

Annual Survey of Childcare Providers 2016 – Response Document

The annual survey of childcare providers was open from April 14th to May 13th and promoted to childcare providers via the Early Years bulletin and individual reminder emails.

193 providers responded to the survey (226 in 2015). These were distributed as follows –

Childminders	45%
Nursery schools	9%
Maintained nursery class	5%
Private providers	18%
Voluntary managed groups	23%
Independent schools	0%

All areas of the county were represented with the highest percentage of responses (19%) from the South Northants area and the lowest (2%) from the Northampton West area.

Hempsalls and NCA

45 voluntary managed groups responded to the question about support from Hempsalls, with 60% saying they had been supported well or very well.

81 childminders responded to the question about support from NCA. 90% rated that support as good or excellent and 85% said they had a good or excellent understanding of their particular challenges.

15 comments were given – the majority were highly complimentary about the service, although one respondent would have liked more support.

Comments will be discussed as part of the contract monitoring process.

Early Years Bulletin

90% of respondents said that they are able to access the Early Years Bulletin easily. Others expressed difficulty as they do not receive the email alert. A number of people also responded that they have difficulty with opening attachments or links.

91% of respondents said that they would prefer the bulletin to be sent out monthly and 7% would prefer weekly. One respondent suggested termly and one suggested quarterly.

The EY Bulletin is sent out using the same email address that the setting provided to Ofsted for their use so it should be correct. If you have not received an EY Bulletin for a month, you can check on the EY Website ([here](#)) as the Bulletins are put on there each time they are released. If you have not received the most current one, you can download it from there and then e-mail earlyyearsimprovement@northamptonshire.gov.uk to check why this might be. All attachments are available on the webpage so can be easily accessed.

The EY Bulletin can be quite lengthy, but this is due to communications from the different agencies who work alongside all EY Settings. We are looking at sending the EY Bulletin out weekly in a slightly different format which will match the one sent to schools, is easily opened on tablets and phones and just gives you key links to documents. This new format will ensure that information is up to date and the Bulletins are easier to navigate.

Documents and Processes

Respondents were asked to rate various documents and processes. The percentages rating each one as clear or very clear were as follows (figures in brackets are for 2015) –

Provider Guide	63% (81%)
Parental Contract	63% (76%)
Process for claiming funding	46% (62%)
Online headcount return	47% (60%)
Appeals process	27% (31%) (46% haven't used)
Process for parents to check 2yo eligibility	47% (66%) (21% haven't used)
Discretionary 2yo process	25% (48%) (44% haven't used)
EY Single Funding Formula	29% (58%)
Process for parents to check EYPP eligibility	33% (58%) (31% haven't used)

53 suggestions were made as to how processes could be made more user friendly. These included ideas as to how the headcount form can be improved and suggestions about providing clearer information to parents, including in other languages.

The system we currently use for the Headcount Return online form has been in place since 2007 and we agree that its time for a change! We are about to embark on a large project to completely update the systems and processes used to claim and administer funding. This new system will also incorporate the 30 hours free childcare. Many of your comments will be used to help us in the design of the new systems and processes and as we move forward we will be asking for your further support with the design and testing.

There were some comments on the closing date of the online Headcount form. This used to close on a Friday at midnight but after listening to feedback from childcare providers, we extended it to cover a weekend. The majority of the childcare providers use this extra weekend to help them complete the forms. Unfortunately in order to pay you quickly, we need to close it as quickly as we can. We will consider what is most appropriate as part of the system redesign.

The Headcount Return form changes regularly because we have to collect information requested of us by the DfE as well as everything we need to administer the funding. Often the wording and layout used is set out by the DfE to ensure they can capture information in the format they require and frequently the timescales mean we cannot give you much warning of this. However, with the introduction of new systems, processes and procedures this may be something we can look into.

A number of people commented on the confusion that arises because a code is given to all unsuccessful 2 year funding checks. Unfortunately the system generates a reference number for every check made in order to ensure that the information is logged correctly. In order to avoid the confusion this causes, we can make the wording around the reference number easier to understand and clearer to users. We can also look at possibly changing the layout of the page and the information that is supplied.

Some people also queried some of the responses given by the Online Eligibility Checker for 2 year olds. This links in with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and once a parent/carer has entered their personal details, these are then checked by the system at NCC with the system at the DWP. It is ultimately the DWP who provide the eligible or not eligible outcome. Due to tight data protection law, the DWP cannot share with us why a family have been approved or declined. In extreme cases we can contact the DWP and do a manual check but this is very limited and the DWP can only answer yes or no to the questions we ask. We cannot under any circumstance be told anything about a family or

their income. We can look into cases like this if we are emailed the information or reference number provided by the checker.

Funding cannot be back dated for any child regardless of how the criteria was met. However we will look again at the current processes for claiming a discretionary place in order to get these places agreed as quickly as possible.

Discretionary places are funded by NCC rather than by the government funding. Therefore they are limited and the criteria are tight. Applications do need to be countersigned by the professional working with the child in order to ensure we are making the best use of the funding.

We will look again at the marketing and processes for EYPP with the aim of encouraging more parents to access this and making the criteria clearer. Any ideas and suggestions would be gratefully received.

We are aware that the Parental Contract can be confusing in terms of the number of available hours. It also requires signatures in a several different places because of the various elements it encompasses. We will be looking at improving this.

We do offer a calculator that advises when a DOB is eligible for funding, there is a link to this on the website as well as on the submission page and subsequent 'eligible' email that is sent out.

Translations isn't something we do as standard practice, however, we are currently working on the 2016-2017 Parental Contract and we will be looking into getting this translated if possible.

We know that some families do need extra support to understand the processes and we thank you for the help that you give. Please do continue to advise us of anything that could be made clearer. You can also direct families to Children's Centre services at their local library where they can get extra help and assistance.

Early Help Assessments

19% of respondents reported completing an Early Help Assessment during the preceding year. 22% of respondents thought it was very easy or fairly easy to receive support from the Early Help co-ordinator (54% responded that they didn't know, suggesting they had not tried to do so).

9 comments on this have been reviewed.

Providing Early Help to children and their families remains a key priority for Northamptonshire as reflected in the Northamptonshire Early Help Strategy. The Early Years Sector has a vital role as one of the earliest services to interact with families. Support is available [here](#) on the council website on understanding your role as childcare providers as well as links to training and support for Early Help Assessments.

There is support available from Early Help Coordinators for any professional working with children or families who may need early help.

Call 0300 126 1000 option 1, option 2 and ask to be put through to the Early Help Support Service in the community where someone will be available to assist you during office hours (or email earlyhelpsupport@northamptonshire.gov.uk). Lisa Marriott is the early years specialist, but any Early Help Coordinator will be glad to take your enquiry and help you with information, advice and guidance. We aim to respond to all enquiries within 5 working days, but if you feel your call is urgent and cannot wait, Early Help support is also available in the MASH.

It has been a year of change for many early help services in Northamptonshire, but there are still a wealth of services and interventions that are available for your children and families. We would encourage anyone to seek advice and guidance about early help options as it is rare that 'nothing' can be done.

The online submission system for EHA has been developed based on the required information for recording purposes. No information requested is superfluous to requirements. We continue to monitor and review these processes and make changes accordingly.

Children's Centres

We asked some questions about providers' relationship with Children's Centres.

36% of respondents said that their working relationship with their local Children's Centre provider enables them to easily support families to access the services they need.

31% of respondents said that their working relationship with their local Children's Centre provider enables the Children's Centre to have opportunities to access families through the provision.

49 suggestions were given as to how this could be improved. Many of the comments were about the changed service offering and the forthcoming reduction in Children's Centre buildings and suggested that Children's Centres no longer had the capacity to engage with childcare providers. Children's Centres continue to deliver both universal services in libraries and targeted support through commissioned providers and it is important that childcare providers are able to support families to access this support. We will be considering all suggestions when seeking to find ways to improve relationships and communication.

SEN

70% of respondents felt they had had sufficient support to enable them to meet the needs of children with SEND.

16 respondents made comments with a number requesting more training or support but specific needs were not identified.

Specialist advice and support is available on an unnamed basis through the Portage and Early Years SEND team either by phone, (details [here](#)), or in person at the inclusion network meetings. More general advice is available from the setting improvement contact. Childminders can contact their Childminder consultant who can offer support and advice regarding support for children who may have a special educational need or disability.

46 respondents made comments on the training for SENCOs. Whilst many praised the training, many others have had difficulties with accessing it.

During the financial year April 2015-16 we have held 6 Qualifying SENCo courses and 2 Enhanced Skilled SENCo courses in addition to 2 SENCo refresher courses. Not all were full and they were all advertised in the Early Years bulletin and on the NCC web pages. We hold them in two areas in Northamptonshire, Northampton and Kettering to try and minimise travelling. In the past we have held the training in four areas of the county but found that participants were not booking in the smaller towns and so the course was not value for money. We need to balance the best value against accessibility and feel offering courses in Northampton and Kettering is the best compromise.

Other issues raised

38 further comments were made about the services we offer. A number of these reiterate issues discussed above and comment has already been made. However we would like to make the following additional responses –

- You may be aware that our web pages have now been redesigned. The new arrangement has clearly defined zones for parents and providers and we hope that information is much easier to access. Please take a look [here](#) and see if you think we have addressed the issues you identified.
- The redesign of the web pages has also impacted on the use of the pages on a mobile device. The pages and the Online Eligibility Checkers have always been mobile compatible but the new pages should make this even easier now.
- We aim to distribute as much early years funding as possible to providers so we are not able to fund the provision of a telephone service but we will always respond to your emails as quickly as we can and will call you back if a conversation is the easiest way to support you.
- Training – there has been significant amounts of training available during the week and at some weekends and on wide ranging topics. Everyone can access the EY Website [here](#) and can see what is on offer at a time to suit them. The training has also been fully subsidised over the last year.

34 respondents left their details for individual feedback. Where they asked a specific question this has been answered. In many cases no specific question was asked or the comments needed to be considered alongside those made by other respondents. These people will all be contacted with the final report.

Responses to the part of the survey regarding the Trajectory Funding

These responses will be used to inform the impact report to be presented to Schools Forum in July 2016 and so are not analysed here.