

## **Daycare Trust Evidence to the London Assembly Investigation into Childcare in London**

October 2011

Daycare Trust welcomes the opportunity to respond to this investigation, and for the opportunities to give oral evidence to the Committee. We were founded as an organisation by a group of London parents 25 years ago, and ever since we have represented the views of parents in the capital and across the country in campaigning for affordable, accessible high quality childcare for children of all ages. We undertake research, campaign on childcare issues, work with providers in different types of childcare settings, as well as providing information for parents and carers. Earlier in 2011, Daycare Trust merged with the National Association of Family Information Services (NAFIS), the charity that supports, links and promotes Family Information Services in Great Britain.

Our research with parents, childcare providers and local authorities gives a comprehensive and up-to-date picture of London parents' experiences of accessing childcare and this response draws on that research.

### **Daycare Trust's work in London**

Daycare Trust currently undertakes significant amounts of work with a London focus. The London Childcare Network project is funded by London Councils and coordinated by Daycare Trust, in collaboration with the Pre-school Learning Alliance. The aims of the project are for London parents to be better informed about childcare provision, and supported to access appropriate services, and for childcare providers to be:

- better supported to ensure quality of their workforce, and to increase their sustainability
- better able to influence strategic plans at borough, sub-regional and cross-London level
- supported to improve the home learning and parenting environment of London families, and be
- better able to work with disadvantaged groups.

Key activities include an annual London childcare providers forum and survey, a London e-bulletin covering news, events and services, and regular free workshops and seminars. We have a network of over 2,000 childcare providers who receive information and attend events.

Daycare Trust runs a campaign called Childcare for the Capital's Children, which is funded by Trust for London. The campaign works with parents and local groups across London to fight cuts to childcare; increase access to childcare for low income families; and improve knowledge of childcare entitlements and support available. We also work closely in partnership with other campaigns such as 4in10, the London child poverty campaign.

Over the last 20 years, Daycare Trust has worked to develop ways of reaching out to parents who under-utilise childcare and early education, or find it difficult to access financial support for childcare costs. Daycare Trust is presently running a Department for Education Parent Champions project in a number of local authorities, including a project in the London Borough of Southwark targeting new migrant parents.

Daycare Trust is also delivering a project for the Walcot Foundation, promoting the Walcot grant. Parents who live in Lambeth, who are on a very low income and want to study or train as a pathway to work can apply to for help with their childcare costs through this grant if they meet the criteria. The Walcot Foundation can provide up to £5,000 per year, and students are screened and referred via Daycare Trust.

Daycare Trust is growing its links with London businesses and a major strand of its work is to show the benefits for large and small businesses of childcare and family friendly work practices.

Through its recent merger with NAFIS, Daycare Trust is now working to support London Family Information Services and has recently undertaken a survey of them. Daycare Trust also continues to carry out research on issues relevant to London, for example, on-going research on access to informal childcare and on childcare for those who work atypical hours.

## **The childcare picture in London**

As the Committee's scoping document makes clear, the childcare picture in London is a reflection of London's unique social, economic and demographic conditions.

### *Children in London*

London has a higher proportion of children under five than other parts of the UK and a younger age profile. Half of all Londoners are aged under 34, and the child population (under 16) is estimated to grow to 1.7 million by 2011. Furthermore, London's population is super-diverse and in 2010 some 55 per cent of children were born to mothers who were themselves born outside the UK. As a consequence of population super-diversity there are some specific challenges in imparting information about childcare in London.

One in four children in London lives in poverty, and a quarter live in workless households, the highest of any region. We believe that provision of affordable childcare is one of the most effective and sustainable ways of reducing child poverty, as it enables parents to work. It should be noted that the proportion of working age women in employment in London is, at 60.7 per cent<sup>1</sup>, the lowest of any UK region.

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<sup>1</sup> NOMIS data from Labour Force Survey, June-August 2011.

Access to early education and childcare also has a number of other benefits for children, such as improving their social, emotional and physical development, promoting good communication and ensuring they are ready to start school. Access to early education is particularly important for children who come from homes where English is not spoken. Rates of childhood obesity are high in London and many children in the capital also have limited access to outdoor play space. For them, the daily outdoor play received through formal childcare has significant physical benefits.

#### *Cost of childcare in London*

The cost of childcare in London is significantly higher than the UK average and is the most expensive region for all categories of early years childcare.<sup>2</sup> A part-time (25 hours) nursery place for a child aged under two now costs £119. For a full time place this could equate to nearly £12,000 per year.

Out of school childcare in London is actually marginally cheaper than the average at £43 per week for 15 hours of care compared with £45 nationally. This may reflect the historically higher levels of investment in play services by London local authorities, along with higher levels of (cheaper) public sector provision. The cost of holiday schemes is also marginally lower than the national average, with a full time place costing £93 per week compared with £95 across Britain.<sup>3</sup>

	Nursery (under 2)	Nursery (2 and over)	Childminder (under 2)	Childminder (2 and over)	Out of school care (15 hours)
London	£119	£113	£119	£116	£43
Britain average	£96	£94	£90	£88	£45

*Source: Daycare Trust Childcare Costs Survey 2011*

Daycare Trust is concerned that the cut in April 2011 to the amount of help available through the tax credit system will have made it even more difficult for London parents to pay for childcare and sustain employment. We believe that the Government's decision to reduce the maximum amount of childcare costs paid through the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit from 80 per cent to 70 per cent has already resulted in some parents giving up work. This cut means an average loss this year of £442 for families with one child and £546 for those with more than one child, and it could mean a loss of up to £1,500 for those with the highest claims. Other changes to the tax credit system mean that by 2012 a two child family will not receive any tax credits if their gross household income exceeds £31,000. Daycare Trust is concerned that while government wishes greater numbers of workless households to move into employment, its Tax Credit changes limit families' capacity to do so.

Daycare Trust research has found that parents' inability to pay for childcare is now the biggest sustainability issue for childcare providers in London. Our survey of more than 400

<sup>2</sup> Daycare Trust Childcare Costs Survey 2011

<sup>3</sup> Daycare Trust Holiday Costs Survey 2011

London childcare providers found that this was their top issue in 2011, above workforce issues and Ofsted inspections. Nearly half (46 per cent) of providers said they had experienced lower demand for places and many described how fee arrears had increased. Urgent action to address affordability concerns is therefore essential to protect childcare providers and their workforce.

#### *Take up of childcare initiatives*

Despite high childcare costs, the uptake of tax credits, including the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, is low in London. Overall, 18 per cent of income-entitled London families took up the childcare element of Working Tax Credit in 2008<sup>4</sup>. Low uptake may be partly due to the nature of the London labour market, as the tax credit system does not work well for parents with intermittent or unpredictable employment. There may also be barriers relating to the complexity for families with English as an additional language or low levels of literacy. Negative past experiences of over-payment may also act to limit uptake of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. The development of the Universal Credit, which will replace benefits and Tax Credits from 2013, offers many opportunities for simplifications to increase take up and to help families to move out of poverty.

The creation of free early education places for all three and four year olds was one of the most important policies introduced by the previous Government in its childcare strategy. A universal free entitlement has also been prioritised by the coalition Government, which extended provision to 15 hours per week in 2010. The Government has also pledged to extend free places to the 20 per cent most deprived two year olds.

Despite the overall success of the free entitlement policy, take up of the places is still lower in London than elsewhere in England with just 76 per cent of all London three and four years olds taking up their place, compared with 94 per cent nationally. In some London local authorities more than 40 per cent of eligible three and four year olds do not take up free provision.<sup>5</sup> Daycare Trust also has concerns that the free early education offer for three and four year olds is not always sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of working parents, with the free hours not always available when parents need them.

We are also concerned that there may be insufficient suitable childcare provision in London for two year old children who become entitled to free early education. (This issue has already been highlighted in evaluations of pilots of the two year old early education offer). It should be noted that while the 20 per cent most deprived children across England will become entitled to free early education, this proportion will be much higher in London because of high levels of child poverty in the capital. This, in turn, will require London local authorities to find a greater number of suitable places for these two year olds.

#### *Support from family members for childcare*

London also has the lowest level of informal childcare - provided by relatives and friends - of all the UK regions. This is due to London's role as a hub for international and internal migration. Around one third of London's population was born overseas and more than half of births in London in 2009 were to mothers born overseas. In addition, in 2008/09, 205,000

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<sup>4</sup> DWP data made available on Neighbourhood Statistics

<sup>5</sup> Daycare Trust analysis of childcare sufficiency assessments, 2011

people moved to London from elsewhere in UK. Moving, whether from overseas or elsewhere in the UK, often severs support networks, so London parents are less likely to live near to grandparents and other relatives that can provide childcare.

An Ipsos MORI survey commissioned by Daycare Trust in 2011 found that 18 per cent of respondents from London had used a grandparent for childcare in the previous six months. This compares to 32 per cent across the UK and 51 per cent in Scotland, which had the highest levels of grandparent care. The same survey found that informal childcare was frequently used by parents who worked outside office hours, to care for children in the evening, overnight or at the weekend, when formal care was not available. Daycare Trust research on informal childcare suggests that parents who have limited access to informal childcare often have to turn down work opportunities.

### *London's labour market*

London's labour market poses unique challenges for childcare. The transport, communications, retail, hotel and catering and health and social care industries all employ large numbers of Londoners and are all sectors of the economy which involve significant amounts of work outside office hours. There were an estimated 1,349,200 jobs in these sectors in 2009 and in some parts of London – for example, Westminster and Hillingdon – a very high proportion of local jobs involve work outside normal office hours<sup>6</sup>.

A higher proportion of London employees work longer than 45 hours per week (23.5 per cent compared to 16.7 per cent in the north east). This means they require childcare for longer. Furthermore, in 2009 56 per cent of Londoners commuted for more than an hour to get to work, compared with just 20 per cent in the rest of the UK. This also adds to the amount of childcare that parents need to buy in order to work.

The times when parents work also influences whether they are able to find appropriate childcare. Recent Daycare Trust research highlighted the difficulties of finding childcare for parents who work outside normal office hours<sup>7</sup>. In this research 53 per cent of parents surveyed had problems accessing childcare before 8am and 66 per cent had problems accessing childcare after 6pm. Parents whose hours varied from week to week found it particularly difficult to find suitable childcare, as most nurseries and childminders were unable to accommodate these changes.

As noted above, some London parents who work outside normal office hours may use relatives or friends to provide informal childcare. However, London parents are less likely to live close to relatives who are willing to provide this type of childcare. Higher income families may also use nannies to provide childcare outside normal office hours, but the high cost of a nanny or nanny share puts this type of childcare out of reach of most families. In other families, parents work at different times in order to manage childcare – an adaptation sometimes called 'shift parenting'. But Daycare Trust research suggest that lone parents, couples who need to work at the same time and those who have no nearby relatives willing or able to provide childcare may not be able to take up employment that involves working outside normal office hours.

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<sup>6</sup> Business Register and Employment Survey, 2009

<sup>7</sup> Singler, R. (2011) *Open All Hours: Flexible Childcare in the 24/7 era*, London: Daycare Trust

### *Female employment in London*

Daycare Trust believes that the high cost of formal childcare and the low levels of informal childcare contribute significantly to London having the lowest level of female employment of any UK region. In the quarter June to August 2011 60.7 per cent of working age women in London were in employment, compared with 68.7 per cent in south west England. This is despite a highly qualified workforce. London also has the highest percentage of working age women who are economically inactive due to caring obligations of any UK region. In the year April 2011 to March 2011 44 per cent of economically inactive women in London were inactive because of family caring obligation, compared with 28.8 per cent in Wales. Daycare Trust believes that urgent efforts must be made to increase the employment rate among women in order to reduce the very high levels of child poverty in London.

We will now address the specific questions that the Committee wishes to consider, highlighting further relevant evidence and recommendations for action the Mayor of London could take.

### **What more can be done to ensure Londoners know about the childcare options and financial support available?**

Unlike school education, the childcare sector is complex and fragmented, involving a diverse group of providers from the maintained, third and private sectors. Research has also shown that many parents do not understand the range financial support that is available to help them meet the costs of childcare. There is, therefore, still a significant need for information about childcare options and financial support.

The importance of information was recognised in the Childcare Act 2006, with Section 12 of this Act outlining the duty of local authorities to provide information to parents about childcare. This duty is backed up with statutory guidance to local authorities<sup>8</sup>. Until very recently almost all local authorities provided this information through a Family Information Service, which in many areas includes a physical presence as well as phone and web-based information. In addition to providing telephone, written, web-based and email advice, statutory guidance supporting the Childcare Act 2006 obliges local authorities to provide a childcare brokerage service to give further assistance for parents who cannot readily find childcare. Childcare brokerage is a more intensive form of support and may involve help searching for childcare or contacting local childcare providers on behalf of the parent. London Family Information Services have pioneered childcare brokerage and ways of reaching families with information, for example, visiting supermarkets on a Saturday to provide information to working parents, or enclosing information about their services in the parent-held child development records (Red Books).

Daycare Trust has recently collated data on the support offered by Family Information Services in a national survey undertaken in September 2011. The survey suggested that the average size of a London Family Information Service was now 4.2 staff, although 72 per cent of London Family Information Services had recently cut staffing.

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<sup>8</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2007) Duty to provide information, advice and assistance, London: DCSF

While Daycare Trust's survey of Family Information Services highlighted much good practice in the capital, it also exposed some worrying trends. In particular, increasing numbers of London local authorities are disbanding their Family Information Services, dividing the work between children's centre outreach teams and generic local authority call centres. In London, at least five local authorities have or will soon disband their Family Information Services and more may follow in April 2012. Daycare Trust concludes that such an approach compromises childcare brokerage services who provide much needed support for families – for example, those with disabled children - who experience particular difficulties finding childcare.

Daycare Trust believes that all local authorities should maintain a distinct Family Information Service, and that this should provide information, advice and brokerage for parents on all aspects of their childcare requirements, outreach to groups who may not be aware of childcare options and support as well as wider family advice services. We are concerned that Family Information Services across London are falling victim to local authority cuts and believe that this is short-sighted and risks undermining high quality provision which at its best can support parents back in to work and ensure that more children take up the provision to which they are entitled.

The roll-out of the free early education offer for the most deprived two year olds and changes to childcare support brought about by the introduction of Universal Credit will result in new challenges for Family Information Services. We are concerned that a weakening of Family Information Services will compromise work to inform parents about these initiatives.

#### *Outreach*

We know that parents access information in many other ways apart from through Family Information Services, for example through word of mouth or via parenting websites. Daycare Trust is committed to ensuring that parents receive high quality, accurate information. We work in partnership with organisations such as Netmums and Gingerbread to support their information services. Despite the importance of word of mouth and internet information, outreach activities need to be undertaken by all local authorities, to encourage parents to take up their child's free early education place and to access services at their local children's centre, and these can be supported by the Mayor of London. These activities sometimes need to be community-specific and promote the benefits of early education to the child.

Daycare Trust's work suggests that those planning early childhood education and care often lack good quality population data that enables them to identify and target vulnerable groups who are not being reached by Sure Start. For example, in one London local authority, data indicated that children of black African origin took up free places at levels comparable to the overall population. But when this data was disaggregated it was found that Somali children rarely took up the free place offer, whereas almost all children of West African origin used the free place offer.

One such way of reaching out to parents is through peer-to-peer methods. Daycare Trust has developed Parent Champions as means of reaching out to families who under-use early

education and childcare<sup>9</sup>. Here parents who have an experience of formal childcare are recruited, sometimes by a voluntary sector or private sector organisation to engage parents and channel them towards taster sessions in nurseries. Parent Champions also direct other parents to sources of advice, for example, Family Information Services. That parents place greater weight on informal face-to-face advice is the observation that underpins the work of Parent Champions. Evaluation of the Parent Champion projects suggest that this method of outreach is both cost-effective and successful<sup>10</sup>.

*We recommend that:*

- the Mayor of London should promote and support the roll out of a Parent Champions scheme to every local authority in London.
- The Mayor of London, supported by the GLA Data Management and Analysis Group, should work with both central Government and local authorities to undertake effective outreach activity through making the best use of its data about different population groups. He should ensure that all public services and policymakers use the best demographic data and encourage the use of extended ethnicity codes that are presently used in schools.
- The Mayor of London should support Family Information Services through asking local authorities to publicise his initiatives for children and families (for example disseminating the London Child publication) through their local Family Information Services. This would signal that he considers them to be an important services and one which they should maintain.
- The Mayor should consider publicising the work of Family Information Services in future London-wide awareness raising campaigns.

## **How could childcare be made more affordable for Londoners?**

It has often been recommended that benefits and tax credits should have a London weighting to reflect higher costs in the capital. Daycare Trust is sympathetic to these arguments, since we believe that the high cost of childcare in London is a barrier to work for many parents. However there are also very legitimate concerns about how such a scheme would be administered, boundary issues, and fairness issues for families elsewhere in the country who also face high childcare costs (for example, because of under-supply).

There have been some calls for the new Universal Credit to offer a higher rate of support for parents in London. Daycare Trust would support consideration of this policy, as long as extra funding was found from outside of the current budget. The Government had originally pledged a budget of £2 billion per annum by 2014/15 and recently announced an additional £300m in order to extend support to those working under 16 hours per week. We could not support the creation of a London weighting from within the current budget as this would mean reducing levels of support for other claimants and we already believe that the level of support is too low. However if extra funding could be found we would support higher maximum allowances for London parents.

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<sup>9</sup> Daycare Trust (2009) *Report on Pilot Champions for Childcare Pilot Schemes*, London: Daycare Trust

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*



There is some precedence for regionally-weighted childcare support. The Care to Learn scheme, which offers funding for young parents for childcare and associated travel costs to enable them to complete their education, gain qualifications and enter employment offers up to £175 in London compared with up to £160 a week in the rest of the country.

Another barrier which prevents parents from taking up work is the up-front cost of childcare. Research by Daycare Trust found that many providers require parents to pay up-front costs such as a holding deposit and a month's fees in advance and many parents report that this presents a major barrier to them returning to work<sup>11</sup>. Discretionary Jobcentre Plus support is rarely available to meet this need and low-income parents who are returning to work or working for the first time find it difficult to access credit to pay these costs. Daycare Trust's report suggested a number of possible solutions, such as low-interest loans via employers, housing associations or credit unions, and we recommended that these were piloted. Daycare Trust has been piloting a scheme in Hillingdon, working with a credit union and registered social landlord. Although the scheme will be evaluated in 2012, initial feedback suggests that there has been fairly low take-up because of difficulties in publicising the scheme, a tight labour market, a small target population and a reluctance among potential claimants to taking on additional debt.

Parents can also receive help with childcare costs from their employer. Payment for using a workplace nursery can be deducted pre-tax, through a workplace nursery salary exchange scheme. Some employers also offer their staff childcare vouchers, with the costs of these vouchers deducted from earnings pre-tax. Across England an estimated 6 per cent of families received help with childcare costs from their employers, most usually in the form of childcare vouchers<sup>12</sup>. Local surveys suggest that the use of childcare vouchers is higher in London than elsewhere in the UK. However, not all childcare providers accept vouchers and some parents are not aware of this form of support. Work with employers, childcare providers and parents is needed to ensure that more London parents are able to benefit from vouchers and other forms of employer support for childcare.

*We recommend that:*

- The Mayor of London should lobby central Government to reverse the cut to the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, which reduced the maximum amount of help available from 80 per cent to 70 per cent.
- The Mayor of London should lobby central Government to ensure that the new Universal Credit system works better for families with fluctuating employment patterns. This could include longer run-ons when finishing work to avoid having to start a new claim when they find another job.
- The Mayor of London introduce a grant scheme to assist parents returning to work with the up-front childcare deposit and advance fee costs, which many parents cannot afford when they first take up employment.

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<sup>11</sup> Bartholomeou, P. (2009) *Childcare Advance: scoping the need for help with up-front*. Daycare Trust; London

<sup>12</sup> Department for Education (DfE) (2010) *Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2009*, London: DfE

- The Mayor of London consult with London Councils, employers and childcare providers to consider ways that more parents can benefit from childcare vouchers.

## **What more could be done to improve access to suitable childcare, including childcare outside office hours?**

There are still significant gaps in childcare provision in London. Daycare Trust research finds that nationally, 60 per cent of Family Information Services say that parents have reported a lack of available childcare during the previous year<sup>13</sup>. Particular difficulties are found for disabled children, out-of-school care for older children and childcare for parents working outside of office hours. We are also concerned about the growing number of closures of college and university nurseries and the impact this is having on parents who are studying or training.

Local authorities have a duty to manage their local childcare market and to ensure that sufficient childcare is available for parents wishing to work or study. However, in their Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, many local authorities continue to identify areas of under-supply; despite the sufficiency duty being in place since April 2007, they are not meeting parents' needs.

Apart from affordability, across London, the biggest gap in childcare provision for the under-fives is childcare for parents who work outside normal office hours. Daycare Trust is concerned about the year-on-year fall in the numbers of working registered childminders in London and nationally, as childminders often have a greater capacity to accommodate out-of-hours or changeable childcare needs.

Daycare Trust is also concerned that in many London local authorities there is little acknowledgement of the childcare needs of this group of parents. The majority of local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments in London fail to examine this issue<sup>14</sup>. Despite this omission, there is exemplary practice in some London local authorities and among some London providers to meet the needs of parents who work outside normal office hours or at irregular intervals. The Southwark At Home Childcare Service uses registered childminders and other trained staff to provide care in the child's own home. That carers are registered enables low income parents to apply for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. It should be acknowledged that this project had some start-up costs, albeit small ones, as well as on-going administrative costs.

The London Borough of Bromley has encouraged nurseries to open before 8am and close after 6pm, to accommodate parents' commuting times. The local authority has also created a providers and employers forum, linking providers with local businesses. Through this forum a number of local employers have given greater consideration to family friendly work practices. Additionally, there are now more childminders and nurseries in Bromley who offer care outside normal office hours.

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<sup>13</sup> Daycare Trust Childcare Costs Survey 2011 and Holiday Childcare Costs Survey 2011

<sup>14</sup> Daycare Trust analysis of 2011 Childcare Sufficiency Assessments

The above examples from Southwark and Bromley highlight good practice in London at meeting the childcare needs of parents who work outside normal office hours. Extending this provision more widely across London would enable greater numbers of unemployed parents to move into work – and out of poverty. We would encourage the Mayor to work to replicate these initiatives more widely across the capital.

Family friendly work practices are also part of the childcare flexibility picture, as such practices have the potential to lessen the need for childcare outside normal office hours. Daycare Trust's work with both parents and employers continually highlights the benefits of flexible working practices such as job-share, part-time work, home working or compressed hours. These benefits include positive impacts on employee motivation and commitment, better workplace relations, increased productivity and decreased absenteeism. Family friendly work practices can help employers retain skilled staff. While there has been some growth in the number of workplaces where flexibility is accepted over the last decade, there are still a significant number of London workplaces where there is little acceptance of flexible and family friendly work practices.

*We recommend that:*

- The Mayor of London should introduce a fund to provide grants to childcare providers to operate out of normal office hours. Daycare Trust research found that providers often needed financing to set up the service, as it is difficult to identify initial demand. The scheme could work on a cross-borough basis and could include marketing the service to key population groups and industries that have large amounts of atypical hours working. This would be an important offer to a group of workers who typically struggle to find childcare in order to stay in work.
- The Mayor of London should work with London Councils to conduct an exercise to map the gaps in childcare across London and to offer support to councils to fill these gaps in a time of tight budget constraints.
- The Mayor of London should ensure that the London Assembly, Transport for London, the London Development Agency all operate exemplary practice with regard to their employees' childcare needs. This should include offering childcare vouchers, flexible working patterns to accommodate childcare arrangements, and signposting to information sources about childcare as a very minimum. Additional support could be offered, for example additional support for childcare costs, on or off-site subsidised childcare provision, or an emergency scheme to offer replacement childcare when normal arrangements fall through.
- The Mayor of London should promote the business case for supporting working parents with their childcare in his dealings with London employers and their representatives such as the CBI, Chambers of Commerce and London First.

## **Older children**

We note that the Committee wishes to focus its attention on childcare services for the under fives. While we accept that some of the problems related to affordability and information are particularly acute for this age group, we would like to stress that many of the challenges that

parents face with regard to childcare continue, or even intensify when their child starts school.

The challenge of finding flexible childcare that fits with working patterns can be even greater once a child starts school. Most private nurseries are open from 8am to 6pm for at least 50 weeks per year. But when a child starts school parents often find it extremely difficult to find wraparound childcare for the 9am to 3pm school day, and during school holidays. Although many schools and other providers offer breakfast and after-school clubs, these are not guaranteed or may not be suitable for the family's needs. We believe that all schools or clusters of schools should offer childcare from 8am to 6pm which should be free to low income families. This 'extended schools' provision offers real opportunities for schools to work in partnership with other organisations in their local communities, such as third sector youth groups who may be able provide holiday childcare using school premises. We believe that extended schools are one aspect of the Big Society ideal. As well as supporting parental employment, after-school clubs can play a vital role in supporting children's learning and development, for example, through organised sports or by providing a quiet space to do homework.

Holiday childcare is a particular problem, and in 2011 we found that holiday provision had been reduced in a majority of local authorities<sup>15</sup>. Many women give up work during the summer as it is simply too difficult to find appropriate childcare, and are then forced to start their search for work again in September.

An additional problem is that some wraparound childcare providers and holiday clubs are not registered with Ofsted (as it is voluntary to join the childcare register if they are solely caring for children aged eight and over) which means that parents cannot use childcare vouchers or tax credits to cover part of the cost.

*We recommend that:*

- The Mayor of London introduces a programme to promote excellent out-of-school childcare provision, as a means of encouraging more schools to offer such services, which includes support for parents to meet the cost of the care.

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<sup>15</sup> Daycare Trust (2011) *Holiday Childcare Survey 2011*, London: Daycare Trust