



Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1

19 June 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

Supporting Early Education and Childcare Providers through Covid-19

Since I joined other sector bodies in writing to your Department for Education and HM Treasury just under a month ago, setting out the support the early education and childcare sector urgently needed to be able to support children and their families whilst remaining sustainable after the pandemic, I had hoped the dire straits that childminders, nurseries and pre-schools found themselves in would be recognised and funding support given to this vital national service.

Whilst we have had much praise and thanks from your government, there has been little recognition of the support the sector needs given reduced attendance by children and a new operating environment that adds significantly to their costs. Data from Ceeda reveals that so far in June average occupancy for the 75% of settings currently open is at just 38% which is simply not tenable long-term.

The catch-up programme you have announced for school children is to be commended but don't children under five need support too? There is a wealth of evidence that early education plays a critical role in supporting improved outcomes, especially for our most disadvantaged children. So many children have missed out on the critical support that early education settings provide, not least in terms of enabling them to be ready for their transition to primary school.

So I am writing again to express my deep concern that your government needs to do more to support the thousands of childminders, nurseries and pre-schools who risked life and livelihoods to provide the care vulnerable children and the children of critical workers needed during the pandemic. This is needed to ensure the high quality early education our youngest children deserve can survive this pandemic and be there to support under-fives to have the best start in life and working parents to return to their jobs.

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme & Self-employed Income Support Scheme have helped childcare providers but many, especially self-employed childminders, have not benefited from these schemes. Coronavirus has hit early years and childcare providers in the private, voluntary and maintained sectors particularly hard because they rely on parental income as well as government funding to remain viable. We know that parents



have been facing tough times as well, with many furloughed or losing income as a result of the lockdown conditions. Those early years and childcare settings that have re-opened or accepted more children back, have had to make significant changes to their daily operating environment to minimise that risk. All of this has increased their business costs at a time when they have reduced numbers of children attending. We believe attendance will remain below viable levels for many months to come, especially as parents may have lost jobs or have reduced incomes.

More families worried about their finances are likely to rely on just the early education funded places that government provides. The DfE's pledge to maintain payments for funded entitlements at pre-pandemic levels is welcome but there is already evidence that some local authorities are using local discretion to change that commitment. Furthermore, these fees don't take into account increasing costs nor do they rectify historic levels of past underfunding.

So once again I am asking you to consider establishing a transformation and recovery fund for early years. This will support providers to make changes they need to be able to deliver much needed childcare and early education in a new operating environment, while helping ensure businesses 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 over the summer while ensuring there will still be adequate provision for working families planning to return in the future.

PACEY believe that for the future sustainability of high quality early years and childcare provision in England, providers need support from the Government now. My concern is that the sector is perceived as an add-on and that Government's primary focus remains on schools. Providers are going out of business now due to this crisis and a lack of childcare provision will damage our economic recovery, limit working families' options and, of course, harm the educational development of our youngest children.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liz Bayram".

Liz Bayram

Chief Executive

Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years