

28 May 2020

Ms Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

Department for Education

29 Great Smith Street

London SW1P 3BT

Dear Minister Ford,

With all early years and childcare providers now preparing to reopen or extend their services to more than just vulnerable children and those of key workers, we are writing to you again to ask you to urgently set out how the Department of Education proposes to help providers to support children and families whilst operating in a vastly different operating environment.

As we have made clear at your Department's COVID-19 childcare and early years taskforce meetings, nurseries, childminders and pre-schools do not expect to see the same demand for childcare places as there was before the outbreak. Parents may have lost jobs or have reduced incomes; some may be shielding and others worried about the risks of returning. More families, worried about their finances, are likely to rely on just the early education funded places that government provides. PACEY's recent survey of 1,000 parents of 1-6 year olds revealed that 48% said they are either not planning on sending their child back to a childcare setting or haven't yet decided.

This means most providers will be operating with far less children than they normally care for and, for nurseries and pre-schools, whilst also having to employ additional staff to ensure children are cared for within COVID-safe bubbles.

Alongside reduced attendance and so income, all providers are returning to an operating environment that has significantly increased their costs. Everything from ongoing additional hygiene controls; greater use of PPE as well as, for some, the cost of structural changes to their setting to accommodate new ways of working e.g. additional washing facilities, partitioning of rooms all add to their growing costs.

Your pledge to maintain payments for funded early education whilst settings were required to close was a lifeline for many providers. We are now in urgent need of your clarification on how this commitment will continue over the coming months, as settings remain open despite reduced attendance. Alongside the Recovery and Transformation Fund we called for in our last letter (which we have again written to the Chancellor about today) we asked for

continued funding of early education entitlement from local authorities that would reflect previous funding levels over the year as a whole (where children retain their registration with that setting, regardless of the hours they may in reality attend over the coming months). Also that this would need to incorporate an urgent increase to the current level of fee paid so sustained underfunding of the early years sector is finally addressed.

We would like to meet with you to discuss how you intend to move this matter forward and, as part of this, consider how local authorities can be encouraged to be agile enough to reflect the changes in parent take-up that are likely to manifest over the coming months. For example, will settings who are open but whose parents are delaying the return of their children be funded? Will settings that have to remain closed due to shielding still receive this funding?

Finally, we wanted to address the issue of cleaning and PPE costs. We are aware of funding available to small primary and some larger schools to reflect these unbudgeted costs, where a case is confirmed. We want to ask your Department to offer the same support to registered early years and childcare providers faced with the same increase in cost, including those who have already incurred such costs whilst remaining open to vulnerable children and those of key workers. A similar grant as well as an increase in early entitlement fee levels will be necessary to support providers to make the changes they need to be able to deliver much needed childcare and early education in a new operating environment, while helping ensure settings can remain viable in the long run against a backdrop of reduced demand. This will mean providers can better care for the children who come back from June while ensuring there will still be adequate provision for working families planning to return in the future.

We look forward to discussing these matters with you urgently so that childcare and early years providers can plan their reopening, reassured of the support they will receive from your Department.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Purnima Tanuku OBE  
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National Day Nurseries Association

Liz Bayram  
**Chief Executive**  
PACEY

Beatrice Merrick  
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Early Education