

To whom it may concern,

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, a wide range of Early Years organisations have come together in an unprecedented way to support and share guidance, expertise and practice in order to ensure a continuation of the very high standards of Early Years Care and Education, being delivered.

This includes the major sector representative groups alongside national, regional and smaller local multi-site providers. With all their backing, we are writing to outline how, as a combined group of 70 major providers, we feel the sector is best placed to support Government and the economy by setting out how we can safely and effectively 're-open' childcare provision across the country which will clearly be needed to support parents who return to work in the months ahead.

In relation to the Statutory Framework for EYFS, current disapplication measures within Learning & Development requirements and appropriate flexibilities within Safeguarding & Welfare requirements have given providers initial support to deliver 'emergency childcare' as part of the initial response to COVID-19. As we move to re-opening/transitioning from 'emergency childcare', the sector is well placed to address several matters:

1. EYFS – Safeguarding & Welfare requirements – with current flexibilities in place and the nature of Early Years settings being considerably smaller than schools, with key-groups of children, we are more able to further minimise transmission risks as settings are less likely to have large communal areas such as playground entrances, dining rooms, halls, meeting rooms and other facilities which may more typically be associated with schools and larger educational provision.
2. Training & Regulatory matters – providers have clear guidance and accountabilities from a range of sources including:
  - a. Gov.uk guidance which has been in place since late February/early March and evolved in response to the pandemic and resulted in dynamic changes to providers Site Operating Procedures (SOPs) being implemented by our workforce
  - b. Health & Safety at work Act 1974 and related HSE guidance and oversight
  - c. Ofsted Inspection Handbook and associated guidance
  - d. A well-established sector-linked range of independent training and support organisations
3. Key Supplies – we have the current ability to build on our emerging 'sector procurement strategy' including items such as PPE, Resources and Educational Materials, Hygiene and Food which will remove any further burden from Government in supporting the sector in transitioning from 'emergency childcare'.
4. School Transitions – we are very aware of the difficulties faced by young children who will be transitioning back into settings and for some also due to move onto primary school settings in just a few months, having spent in many cases a number of months away from their key attachments and familiar learning environments. To support their

wellbeing and social/emotional implications of lockdown, alongside ongoing social distancing demands placing additional pressure on schools, we would require Government to re-enforce the existing mandatory school starting age of five for this cohort of children, allowing them to take up their reception place from either January or April 2021. Early Years settings are ideally placed to support this move, which should remain at parental choice and facilitated by:

- a. Schools guaranteeing children their Reception place if entry is deferred by 1 or 2 terms
- b. LA's funding term time 9-3pm (30 hrs) provision in Good & Outstanding provision using existing mechanisms and current underspends from DSG.
- c. EY settings continuing to provide a rich and varied curriculum as per the existing EYFS which already covers the age range up to 5 years (60 months).
- d. Parents retaining a choice and also paying EY providers directly for wraparound/out of school hours

Finally, we would welcome supportive guidance from Government in the following areas:

1. Directives to Local Authorities – a need for both consistency and speed of decision making in supporting providers through this transition phase and beyond
2. PPE – clarity for both our teams and parents on latest medical advice and requirements
3. Notice – in relation to effectively 're-opening' and considering the needs of both our teams (furlough status, wellbeing) and the appropriate transition for children into the setting and their emotional and physical wellbeing, we would request that Government supports the sector to begin to open the nurseries in response to local need as and when they are ready.

As referenced above, Appendix I sets out an outline of SOP's which relate to the key considerations all settings will have in re-opening and/or transitioning from 'emergency childcare' operations. These have also been developed with the expertise and input of the aforementioned providers and should serve as a sector-wide reference tool from which all providers can make the necessary arrangements that are appropriate to their individual setting or context.

These views and the SOP's included at Appendix I are given in good faith and with a collaborative spirit to ensure we can provide the very best level of Early Years Care and Education that the country's children deserve and that enables families to get safely back to work whilst ensuring all appropriate consideration is given to how we support ongoing measures in the UK's response to COVID-19 and ensuring that 'R' is both reduced and maintained at a suitably low level to prevent the NHS being overwhelmed as part of a second spike.

Your faithfully,

Early Years COVID-19 Response Group