



**Consultation on Draft Code of Practice on  
the Provision of Free Nursery Education  
Places for 3 and 4 Year Olds**

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**Child Poverty Action Group  
94 White Lion Street  
London N1 9PF**

## Introduction

1. CPAG welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Government's proposed extension of free nursery education places for three and four year olds. As an organisation campaigning to eradicate child poverty CPAG recognises and supports the Government's determination to reduce educational inequalities as an integral part of its long-term strategy on the eradication of child poverty
2. The Government should be commended for this bold initiative to extend free nursery provision for all three and four year olds from 12.5 hours a week for 33 to 12.5 hours a week for 38 weeks from April 2006. The extension to 15 hours a week for 38 weeks in April 2007, with the intention that by 2010 all three and four year olds will have access to this extended entitlement, en route to a longer term goal of 20 hours a week for 38 weeks, is similarly welcome.
3. Research clearly indicates that access to high quality, early years education, with well qualified teaching staff in attendance, is of benefit to all children, but is of particular advantage to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, especially when it is provided in maintained or integrated settings, with children from a mixture of socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>1</sup> Free nursery entitlement may well improve such children's life chances and will – hopefully reduce – some of the stark educational inequalities that currently blight such children's lives once they reach mainstream schooling.
4. CPAG has recently published *At Greatest Risk: the children most likely to be poor*.<sup>2</sup> The book considers children from black and minority ethnic groups, disabled children, children with disabled parents, asylum seeker children, children in larger families, children with a parent in prison and young people leaving care. This consultation is informed by the findings of *At Greatest Risk*.

## CONSULTATION QUESTION 1.

### **What interim arrangements, if any, should be made to divert funding to authorities with a high proportion of PVI's? (Private, voluntary and independent providers)**

5. We are unable to comment on the funding arrangements. However, we feel that the following issues should be kept in mind when deciding on funding priorities. CPAG does not believe there should be any interim arrangements until these points have been addressed.
6. Research findings in the US (the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Early Child Care Research Network) and the UK (the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project) raise concerns about the quality of care provided in private day nurseries. EPPE findings suggest that playgroups, private day nurseries and local authority centres had lower scores for quality than integrated centres (which combine education and care) and nurseries

within the maintained centre. We urge the Government and local authorities to heed these research findings and encourage the development of high quality nursery education, particularly for the most disadvantaged children.

7. Because of high levels of costs, private nurseries are more likely to have proliferated in more affluent areas. In the light of the Government's determination to remove the current barriers between early years education and childcare provision, it is important that steps be taken to ensure that children in low income families have access to a range of appropriate nursery and childcare provision in their area. Given that gaps in provision are likely to be more evident in deprived areas with high levels of unemployment where there currently is little or no demand for childcare (because parents cannot afford it), we believe that funding priorities should encourage the development of high quality nursery and childcare facilities in such areas. We accept that a mixture of early educational provision is inevitable because the maintained sector is unable to meet the needs of all three and four year olds. However, **we believe that the development of universal, high quality state nursery provision – linked to primary schools where possible - should be a priority.**
8. Preliminary research findings indicate some variation in the quality of Sure Start centres, and variable outcomes for some disadvantaged children. Although it is certainly early days, anecdotal evidence indicates that some families may share Norman Glass's fears that the ethos of Sure Start and Children's Centres is more about getting parents into work, than providing support for their children. It is possible that this emphasis may put the most disadvantaged families - who are unable to access employment - from seeking support services via Sure Start Children's Centres for fear they may be pressurised into work. The development of a maintained sector which meets the needs of all three and four year olds – as it does when they reach school age - would reassure parents that the extension of free nursery provision is driven by the needs of their children, and is not linked with the government's 'welfare to work policy'. **This would reduce possible barriers to take up of the free nursery provision (parental concerns that it may somehow be linked with pressure to move into employment and lead to benefit sanctions) and would ensure that provision is not market-led, and so lead to greater continuity of support.**
9. The introduction of the childcare tax credit (which has in large part been exploited by middle income families) and increased demand has pushed up costs significantly in the PVI sector – which dominates the childcare field. Although we accept that there is a great deal of high quality support for disadvantaged children provided by the voluntary sector, we have concerns about private provision. Although PVI nursery/childcare providers will not be able to charge parents for the extended free nursery provision (15 hours a week for 38 weeks a year from 2007), they will continue to charge parents for any additional childcare provision that does not fall within this free entitlement. The costs of childcare are high, and even with the welcome increase to the childcare tax credit, impose an enormous strain upon low income, working families. Although the Government emphasises the need for 'affordable' childcare, this is a somewhat subjective concept: childcare remains unaffordable for some of the most disadvantaged families. We believe that childcare that is provided as an integral part of extended school provision is likely to be more affordable than additional childcare services provided by private nurseries.

10. **Low income families who are not in paid employment do not qualify for childcare tax credit, and their children are therefore likely to be excluded from extended childcare provision, however much they – and their parents – may benefit from it.** Some of the UK's most disadvantaged children – whom research indicates benefit most from access to high quality childcare activities - will be excluded from extra curricula activities and additional services that other children with higher income and/or working parents enjoy. This will enhance rather than reduce social and educational inequalities.
11. Although we do not think that it is necessarily in young children's best interests to be in childcare settings from 8 am to 6 pm all year round, all children benefit from access to extra activities and opportunities to socialise and play with their peer group during holidays. We are concerned that when the most disadvantaged children whose parents cannot afford to finance additional activities during the holidays - however 'affordable' these are deemed to be - return to nursery after the long summer break, they may well have fallen behind their better-off peer group who have spent the holiday engaged in stimulating extra-curricula activities. This is likely to jeopardise the progress made during term time access to free nursery entitlement.
12. This potentially divisive and inequitable situation will only be redressed if universal nursery education and childcare are extended to families, irrespective of their work status or income. We believe that such a situation is unlikely to evolve if financial arrangements encourage or favour local authorities with a high proportion of PVIs.
13. In 2.2.5 the Government states that 'All three and four year olds are funded at the same basic rate regardless of the setting in which they take up that free place. The formula also takes into account local factors, including deprivation, ethnicity and area costs. Local authorities will need to be able to demonstrate to providers and parents that local provision is funded equitably and takes into account local needs and circumstances.' Although we welcome the commitment (2.2.10) that 'The Department will ensure that sufficient additional resources are factored into the general funding arrangements for schools and local authorities to support the enhanced universal entitlement' there is a danger that private day nurseries in more affluent areas will get more children because of high levels of take up of wraparound care, and therefore higher levels of funding. Centres in more disadvantaged areas, whose parents may simply wish to avail themselves of the free entitlement, will get fewer children and so – presumably - lower levels of funding. This may compound inequalities between different areas, and different forms of provision. **We are concerned that mixing state, private, voluntary and independent provision may exacerbate rather than ameliorate educational, social and financial inequalities, both within the educational system as a whole, and between different local authorities.**

## CONSULTATION QUESTION 2:

**We are planning to phase the roll out of funding to extend the free entitlement to 15 hours per week. Should we phase in the entitlement to 15 hours per week based on age cohorts, on the level of disadvantage in a particular area, or are there other mechanisms which all local authorities could use? How best do you think this should be handled?**

14. We are not able to comment in detail on the mechanisms that should be put in place to enable local authorities to roll out the extended free entitlement to 15 hours a week. However, **it is clearly important that strenuous efforts be put in place to avoid free nursery entitlement replicating the inequalities with which the education system is wracked, with disadvantaged children confined to some nurseries, while their more affluent peer group gather in others.** Funding mechanisms that encourage inclusive policies and avoid segregated provision are crucial. Given that better outcomes are associated with the maintained sector, funding priorities should encourage the development of maintained nurseries in all areas – where possible, linked to primary schools. This would facilitate the smooth transition from nursery to school for some children.
15. Research indicates that children who suffer the material, social and educational disadvantage associated with living in poverty derive the greatest advantage from access to high quality nursery or childcare provision from the age of 30 months plus.<sup>3</sup> It is essential that any mechanism should recognise this fact, and ensure that such children are the primary beneficiaries of the extension of free nursery entitlement. As mentioned above, better quality provision is more in evidence in maintained nurseries and integrated settings than in playgroups, private day nurseries and local authority centres. Ensuring that such provision is available in disadvantaged areas is one way of making sure that such children are the main beneficiaries of this extended provision. However, disadvantaged children do not necessarily live in disadvantaged areas.
16. Furthermore, the EPPE findings indicate that ‘Disadvantaged children in particular can benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences, especially if they attend centres that cater for a mixture of children from different social backgrounds.’
17. The Government should avail itself of the mass of data generated by the DfES, the DWP and the Inland Revenue, to identify the children who would benefit most from access to free nursery provision and ensure that high quality provision is available to such children and that parents are supported in accessing this provision. **We would urge the Government to ensure that local authorities monitor take up of free nursery places on the basis of income, ethnicity, disability etc to ensure that free nursery provision and additional childcare services are accessible to the disadvantaged children who need it most.**

### CONSULTATION QUESTION 3:

#### **How can local authorities encourage and incentivise schools and playgroups offering stand alone sessional provision to build towards offering a full integrated day for the child?**

18. The focus of this consultation is on the extension of free nursery education for 3 and 4 year olds. The consultation is rooted in child development issues and outcomes. This question appears to relate more to wraparound childcare provision for working parents, and to be more closely associated with the Government's 'welfare to work' strategy than developmental outcomes for children.
19. The Government states (2.2.14) that 'It is already evident that young children do not distinguish between education and care – neither should they' – however, the Government clearly does. On the one hand, the increased entitlement to free nursery education will constitute (2.2.13) 'a universal high quality core free entitlement' which will be extended all three and four year olds. Their best interests are at the heart of such provision. On the other hand, the Government confirms (2.2.13) that additional childcare hours will be 'paid for by parents on the basis of ability to pay with extra support for those that need it most through the tax credit system.' Such support is only available to working parents.
20. High quality childcare for children aged between two and three plus is associated with improved social, educational and behavioural outcomes when they start school. However, the requirement (2.2.13) for some sort of parental financial contribution for childcare which falls outside the free nursery entitlement – even if it is provided as an additional service within an integrated setting - will exclude many children whose parents are not in work and therefore do not qualify for the childcare tax credit. Parents living on income support, who are often sucked into debt because it does not cover their most basic human needs, will not be able to finance any additional childcare or extra-curricula activities, however 'affordable' this may seem to be, or however beneficial it would be for their children. **The benefit system needs to be reviewed in the light of the Government's expectation that parents make a financial contribution to some aspects of early years provision which they believe will enhance children's educational outcomes.**
21. As mentioned above, we are concerned that a two-tier system may be established within integrated settings, in which children whose parents can pay will engage in stimulating extra curricula activities that are likely to improve both educational and social outcomes, whilst children whose parents can't afford to pay will be excluded. It is a source of concern that very young children may become aware that they are being treated differently from other children simply because of differences in family income. Although we strongly believe that universal free childcare should be available as and when children need it, we accept that costs may be prohibitive. However, given the inclusive ethos underpinning the Government's early years strategy, **we would suggest that any incentives that encourage schools and playgroups that provide stand alone sessions to develop into an integrated day should favour centres that**

**provide opportunities for disadvantaged children whose families cannot afford to pay to participate in some additional activities.**

22. We would not expect children whose parents are on benefits to have access to 8 am to 6 pm year around care - indeed it may not be in their best interests. The EPPE research found no difference between the benefits to three and four year old children of attending high quality nurseries on a part-time or a full-time basis. However, we believe that they would benefit from access to some additional activities and services which fall outside of the free nursery entitlement, particularly during holidays. If access to early years education and childcare are to improve the life chances of the UK's most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, targets – and financial incentives – are needed to ensure that authorities encourage provision that actively facilitates and encourages the participation of such children in both free nursery education and ensures they have access to some additional services that would be in their best interest (for example, holiday schemes). **Access to occasional additional sessions all year around may well build on the benefits of the free nursery entitlement for disadvantaged children.**
23. If additional provision is demand-led, there will be few incentives for schools and playgroups in deprived areas with high levels of unemployment to develop an integrated day, because so few parents will be in able to avail themselves of additional provision. This may result in a situation in which deprived areas provide only free nursery entitlement, whilst more affluent areas provide a wider range of integrated early education/childcare options. This could compound the difficulties some parents in deprived areas experience accessing employment in the long run.
24. *At Greatest Risk* confirms that high levels of social exclusion and problems with employment experienced by the groups who are most at risk of poverty (see para 1.1 above) are greatly compounded by poor or inaccessible childcare provision. Steps need to be taken to ensure that this situation is not perpetuated by a strategy which may generate high levels of integrated provision in areas with high employment, and low levels of integrated provision in disadvantaged areas.

## **CONSULTATION QUESTION 5.**

**We are aware some issues can make it difficult to offer a fully integrated day for the child, such as premises and staffing arrangements. Are there other barriers to moving towards a fully integrated day for the child? How should these be overcome?**

25. **Many of the children we represent will face barriers towards participating in a fully integrated day that amalgamates childcare and free nursery provision, because their parents are unable to finance additional provision.** The children who would derive the greatest advantage are the least likely to benefit. We would like to emphasise the importance of ensuring that additional provision is sensitive to the needs of all disadvantaged groups, irrespective of

their parent's work status. Careful consideration is needed to ensure that families who are currently disadvantaged by an inadequate benefit system are not also disadvantaged by the early years/childcare strategy.

26. The 10 Year Childcare Strategy states that 'One of the key aims of the strategy is to ensure that all children can benefit from early years support and childcare. This means ensuring that it will work to meet the particular needs of different groups, including families with disabled children and those from ethnic minority communities.' In the current consultation the Government (2.1.6) directs local authorities to 'consult regularly with parents, local delivery partners and other relevant agencies...' and (2.3.10) urges them to ensure that providers 'Respond positively and creatively to requests from parents by developing new services to meet their needs.' However, it is not clear whether this directive will hold true for families who are not in paid employment, and may only have access to the free nursery entitlement. **Monitoring take-up of free nursery entitlement, and of additional services, on the basis of ethnicity, disability, family size etc. is absolutely crucial**, and regular meetings with parents from these groups must take place, irrespective of their work status, to ensure that local provision is accessible and sensitive to their needs.
27. *At Greatest Risk* highlights the fact that many children living in poverty span some, or many, disadvantaged groups. The needs of individual groups who are particularly disadvantaged, and the ways in which such groups overlap, and experience multiple disadvantages, need to be taken into consideration when planning an inclusive service that is accessible to all children. We would encourage local authorities to consult with parents and children from the following groups of families who are at greatest risk of poverty. (Further information is available in CPAG's policy report *At Greatest Risk: the children most likely to be poor*)

## Disabled children

- a) The Council for Disabled Children estimates that 80 per cent of disabled children would be able to use non-specialist provision with no, minor or moderate adjustments to staff training or premises.<sup>4</sup> However, childcare providers may lack experience – and confidence – about caring for disabled children because they may have had limited experience of caring for children with special educational needs or disabilities because low levels of employment amongst mothers with disabled children means that they are rarely able to finance additional childcare support. (Only 3% of mothers with disabled children are in full time employment - compared with 22% of mothers with non-disabled children - and only 13% manage part time work - compared with 39% of mothers with non-disabled children)<sup>5</sup>
- b) Families with disabled children who participated in a small qualitative study reported that problems with schooling and childcare compounded difficulties accessing employment.<sup>6</sup> Families with two or more disabled children experience particular difficulties accessing employment. Families whose child or children have behavioural or emotional difficulties such as autistic spectrum disorders or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, report that one reason they may be unable to undertake paid employment even after their child has started school because of the frequency with which they are sent home or excluded from schools or summer play schemes because of difficult

or disruptive behaviour.<sup>7</sup> A high level of training and support is essential if early years educational support is to be truly accessible to all children.

- c) Families from ethnic minority groups with disabled children face additional problems accessing both childcare and employment. One way to ensure that early years education within integrated settings is fully inclusive, is to ensure that staff gain the training, experience and confidence they need to care for children with different needs. Specialist training is essential. However, the only way staff will gain the experience they need is to ensure that disabled children access additional services. There are two ways of doing this.
- Provide additional childcare support to parents with disabled children, irrespective of their work status.
  - Improve financial support to such families so that they can afford to pay for additional services.
- The childcare element of working tax credit does not take account of the additional costs of financing childcare for disabled children. Resolving this situation by providing an additional amount within the childcare element of working tax credit and/or paying a higher proportion of childcare costs for families whose child is in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) would help the very few families with disabled children who are in paid employment.
- Although improvements to DLA (which could – perhaps – include an additional childcare element) may enable some families to finance their additional childcare needs, research indicates that DLA is an extremely unreliable source of financial support.<sup>8</sup> Families report that their child's DLA is regularly downrated or removed. Although it is often reinstated at appeal, many families may not have the energy to go through the tribunal system repeatedly. The complexity of the system, inadequate information, administrative problems and variable and sometimes arbitrary decision making, means that many families do not receive the financial support they are entitled to. Given that many disadvantaged families do not apply for DLA and the regularity with which DLA is downrated or removed, it may not constitute a reliable way of financing sustainable additional childcare for disabled children.
- Although families with disabled children welcome the idea of Direct Payments, they report problems accessing the system. A mother who was interviewed for *Helter Skelter* (see footnote 4) has been fighting for over a year to get her local authority to do an assessment for Direct Payments. She has recently appointed a solicitor to support her case.
- d) **Financial support for families with disabled children needs to be reviewed – and improved – in the light of their additional childcare needs. Meanwhile strategies need to be put in place to ensure that disabled children are not excluded from additional services because their parents cannot afford to pay for them.**

## Disabled parents

- e) There are around 1.7 million disabled parents in the UK today, and around 2.2 million children in their care. 17% of children have at least one disabled parent. The Government accepts that sickness and disability currently pose major barriers to employment. While the overall UK employment rate is 74.7%, the employment rate for disabled parents is 46.3%. Disabled parents are therefore disproportionately reliant upon benefits. Statistics (which underestimate levels of poverty amongst disabled people because they discount additional disability-related costs, and include extra cost benefits as income) estimate that nearly 700,000 children of disabled parents are living in poverty before housing costs.<sup>9</sup> Although disabled parents sometimes have greater childcare needs than non-disabled parents (they may need to rest during the day), and their children may have additional needs because their parent's disability may reduce opportunities to socialise with other children at home, or go on outings, childcare costs are usually prohibitive.
- f) Although integrated early years provision will clearly resolve many logistical problems for disabled parents - who may have additional transport needs - it is clearly crucial that their children are not excluded from additional provision from an early age because their parents can't pay for additional childcare needs.
- g) The benefits of access to additional services and activities for children with disabled parents are striking. The EPPE research reports that the home learning environment 'makes a real difference to young children's development' and identifies – amongst other things – 'creating regular opportunities for them to play with their friends at home' – as an important part of supporting young children during their early educational years. However, disabled parents may be unable to arrange or finance such activities. They also report that other parents may be concerned about their children visiting a home with a disabled adult. The children of disabled parents are therefore often excluded from social and communal activities other children take for granted. Clearly it is important that these children be given opportunities to socialise with their peer group in alternative settings.
- h) Given the significant barriers disabled people experience accessing employment, it is clearly unacceptable for children with disabled parents to be excluded from additional activities because their parent is unemployed, and therefore will not qualify for the childcare tax credit, or is unable to finance their childcare needs because their benefits are sapped by disability-related costs and do not take account of their additional parenting needs. Although improving financial support to disabled parents via the benefit system is one way of ensuring that their children are not unduly disadvantaged during the early years, as with families with disabled children, low take up and poor administration renders such a solution problematic.
- i) It is crucial that such problems do not blight the early years education and childcare strategy. **A flexible and inclusive system would enable children with disabled parents to participate in additional childcare activities on an occasional basis – for example during holidays, and when their parent is too ill to care for them themselves.** Such support should be financed by the local authority.

## Children from black and minority ethnic groups

- j) The Government recognises that unemployment is high amongst some black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and is associated with high levels of poverty. *At Greatest Risk* outlines the barriers many parents face accessing employment, and the problems their children face within the education. ('The overall picture in relation to the education system is that, for most minorities, disadvantage and discrimination are still built into the system from a very early age.'<sup>10</sup> *At Greatest Risk* highlights a report from the Social Exclusion Unit<sup>11</sup> which notes that children from BME backgrounds are less likely to access childcare and nurseries. 'Consultation by the Daycare Trust with minority parents found again that childcare services were 'insensitive to the differing needs and perceptions of ethnic (sic) communities', with some parents reporting outright racism.'<sup>12</sup> **It is clearly important that the early years strategy is utilised in such a way that pre-empts the educational and social inequalities which blight the lives of too many children from some BME groups.** As with disabled children and children with disabled parents, we are concerned that the provision of 'affordable' additional services will exclude a substantial number of children from ethnic minority groups. This will not resolve educational inequalities, but will set them in stone from the earliest stage. Families from BME communities who have disabled children, disabled parents, or both, are particularly disadvantaged.
- k) A number of reports highlight the fact that **families with disabled children from BME groups are even more disadvantaged than already disadvantaged white families with a disabled child vis a vis the benefit system.**<sup>13</sup> They are therefore likely to be excluded from additional services and provision that have to be paid for.
- l) **There is evidence of the low take-up of both benefits and of services by disabled parents in BME families.** Barriers to take-up include lack of awareness, communication difficulties and the cultural appropriateness of services. One report indicates that parents from black and minority ethnic communities with mental illness often receive uncoordinated support which does not take account of their parental responsibilities as well as their childcare needs.<sup>14</sup> Another report exposes '*a high level of unmet social, personal and – in some cases – medical needs among black parents who were disabled or experiencing ill health... Experiences of social services, health services and schools showed a lack of understanding of the problems faced and there were examples of discrimination by race and/or disability.*'<sup>15</sup>

## Larger families

- m) Large families are not only more likely to be dependent on out-of-work benefits but they are also dependent on them for longer periods of time. Although the provision of free nursery education and access to childcare within an integrated setting may resolve some logistical problems for families with three or more children, they have to balance the needs of children who may span nursery, primary and secondary education. Problems with childcare currently deter many such families seeking employment. Their particular needs must be considered. Such families are currently disadvantaged by the childcare element of working tax credit which only covers up to 70% of childcare costs for up to two children. Increasing childcare tax credit for the

third and subsequent children would render it easier for such families to consider accessing employment.

### **Parents in prison: the impact on children**

- n) *At greatest risk* highlights problems around childcare for children with a parent in prison. It reports that 'Some childcare arrangements were particularly complex with siblings split between family members....We know that most grandparents with responsibility for the care of their grandchildren during and after a parent's imprisonment experience financial difficulties. Many give up work or reduce their hours, with adverse impact on their pension entitlements and savings for retirement. 'It seems grossly unfair that relatives who provide childcare are not eligible for the childcare element in working tax credit and we suggest that ways should be found of reimbursing relatives for the costs of additional childcare responsibilities when they look after children in these circumstances.'<sup>16</sup>

### **CONSULTATION QUESTION 7:**

#### **What, if any, additional conditions might local authorities reasonably impose in relation to eligibility for inclusion in the local Directory of Providers?**

28. The Government has rightly focused on the legal requirement that providers of free nursery education conform to regulations on the inclusion of children from all backgrounds, irrespective of ethnicity, disability, or parental income. Monitoring intake on the basis of ethnicity and disability and receipt of benefits should be an integral part of local authority responsibilities. Local authorities should also ensure that families are receiving their full benefit and tax credit entitlement, to maximise the possibility of financing access to additional educational and childcare services.
29. It is crucial that local authorities accumulate data on the range of provision within the area, and take up amongst different groups (disabled parents, disabled children, children from black and minority ethnic groups, children of asylum seekers etc) within the different sectors. This will illuminate differentials in intake. Given that research highlights the particular importance for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to access early years education in settings with children from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, any such differentials should be resolved as a requirement for inclusion in the local Directory of Providers.

## CONSULTATION QUESTION 10:

**What charging arrangements should be introduced to ensure that a) parents can secure more provision in addition to the free entitlement if it is available, and they are willing and able to pay; b) providers are not unduly burdened with accounting requirements.**

30. Again, this question focuses on childcare for working parents, rather than free nursery provision for 3 and 4 year olds. This response highlights our concern that a system which enables some parents to be able to 'buy' additional entitlement is likely to exacerbate social and educational differentials.
31. **Although access to free nursery provision must be wholly inclusive, access to 'additional hours' will not be.** Could the Direct Schools Grant be used for more disadvantaged areas, to ensure additional childcare provision is the same as in more affluent areas? Schools have a disproportionately positive – or negative – impact upon disadvantaged children. Presumably this impact is likely to be greater the younger child accesses the education system. The provision of additional support and services to children whose parents can afford it, or who qualify for the childcare tax credit, whilst the most disadvantaged children are excluded, will set up disparities within early education which is likely to enhance rather than reduce later educational inequalities.
32. In our response to the consultation on the 10 year childcare strategy, we expressed our concerns about the provision of free nursery school education alongside childcare for which a charge will be made within the same context and setting. Although we accept that the provision of childcare and nursery education within the same setting resolves many logistical problems for working parents, and reduces disruption for children, the fact that some of the most disadvantaged children will be excluded from additional services because their parents are unable to pay is a source of particular concern. Such an arrangement will send out a very divisive message to extremely young children and their families, and will compound disadvantages from a very early age. Educational inequalities are a source of particular concern to this government – and rightly so. **We fear that the amalgamation of what is, in effect a selective form of childcare that is provided on the basis of a parents ability to pay as an integral part of educational provision, will do little to redress – and may actively exacerbate – later inequalities.** It seems a very harsh message for very young and impressionable children to be excluded from potentially beneficial and rewarding after school and holiday activities simply because their parents cannot pay.
33. **We urge the Government to review benefit adequacy to ensure that the most disadvantaged families can finance additional sessions for their children, particularly during the summer holidays.** Families on a very low income may be unable to invite other children around to socialise and play with their child at home. They would clearly benefit from opportunities to do so outside the free nursery hours. The EPPE findings clearly indicate that the Home Learning Environment (HLE) is crucial in supporting young children's educational development. However, many of the activities outlined are beyond the means of families struggling to survive on income support. The inadequacies of income support to are starkly exposed in *At Greatest Risk*. We would suggest that the

benefit system be reviewed to enable low income families to purchase the sort of educational books, toys and equipment which are so crucial in stimulating children's educational development, and to enable them to access additional services and activities which are of particular benefit to the most disadvantaged children.

## **CONSULTATION QUESTION 11:**

**What arrangements, if any, should be introduced to ensure that parents purchasing additional services are not treated more favourably than those who only require or can only afford the free entitlement?**

34. **Better-off parents who are able to purchase additional services are already being treated more favourably than parents who can't afford such services.** Furthermore, research into school costs undertaken by the Department for Education and Skills<sup>17</sup> and a recent report produced by Citizens Advice and a consortium of organisations (including CPAG) highlights the damaging impact school costs have on disadvantaged children's educational and social development within the education system as a whole. This question reveals an implicit acceptance that additional services will be provided for children whose parents can pay for them, which will introduce inequitable costs from a very young age. The best way of ensuring that parents purchasing additional services are not treated more favourably than those who require or can only afford the free entitlement, is to ensure that all children have access to such provision – irrespective of whether their parents can afford it or not.

## **CONSULTATION QUESTION 12:**

**Do you have any other comments on the draft Code of Practice?**

35. **We are concerned that the direct link between work and childcare has failed children in several ways, not least in the quality of care that is provided.** This is a vital issue for children's well being, and there is still a very long way to go before children receive the quality of care they deserve.
36. Educational inequalities in the UK are obviously a source of concern<sup>18</sup> and are blighting disadvantaged children's life chances. Any initiative which is designed to reduce such inequalities is very welcome. However, although the current early years educational/childcare strategy is an important step in the right direction, **we are concerned that underlying confusion about priorities and motivations may end up increasing rather than reducing educational inequalities.**
37. Early years education will be provided as a universal service which all children can access, regardless of their parent's income, nationality, residency or employment status. The child's best interests are at the forefront of the provision of free nursery entitlement. However, the Government's vision that this free

nursery entitlement be supplemented by year round, wraparound childcare from 8 am to 6 pm introduces a different and contradictory perspective in which the needs of the child become secondary to the economic requirements of the Government, and parents employment needs.

38. Although, as discussed above, we are concerned about the quality of childcare, and are certainly not convinced that all young children will benefit from 8 am to 6 pm care all year around, and indeed believe that some vulnerable children may suffer from lengthy time spent away from the family home, we accept that participation in additional after-school or holiday sessions may well be of benefit to young children, particularly those whose families are unable to finance additional activities at home during the long summer break. **We are concerned that the very children who may benefit most from additional support will be the very ones who will be excluded because their parents are out of work and unable to make a financial contribution to such services. Far from redressing inequalities, early years education/childcare may set them in stone before a child starts mainstream education. This is a source of considerable concern to CPAG.**
39. **CPAG is concerned that the over-emphasis of welfare to work within Government thinking appears to be undermining the value of parenting.** This is particularly insulting for parents who are unable to work because they are caring full time for their children, often into adulthood. It is worrying for any parent – particularly lone parents - who may feel pressurised to access paid employment when they wish to care for their children themselves. **We urge the Government to ensure that all children – particularly disadvantaged children – have access to high quality, pre-school education and childcare on a sessional basis, all year around, irrespective of their parent’s work status. Such a flexible arrangement would facilitate choice for all parents, and be in the best interest of their child.** Such an arrangement would enable parents to engage in ‘mini jobs’, voluntary work, or training opportunities which may not greatly increase their income, but could be good for social inclusion, and may improve their long-term job prospects when their children are older. Such an approach would provide good evidence of ‘joined up thinking’. For sick or disabled parents, or parents with disabled children, such additional support may help them recoup the energy and confidence they need to access the labour market. It would prove that the Government is prepared to support parents in their parenting role, irrespective of their work status.
40. The provision of 15 hours free nursery entitlement does not sit well with the 16 hour work rule. Parents will still have to pay for additional childcare support, to enable them to get to and from work.
41. CPAG is extremely concerned about an invidious attitude to poverty which seems, increasingly, to equate poor parenting with bad parenting. The Government has previously argued that it is in the best interest of the child that parents be drawn out of poverty by accessing employment. This is at the heart of their ‘welfare to work strategy’. However, there are alarming intimations that some Government officials now believe that children experiencing poverty would be better cared for by ‘professional childcare workers’ rather than their own parents, and that parents experiencing poverty should go out to work not just to increase their income, but to enable their children to be looked after by ‘professionals’. The underlying conviction, that the more time poor children spend away from their parents the better, is very worrying indeed. **We are concerned that the early**

**years strategy is being used to boost welfare to work policies which are steadily increasing the pressure for parents – particularly lone parents and disabled parents - to work, and that this is undermining the importance or legitimacy of parenting, particularly mothering.** This is a very disturbing message which needs to be challenged at the highest levels of Government. It is important that the provision of early years education and integrated childcare does not remove the choice from parents – particularly lone parents - who may wish to care for their children themselves. **An individualised responsibility to work must be matched with a more family/collective-based right to care (or right to parent).** It is important that early years education and childcare is not dictated by the current needs of the labour market, but by the best interest of the child. That it is used to increase choice – and not reduce – choice and flexibility for parents, and that includes the choice to care for their child or children themselves.

42. We would like to emphasise that ‘bad’ parenting – insofar as it exists – spans the socio-economic spectrum. However – as discussed in *At Greatest Risk*<sup>19</sup> - it should be emphasised that failure to provide adequate financial support to vulnerable parents generates high levels of stress amongst the most disadvantaged groups which inevitably undermines their ability to parent. This is not ‘bad parenting’ but ‘unsupported parenting’. The benefit system needs to be reviewed in such a way that low income families are able to espouse the sort of parenting ‘responsibilities’ the Government clearly expects of them to improve the ‘home learning environment – such as reading and painting at home, or taking their children on outings - and to ensure that ill health and depression (both of which are so closely associated with poverty) do not undermine anybody’s ability to parent. **The most disadvantaged parents would benefit from increased financial security, and their children would benefit from having access to some high quality additional services and support all year around – irrespective of their work status.**
43. Many of the chapters in *At Greatest Risk* reveal the different ways in which the educational system compounds social exclusion and disadvantage. We are concerned that the way in which the early education/childcare strategy is evolving may do little to redress these problems. CPAG strongly urges the Government to take note of the warnings – and recommendations - contained in this policy report.

## **About CPAG**

CPAG is the leading charity campaigning for the abolition of poverty among children and young people in the UK and for the improvement of the lives of low income families. CPAG aims to: raise awareness of the extent, nature and impact of poverty; bring about positive income policy changes for families with children in poverty; and enable those eligible for benefits and tax credits to have access to their full entitlement.

**Gabrielle Preston**  
**Policy and Research Officer**  
**Child Poverty Action Group**  
94 White Lion Street  
London N1 9PF  
tel: 020 7837 7979  
fax: 020 7837 6414  
email: [gpreston@cpag.org.uk](mailto:gpreston@cpag.org.uk)

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- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) project 1997 to 2003, K Sylva, E Melhuish, P Sammons, I Siraj-Blatchford, B Taggart and K Elliot (Institute of Education, University of Oxford and Birkbeck, University of London).
- <sup>2</sup> G Preston (Editor) *At Great Risk: the children most likely to be poor* (CPAG, 2005)
- <sup>3</sup> See, for example, EPPE and research findings in the US (the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Early Child Care Research Network) NICHD and *A prospective study of the effects of different kinds of care on children's development in the first five years*, Families Children and Child Care Project, Kathy Sylva, Alan Stein and Penelope Leach (funded by the Tedworth and Glass House Trusts. Although this reveals 'evidence that extensive non-parental care during the first year was associated with increased avoidance and insecurity in the infant-mother attachment' (p. 2) and highlights the fact that it is 'the quality of care experienced by the child in non-maternal care, rather than the mere fact, or extent, of his separation from the mother' (p. 3) it accepts the benefits of high quality childcare for children aged 30 months plus. However, this research project concludes that 'more information is needed concerning the relationship between different types of child care, including maternal, parental or familial care, and their quality and a range of outcomes for different children.'
- <sup>4</sup> *Improving access to childcare for disabled children: What is needed, what it would mean* (Contact a family incorporating the Lady Hoare Trust)
- <sup>5</sup> HM Treasury, *Child Poverty Review* (2004)
- <sup>6</sup> G Preston, *Helter Skelter: families, disabled children and the benefit system* (CASEpaper 92, 2005) see pages 58 to 69.
- <sup>7</sup> See G Preston *Hard-working families: Caring for two or more disabled children* (Disability Alliance, 2005) reports that the need to be available during school hours in case they are summoned to collect their child 'seriously undermines a parent's ability to access paid employment – the biggest cost of all.', p. 17
- <sup>8</sup> See *Helter Skelter*, *op cit*
- <sup>9</sup> H Stickland and R Olsen 'Children with disabled parents', in *At Greatest Risk*, p. 135
- <sup>10</sup> Gary Craig, 'Poverty among black and minority ethnic children' in *At Great Risk*, CPAG 2005.
- <sup>11</sup> *Breaking the Cycle of Social Exclusion: Taking stock of progress and priorities for the future* (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, final report September 2004)
- <sup>12</sup> G Craig, *At Greatest Risk*, *Op cit*, p. 74
- <sup>13</sup> See, for example, Chamba, Rampaul, Adham, Waqar, Hirst, Michael, Lawton, Dot, Beresford, Bryony. *On the edge: Minority ethnic families caring for a severely disabled child* (Policy Press, May 1999) which indicates that these families are even more disadvantaged than already disadvantaged white families with disabled child. Although it reveals low levels of employment, it indicates that fewer families receive disability benefits and are less likely to be awarded higher rates of DLA. Overall, levels of unmet are need higher than study of white families. Beresford, Bryony. Sloper, Patricia. Baldwin, Sally. Newman, Tony. *What works in services for families with a disabled child?* (Barnardo's, 1996) reveals that parents from some minority ethnic groups and those on very low income least likely to know about support groups. *Still missing out? Ending poverty and social exclusion: messages to government from families with disabled children*, Neera Sharma, Barnardo's, 2002) confirms that minority ethnic families more likely to have low incomes, unsuitable housing, are less able to access services.
- <sup>14</sup> Bignall, T., Box, L., Otoo, S. Black and Ethnic Minority Families Policy Forum (Discussion paper 7) *Family support for parents with additional needs*. (REU 2001)
- <sup>15</sup> Jones, Adele, Jeyasingham, Dharman and Rajasooriya, Sita – *Invisible families: The strengths and needs of Black families in which young people have caring responsibilities* (The Policy Press, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002)
- <sup>16</sup> J Walker and P McCarthy 'Parents in prison: the impact on children' in *At Greatest Risk*, p. 126.
- <sup>17</sup> Tim Brunwin, Sam Clemens, Gemma Deakin and Ed Mortimer *The cost of schooling.*, Research Report 588 (BMRB Social Research, 2004),
- <sup>18</sup> Research from the Sutton Trust and the London School of Economics reveal that social mobility in Britain is lower than other advanced countries and declining. They conclude 'the strength of the relationship between educational attainment and family income, especially for access to higher education, is at the heart of Britain's low mobility culture and what sets us apart from other European and North American countries' See Blanden, Jo, Gregg, Paul, and Machin, Stephen. *Intergenerational Mobility in Europe and North America* (Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics, a report supported by the Sutton Trust, 2005)
- <sup>19</sup> See P Fitzpatrick, 'Asylum seeker families' in *At Greatest Risk*, 'Many will also have been tortured and/ or imprisoned. It should be obvious that their experience may well affect their ability to care for their children. Apart from the physical scars they may be depressed, forgetful and withdrawn and find it hard to participate in daily life', p. 92