In a sense they're frightened to say 'I don't want that place. I want my child to stay there' because they're frightened the child won't get into school when they're 5 (PG).*

*With the day nursery at the centre they have more flexibility of sessions. With the rising 5s in schools they have the option whether to stay with us or go. I would say they have more choice though not always for the better (NS).*

*Yes, in the city they do have more. It's different within the villages. There are no choices. So it depends on cost and where you live (PG).*

*I think there's less choice. I'm a 30-place nursery and I have 194 children on my books. I reckon not even a half of that lot is going to be able to get into here (DC).*

## THE EFFECTS OF NEW INITIATIVES ON PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Both the LEA co-ordinators and the centre managers agreed that there had been little effect upon parental involvement so far.

*In many ways for working parents the choices offered have caused more confusion. The opportunities for 4-year-olds to have a full-time place at school has not been an easy choice for working parents, as there has not yet been the full development of out of school care for the Under 5s. This is now happening, but slowly (Y12).*

In two authorities there has been a long-term problem with provision for ethnic minority families in two inner city areas. The shortage of local nursery education has meant that they have to travel further, and have experienced more racial harassment due to this.

Our survey suggests that the new initiatives have had little effect on parental involvement, 104 (77%) of the centre managers said there was none and only 30 (22%) said that there had been improvements. The nursery school, private nursery and play group managers tended to be upbeat about their prior performance but many of the other managers described the specific problems that they faced. Interestingly most of the managers demonstrated an implicit understanding of parent involvement as 'them' helping 'us':

*No because I find them lethargic anyway. We try to involve them in reading sessions but no I wouldn't say there was a dramatic urge for them to come forward or to help more.' (NC)*

*'With community nurseries and playgroups, we have always had a problem with parent involvement. The parents just don't have the time to put as much into the nursery as we would like. They don't see us as schools. They see us as a place they drop their children off, we teach them hygiene, good manners and they don't see us as being educators. So they don't put the same input into the nursery as they would into schools (DC).*

According to the LEA co-ordinators, task groups have been formed, and outreach workers have been active but little progress is to be reported at this stage. The quality as well as the amount of involvement to be found in the authorities seems to vary considerably. In one authority there has always been parental involvement within the voluntary sector as the parents have always formed the key part of their Management Committees. This has been extended to some centres with places for parent representatives. In another authority some increase was noted due to the institutionalisation of parent focus groups, and a big partnership group. Increases were also noted in relation to the number of voluntary parent-led organisations e.g. playgroups, parent and toddler groups had increased (W13).

The co-ordinators referred to the 'representative' parents invited to contribute to the Early Years Partnerships. But there was a feeling that less people were coming forward from playgroups because they had more to do - leaders were resigning and not coming forward because of the increased planning / record keeping etc. they were involved in. Other initiatives like home-start, the relevance of the Effective Early Learning project (a practice development project), Parents and Children Reading Together and 'babies need books'; health forums and family literacy projects were cited as influential.

## IMPROVEMENTS IN CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE

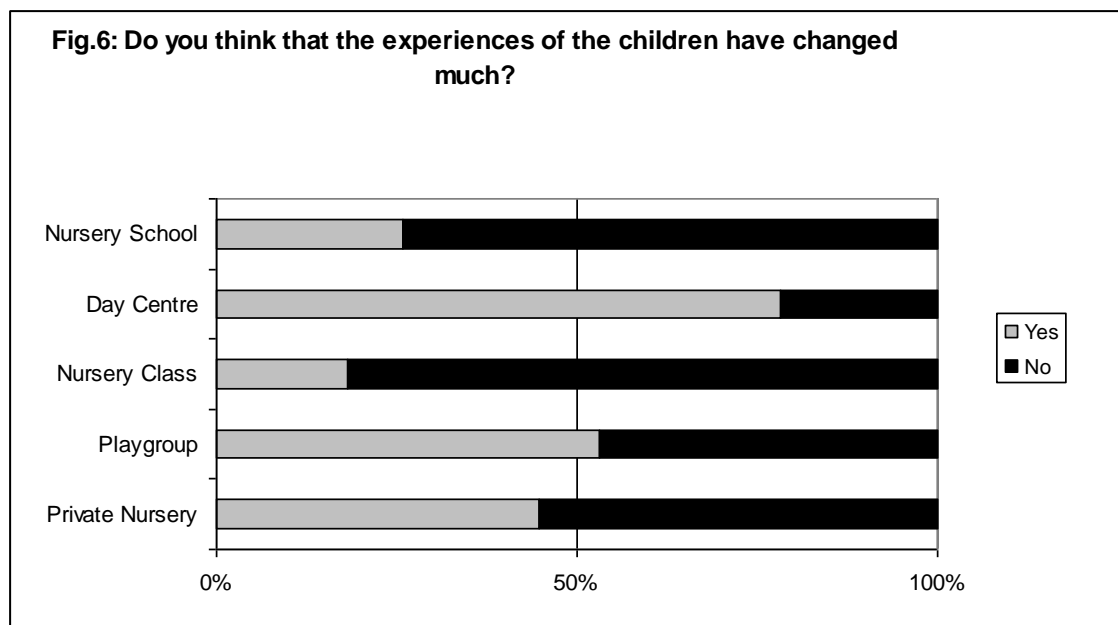
Again, the most significant changes have been related to the movement of 4-year-olds into schools and the introduction of the early years curriculum appears to be regarded as only of secondary impact. The poor staffing ratios in reception classes is seen as particularly worrying and reception children in vertically grouped classes are considered to be suffering especially (X14). Concern was also expressed regarding the increasingly skewed (3/4-year-old) age balance in Nursery Schools. Many of the older, more experienced children are now in schools and the 3-year-olds are left without the benefit of the older role models/influences. Mixed views were expressed regarding the effects of focusing attention more closely on curriculum. In one authority it was felt that some playgroups were becoming inappropriately formal. In another it was felt that Local Education Authority (LEA) settings had improved because they had to be explicit about what they wanted the children to learn. Most authorities felt that the influence was positive. According to the LAs own inspection and advisory service evidence, the increasing emphasis upon quality has also changed children's experiences, although interpretations of this may still vary between authorities:

*The Desirable Outcomes have changed reception classes that now focus less on National Curriculum, especially in more affluent areas (T14).*

*More nurseries are putting in number lines etc. (T14).*

What is considered appropriate provision for nurseries is also being confused due to perceived OfSTED requirements (T14). It is also being challenged by other strategies employed to raise standards e.g. the National literacy/numeracy strategy.

We asked the centre managers if they felt that the experiences of children had changed and their responses were varied. Seventy four (55%) said that they had not and 59 (44%) said that they had (see FIGURE 6). The Desirable Learning Outcomes were mentioned and several managers mentioned an increase in technology provision as well.

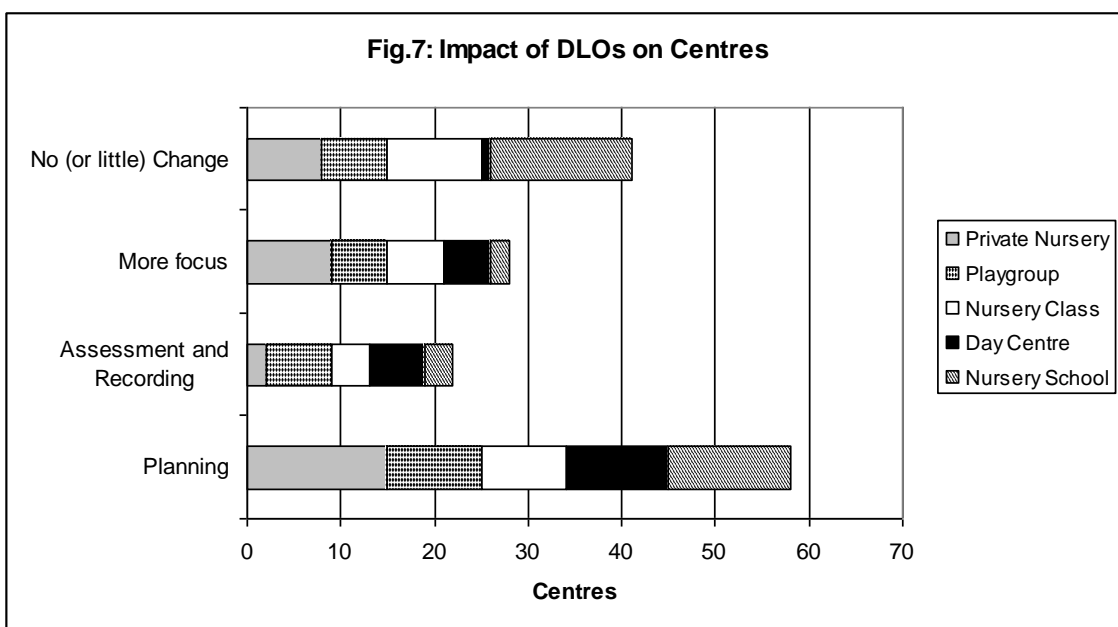


*Yes. They have more available to them. Particularly in technology. They have access to cassette recorders, cameras and computers and opportunities to play with and investigate these things (PN).*

*Children are beginning to get a more balanced range of experiences. We are picking up on an awareness of groups who are avoiding some areas of activities for example girls avoiding maths. There is more structure (NC).*

*Dramatically over the last 2 years. Experiences were very limited. Staff development has been involved too. I have been here for 2 years, if we had had an OfSTED then we would have failed. (DC)*

When we asked centre managers specifically about the impact of the Desirable Learning Outcomes on their centre 52 respondents said that it had had an effect upon their planning (15 PN, 10 PG, 9 NC, 11DC, 7NS) and 23 of these managers specifically mentioned assessment and recording. Thirty managers said they are 'more focused' and 32 reported little or no change in their centre (4PN, 2PG, 1NC, 1 DC, 14NS). Surprisingly 2 of the playgroup leaders said they did not know about Desirable Learning Outcomes (see FIGURE 7). Six managers said the Desirable Learning Outcomes have had the effect of narrowing children's experiences and pulling them away from play (1 PN, 2 DC, 3NS). Two managers referred to improved equal opportunities.



*For us it's been very much about the way we plan activities. We've included the Desirable Learning Outcomes on our activity planning, on our profiling of the children and on our theme planning so in that respect we're very much aware of it. We're very much looking for those outcomes for the children but I'd like to think the children's programme hasn't changed dramatically because we felt we were already offering the children an awful lot in terms of education anyway. So I think it may be the articulation of it, it may be the way we are thinking about it, but I think in the day to day experiences of the children it won't have changed dramatically at all (PN).*

*I think the children have taken it all in their stride really. You see it hasn't been all that much different really for the older children. Because for at least the last 5 or 6 years we have always treated the afternoon children like a reception class in a way. We have always drawn*



*and painted and joined dots and tracing and learned about the world around us and done experiments, so I really don't think the children have noticed a little bit more creeping in (PG).*

Some respondents had an interesting perception of pedagogy, and reported that they were finding the balance between 'play and work' difficult to manage. This response was particularly notable among the playgroups and their comments suggested that they may be experiencing difficulties when it comes to combining the two. This is interesting because these practitioners' perceptions are that DLOs are about teaching and that teaching is about formal, didactic education, even though this is not the intention of the DLOs document. The following is a typical quote from a playgroup leader:

*Ours is learning through play so we don't force anybody to sit down and do anything. The only time they actually were sitting for any length of time is when they're doing milk and biscuits. We actually do counting, the date, the month, what the weather is like. We ask them, they tell us. To them it was a game. So what we've had to do in a sense is to get the older children sitting down. Well we're trying to get them to write their names but this is going all against what we in the first place were. You weren't allowed to teach them to write or anything. If the child came up and asked we would sit and do it with them but otherwise...(PG).*

Consistent with other research findings (Sylva et al, 1992; Moriarty and Siraj-Blatchford, 1997), the vast majority of respondents from nursery classes said that the Desirable Learning Outcomes had helped to focus thinking, planning and assessment:

*Looking through the book it's actually what we have been doing for years but it's never actually been named Desirable Outcomes. All our planning is child centred. When we plan activities we know why we're doing this particular activity, we know what we want the children to learn from it and we evaluate each week what has been going on the previous week. So basically it hasn't had an impact. It has perhaps highlighted that we have been doing what we are required to do (NC).*

*Our plans. It puts in a neater context what you're doing, where you're going and the assessment and where the children are at and where they should be going (NC).*

Within day care centres respondents expressed some concern about the balance between care and education. Most however said that the Desirable Learning Outcomes had had a positive impact on their centre.

*It has helped in specifying some of the ingredients in learning. It has helped us to plan, record and assess and helped us to clarify areas of the curriculum. Cover of the basic curriculum is assured (DC).*

*It has been dramatic. Before we concentrated on the physical, intellectual, social and spiritual. The headings have changed and brought things together. It has brought a dramatic change in the children. We have core group activities with physical or maths activities every session (DC).*

For nursery schools the impact has been slight, with respondents referring to little more than a curriculum review and minor changes in planning.

*I wouldn't say there's been any great changes because we always used to plan to the areas of experience in Starting from Quality. And the Desirable Outcomes in a way, slightly different because they've got different headings but the actual content didn't change much, although we've had to change our planning slightly (NS).*

When we asked the centre managers if they envisaged taking more or less of an educational emphasis in their centres in the future 62 (46%) respondents said more 71 (53%) said the same, 1 'didn't know' and 1 (PG) said less (not surprisingly because; *'there are no longer any 4-year-olds attending'*). Twenty one (78%) of the nursery school managers told us they were doing a great deal already and most could see little opportunity or that there was anything to be gained from an increase.

*It's about getting a balance and remembering that children come first. We put a lot of emphasis on children being happy and a lot of emphasis on first hand experience and we firmly believe that unless a child's happy and their well being is good they are not going to learn. And yes there is an educational emphasis because at the end of the day children have got to take the next step in the system and you've got to .. that's what it's there for to give you a structure. It will be a matter of looking at the new learning goals whether we will have to make any changes or not. Staff start with the child (NS).*

Concern was generally expressed about the loss of play and there was also concern in the day care centres about the perceived shift from care to education. Amongst private nursery managers there was a range of views:

*Probably more because of the way it's been delivered to parents. Their expectation of the educational side has grown. We have to demonstrate to parents what we do. The danger is that it will make it more formal and it's getting away from what we do. Care is uppermost in our nursery (PN).*

*We can't go for much more. We cover more of the year 1 curriculum in the nursery now (PN).*

*They definitely want more (OfSTED). We have children from 2 ½ and the inspection looked at the class as a whole. Children are pushed at a very early age now (PN).*

*There is definitely more. It has changed so much in the last 12 months. Our standards have been reviewed and we are achieving a higher standard. We will get better as we gain experience (PN).*

Among playgroup leaders the main concern expressed was the anxiety that the focus on play would be lost.

*I think it will be the same really because we carry on and do what we do. If something comes out and we think that's a good idea then we'll join in. We've got younger children now. Personally I think they're trying to get them to learn too much too soon. (PG).*

*It's mainly an awareness that we should certainly involve ourselves more with the children and hand them the tools for describing what they're doing. We rather resist seeing ourselves as teachers though. We still want to think of ourselves as carers or as companions because we feel certainly with the 2 and 3 year olds there is enough formal teaching ahead of them and we would like to keep the emphasis on play and on exploring with us there as enablers really (PG).*

*We hope to get a balance between education and play. We feel play is valuable to children, especially younger children. The lessons and skills learnt in play are essential to future life (PG).*

## **THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF THE EARLY EXCELLENCE CENTRES**

The EPPE study has 5 Early Excellence Centres (EEC) in the sample of nursery schools. In all there will be a total of 25 such centres, not all of which have been selected. Local authorities often devote a great deal of time to writing a proposal for such a designation for one of their centres. The EECs in our study were, as to be expected, very positive about the future and their own role in shaping early years provision both locally in terms of training and disseminating good practice and nationally through exchange visits. While some respondents clearly saw the centres as potentially divisive, the general view of LA co-ordinators was that the national recognition as a centre of excellence was very positive. References were made to the misunderstandings of schools – where they have felt their contribution will be overlooked.

## **THE PERCEIVED EFFECTS ON SPECIAL NEEDS PROVISION**

In the process of developing the EYDP one authority identified a significant gap in the Service it was providing for playgroups with children with special educational needs (SENs) (Y2). This was now being attended to. Each of the respondents reported on training being carried out across all sectors, using the Code of Practice, surgeries and drop-in provision in several geographical locations. One authority referred to the setting up of a development fund for the voluntary sector, to support their work with special educational needs children (Y16) The development of a children's database in one authority (a children's information service X16) was also seen as a positive step forward. In one authority SEN as a whole had '*not really been well addressed yet*' (V16).

Some concern was expressed regarding the likelihood that children-in-need might be labelled as children with special needs and concerns were also expressed about the lack of resources particularly for profoundly disabled children. One hundred and ten (81%) of our centre managers felt that their practice had not been effected by the changes (27 PN, 23 PG, 23 NC, 10 DC, 27NS). Twenty four (18%) said that they had. Responses were clearly influenced by the presence, or otherwise of children with identifiable needs in the centres.

*No we haven't got any children with SENs at the moment in situ. We did have up until January of this year. We would say that's an area where we're looking to improve our own training and expertise. We're just in the process of setting up a session with the LEA trainer who specialises in SENs because that's an area where we think we haven't got the expertise ourselves. But certainly I've been made more aware of the Code of Practice in relation particularly to OfSTED but not in terms of our practice I don't think (PN).*

*No it hasn't. We have always catered for children with special educational needs (PG).*

*Not really. We have implemented a more precise screen but that was in response to concerns that we were feeling that perhaps we weren't picking up on things soon enough in an official way. We were doing things unofficially with parents, which is obviously the beauty of nursery because you do get the chance to work very closely and get personal relationships going. We had an OfSTED inspection in 1996 and it was one of the things they raised (NC).*

*Yes, because now SEN is much broader and I think we will find it hard to break down which children do have special educational needs. I have just finished a course and I'm still very confused. It's something I will have to feel my way through very carefully because it's very easy to label a child when they're not (DC).*

*We are keen to provide as inclusive an education as possible. We have a couple of staff who have had portage training this year which is really good. (NS).*

*Our practice has evolved on SEN. We've actually got a pilot project involving under 3s children who've got special needs. We're also working on an inclusive pattern to include special needs children and also parents are very involved (NS).*

We asked the managers if their centres were responding to the Code of Practice and 104 (77%) of the respondents said they were following it and had appropriate systems in place. All of the nursery schools said that they were following the Code of Practice with systems in place to meet the full requirements. These included a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), who was frequently the headteacher, the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and a network of additional support from other professionals. In the private nurseries 8 managers said they have not had to use the Code of Practice because they either do not have, or they do not cater for, children with special educational needs. Another 5 managers did not know what the Code of Practice was and 2 said they had their own policy. Three managers said that they had support and guidelines from the under 5s officer and 2 felt that it wasn't applicable to them. All of the managers of nursery classes said they have systems set up to meet the Code of Practice and all but 1 of the daycare managers said the same, the manager of one daycare nursery said she was unaware of the Code of Practice.

*We have a system in place. We have meetings twice a term for the whole school and we go through the forms and update them (NC).*

*We are quite far ahead in this borough. We have good support systems and well-developed structures in line with the code of practice (DC).*

The only providers linking the Code of Practice to the IEPs and planning in a systematic way are the nursery classes, this might be because of a wider policy link with the primary school. Daycare centres seem to rely on outside agencies and individual support assistants. Centres across the range of providers did say they followed the Code of Practice but some of them found it hard to explain how they did this. Some children are coming into settings having been identified by health services but it would also seem that some children who might need early identification of special needs are not 'picked-up', some providers are missing this opportunity.

## **LOCAL PRIORITIES**

Training and standards are the main priorities across the authorities (see Table in the appendices). Concerns were expressed by the co-ordinators about the inadequately trained staff, and the poor quality of some inspectors. References were also made to an action zone bid (W14) and the perceived need to get 3 year olds into education settings as soon as was possible after they've been in day-care (W14).

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR NATIONAL POLICY**

All the co-ordinators had something to contribute to our final question offering them the opportunity to identify 'a wish list' for the future. Local authority early years co-ordinators felt that it would be particularly helpful if reception classes were excluded from the national curriculum. The Desirable

Learning Outcomes should be in place for reception year and it was suggested that the National Curriculum should start in Year 1

*The National Literacy strategy works against this. Children that start in the Summer Term have a lot to do in that term. There is a lot of anger about literacy hour for 4-year-olds (W14).*

There is a perceived need for the development of a common entitlement for parents and children that provide continuity in provision 0-5. It was also felt that national standards need to be set for staffing ratios for 4-year-olds. The co-ordinators referred to the need for a concerted drive towards integration. A more uniform approach to registration and inspection is also needed across the country.

The co-ordinators would also like to see:

- *Nationally recognised qualifications for childcare workers across all settings.*
- *Nationally recognised qualification for inspectors and clearer guidelines.*
- *National standards for registration and inspection to include care and education.*
- *Central government strategy on training.*
- *Funding to support infrastructure development.*

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## APPENDICES

**Table 1 The sample according to region and type of provision**

	Private Nursery	Playgroup	Nursery Class	Day care	Nursery school
Inner City	5	6	3	7	7
North East	3	5	4	8	5
East Anglia	10	8	5		4
Mid-Shire	8	8	7		5
West Mid.	4	5	4	8	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>27</b>

**Table 2 Main characteristics of effective pre-school practice\***

	Qualif.	PS E	Safe	AER	Relat.	Play	Care	Res.	Ind. Needs	Train.	Team Work	Enjoy	Curric.	Equal Opps.
PN	13	5	11	4	6	5	13	8	9	4	1	1	3	1
PG	6	16	11	1	6	9	4	4	5	3	3	8	4	1
NC	10	18	3	21	11	6	1	8	6	1	3			1
DC	13	4	12	7	7	5	6	4	4	9	5	3		1
NS	12	3	6	6	13	4	5	4	7	2	6	7	3	8

\*could name more than one

**Table 3 Centre changes as a consequence of recent national initiatives**

	No	Yes
PN	13	16
PG	13	19
NC	13	7
DC	6	17
NS	11	16
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>75</b>

**Table 4 Key issues in these changes for your centre**

	DLO	OfSTED	Funding/Admissions	Integration	After-School	Baseline
PN	12	7	7			
PG	10	5	12		1	
NC	11		6			1
DC	12	12	2	7	1	1
NS	6	3	3			1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>

**Table 5 Has enrolment been affected?**

	Yes	No
PN	20	10
PG	18	14
NC	5	14
DC	12	11
NS	10	17
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>61</b>

**Table 6 Have children's experiences changed?**

	Yes	No
PN	13	16
PG	17	15
NC	4	18
DC	18	5
NS	7	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>74</b>

**Table 7 Impact of Desirable Learning Outcomes on Centres**

	Planning	Assessment and Record	More focus	No/little Change	Less Play	What are DLOs?	Others
PN	15	2	9	8	1		2
PG	10	7	6	7		2	7
NC	9	4	6	10			2
DC	11	6	5	1	2		7
NS	13	3	2	15			2
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>20</b>



## **EFFECTIVE PROVISION FOR PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION (EPPE) PROJECT**

### **INTERVIEW FOR CENTRE MANAGERS**

Thank you very much for agreeing to talk to us about your pre-school centre. There have been many recent changes in pre-school education and we are very eager to hear how these changes affect your centre. We are aware that changes have occurred at a different pace in different centres and we realise that centres will have different experiences of change.

1. Has your centre changed as a consequence of recent national initiatives? What has been the key issue in these changes for your centre?

#### **Partnership and collaboration**

2. Have you been involved in the setting up of Partnerships?  
How has your centre been affected by the introduction of Partnerships? Were you consulted?
3. How has the new LEA Early Years Development Plan (or plans being made for one) affected your centre and staff?
4. What have been the implications for your centre of the move towards collaborative working across sectors?  
What would help you move in this direction?
5. Do you think the enrolment in your centre has been/will be affected by recent national changes? (for example, by the Early Years Development Plan).

#### **Inspection, funding and assessment**

6. Will new funding arrangements affect your centre? In what ways?
7. What are the implications of the inspection arrangements for practice your centre? For example, Nursery education inspection/school inspection - Section 13 revised/Children Act inspection?
8. Will the new baseline assessment scheme affect your centre?

#### **Children's experiences**

9. What has been the impact of Desirable Learning Outcomes on your centre? Do you envisage more or less educational emphasis at your centre? Do you think experiences of children have changed much?
10. Has your practice concerning children with Special Educational Needs been affected? How are you responding to the Code of Practice?

#### **Staff Training**

11. What has been the implication of these new initiatives for staff development? What would help you improve training?

#### **Parents**

12. Has parental involvement changed as a result of new initiatives? Parent choice?

#### **In conclusion**

13. What would you say were the main characteristics of effective nursery practice?  
Has your centre changed in its approach to these key areas as a result of recent initiatives?

## **EFFECTIVE PROVISION FOR PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION (EPPE) PROJECT**

### **INTERVIEW FOR PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTING EARLY YEARS DEVELOPMENT PLANS IN EACH OF THE EPPE REGIONS**

#### **Your role in recent initiatives**

1. What is your position in the local authority organisation and what is your role in the Early Years development plans?
2. Has your role changed over the last year or so as a consequence of national policy in early years provision?
3. What benefits have you seen in your area as a result of recent government initiatives?

#### **Collaboration and partnership**

4. How far has your authority succeeded in integrating early education and care? How much is due to the initiatives of central government and how much to local initiatives?
5. In what ways has early years provision expanded in your authority as a result of recent initiatives? Have different types of provision been affected differently?  
Probe: different sectors, geographic parts of the authority, age of children.
6. Are providers working collaboratively across the sector? What prompted this?
7. How have the co-operation between local authority departments and voluntary/private agencies been affected? Is there more co-operation across the authority?
8. What have you done about consultation with the private and voluntary sector? What steps did you take and how successful were they?

#### **Quality assurance and training**

9. Who is responsible for quality assurance in Early Years provision? What strategies are in place for improving the quality of provision? What arrangements are there to monitor quality at centre and local authority levels?
10. Have there been any developments to change the involvement of qualified teachers in Early Years provision? How will this be developed in your area?
11. What is your training strategy in the local authority plan?

#### **Parents**

12. Has parental choice been affected by recent changes in your authority?
13. Has parental involvement been affected?

#### **Improving children's experiences**

14. How have children's experiences in pre-school settings changed as a result of recent initiatives?
15. How has (or will) the Centres of Excellence initiative affect provision in your authority?
16. How has special needs provision been affected?
17. What are your priorities for development of early years provision in your authority?
18. How would you like to see national policy develop for pre-school provision?

**TABLE 8 - LEAs responses to recent government initiatives on ECE provision**

<b>LEA</b>	<b>Expansion in Provision</b>	<b>Priorities and Targets</b>	<b>Training</b> (all Standards Funds (SF) cited are matched by LEAs)	<b>Involvement of qualified teachers</b>
<b>T</b>	Not at this stage. A high level of provision has always been available. A shortfall in some areas requires strategic overview. Nursery classes are taking more rising 4s while more playgroups take 3-year-olds.	Quality provision and continuity in curriculum for 3-6-year-olds. Training. Family support. Integrate care and education. Review services for 3-year-olds. Standardisation of funding	£17,000 SF. Increase access to training and accreditation for Early Years workers in all settings, have existing specialist venue for training. Training for positive parenting provided for some.	Always had 4 full-time teachers across 10 day care settings (no plans to increase at this time) but it's not enough. Struggling in some settings to keep nursery teachers.
<b>V</b>	Opened 35 nursery classes since 1996, this has affected community playgroups – voluntary sector is marginalised while private sector is stable. In some areas not enough children to go round all the providers.	Development of 'wrap around care'. By mid-1999 to: Review current teacher involvement and English as an Additional Language in Early Years settings. Increase collaboration to raise quality. Impact of rural isolation on learners. SENs identification and provision. Review provision for 3-year-olds.	£80,000 SF. Cert. course developed. Admin post to co-ordinate training. All staff to be qualified to registration standards by 2001 including support staff in reception. Produced special guidance document for training. Consortium established 5 levels of training: basic to degree level	8 good local partnerships between schools and other providers – 40 more schools identified for development. Some surplus teacher time to be used for outreach work –as yet no real time to commit to this work.
<b>W</b>	No funds for expansion, a reconfiguration of services needed first. Playgroups suffered due to cut in social services budget in '95. Identified some areas with no provision e.g. a multi-ethnic part of city	Integrated provision to support children and families. Establish training strategy and appoint curriculum co-ordinator. Parent support. Review services for 3s. Involve a teacher in every setting. Increase Early Years Units with nursery ratios and curriculum.	Still at planning stage but £16,000 SF used to appoint curriculum and training co-ordinator and develop common training processes and procedures but retain specialisms. Specialist training in early years curriculum, SENs and family support.	'Not insisting teachers being in every setting (DfES can't fund this)'. General advisers give support to private/voluntary sectors that have difficulty with standards with 4 year-olds. Conducting an audit of needs.
<b>X</b>	A decrease in provision due to early entry to school. Lost sessions in rural playgroups. Nursery schools and playgroups are taking children younger.	Training. All 4-year-olds in p/time education. Strengthen partnerships to provide more info. And support to parents, more wrap-around. Expand provision for 3s. Coordinate systems for inspection, registration and quality assurance.	£50,000 SF. One teacher per division with 5/6 part time field-workers delivering inter-agency training. Professional Development programme can cover basic stage through to PhD.	One teacher attached to each division. 31 part time 'early years qualified' fieldworkers to cover 350 voluntary/private settings. Approx 600 settings overall.
<b>Y</b>	No expansion, always a high provider. Now, more full-time places for four year olds, releasing more part-time places for 3-year-olds in nursery classes.	Quality provision: nursery principles and Desirable Outcomes, learning of four-year-olds. Review provision for 3s. Audit provision levels. Expand wrap-around. Develop parent support and increase partnerships.	£18,000 SF. Local authority training strategy in draft form but expected that staff development will support targets and inspection	Combined provisions have 2/3 teachers in each. Majority of courses offered to every sector, all have high teacher input. Appointed p/t advisory teacher to develop this.
<b>Z</b>	Not at all, plans to increase nursery provision were already in place and "playgroups are struggling to find a role"	P/T provision for all 3 year olds. Co-operation with other agencies to improve provision for 0-5. Promote Early Years curriculum training. More inclusive of children in need and those with disabilities. Standards for equal opportunities.	£70,000 SF. Have developed their own training package focussing on DOs, baseline assessment with ref. To SENs and equal opps. Hope to link with a Higher Ed. Institution for accreditation. Cost and time a problem. Looking to National Training Organisation for guidance on quality.	Put 1 teacher in social services settings but they did not want them. Now moving to one 'pedagogue' in each social service setting for 2-days/ wk for 4-year-olds – to be extended in future to all settings.

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