

Oxfordshire County Council

Results of a consultation
exercise with childcare
providers

January 2008

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1 Introduction

1.1 Context

This report presents the findings of:

- A questionnaire distributed to all childcare providers in Oxfordshire. See the report on supply for further information about childcare provision in Oxfordshire.
- Focus groups with childcare providers.

The consultation materials were produced in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and were designed to better understand providers' views of the local childcare market, their plans for the future and the support that they might need. Copies of the materials are included in the appendix.

1.2 Profile of questionnaire respondents

507 childcare providers responded to the questionnaire. In the main, responses were received from childminders (42%), pre-schools (22%), day nurseries (15%), and after school clubs (9%). Figure 1 shows the full distribution of responses (please note that some providers operate more than one type of provision).

Figure 1: Respondents by type of provider

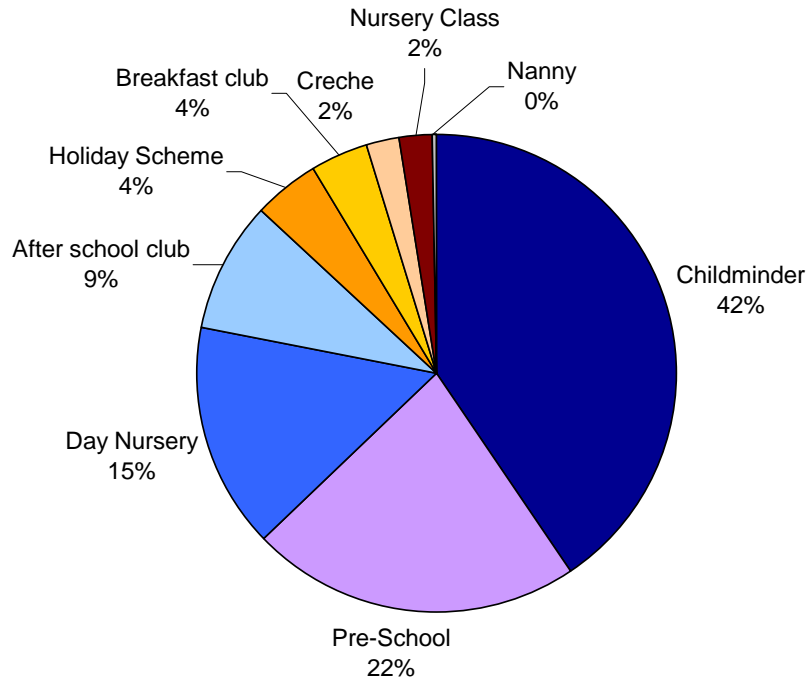
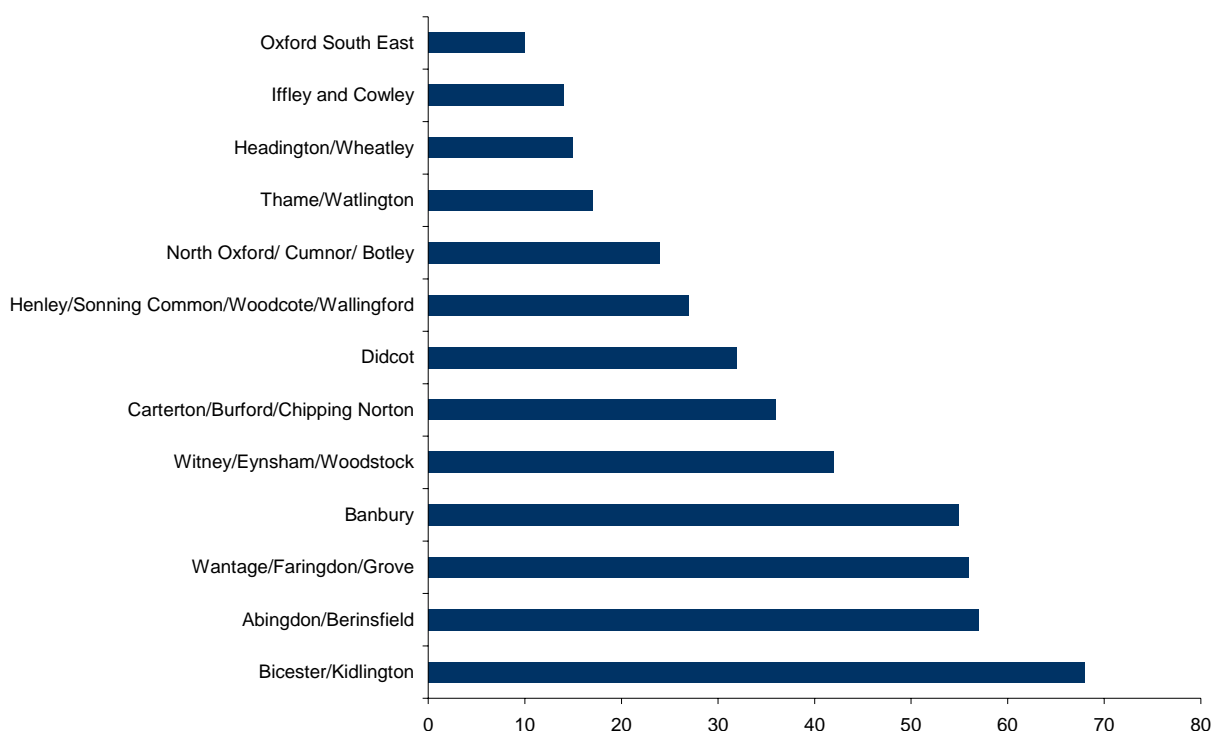


Figure 2 shows that the largest number of respondents were from Bicester/ Kidlington locality (16%), followed by Abingdon/ Berinsfield (13%) and Wantage/ Faringdon/ Grove and Banbury, each with 12%.

Figure 2: Number of respondents by Locality



65% of providers were from the private sector, 23% were from the voluntary sector, and 12% did not know.

44% of respondents provided Nursery Education Fund places, 50% did not, and 6% did not know.

1.3 Focus group participants

Four focus groups were carried out with a total of 25 participants who were childcare providers. In addition one provider fed into the consultation via email. Whilst the majority of participants worked in group day care or out of school provision, a wide spectrum of other types of provision was also represented by participants.

2 Questionnaire results

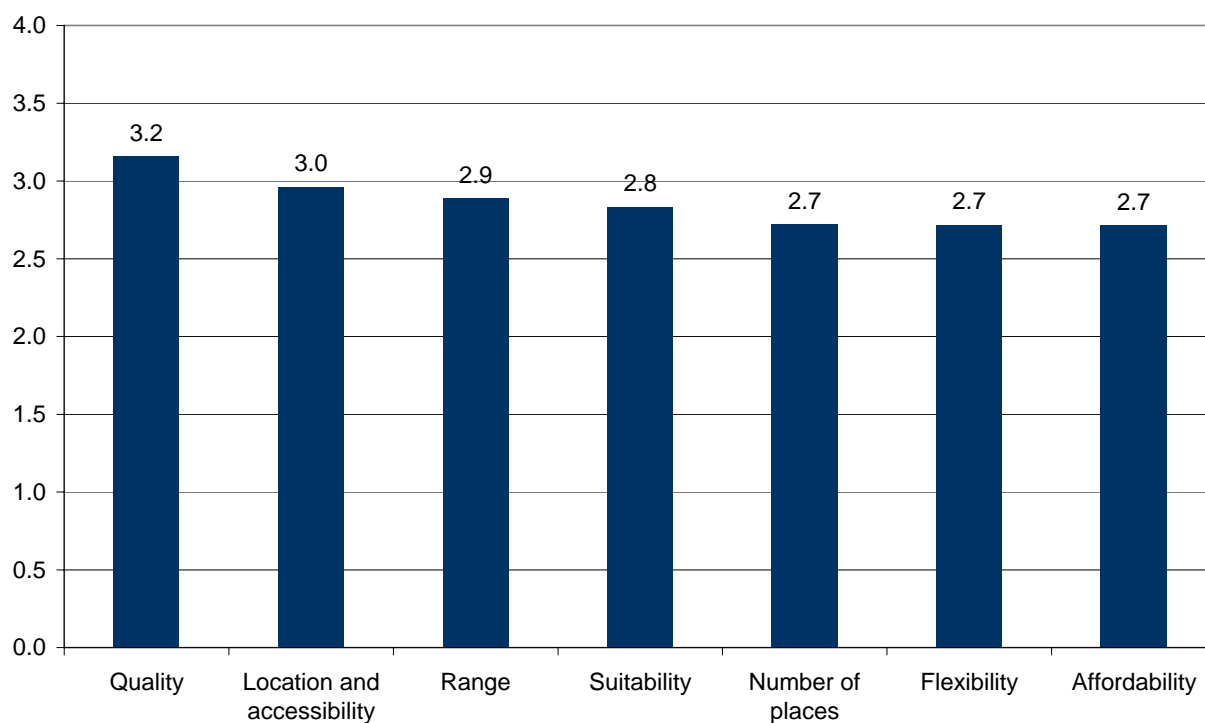
2.1 Views on the local childcare market

2.1.1 Overall views

Figure 3 shows the average rating given by all providers for different aspects of the local childcare market. Each aspect was rated on the following scale: poor (1), satisfactory (2), good (3) and excellent (4).

'Quality' had the highest rating, between 'good' and 'excellent' at 3.2. 'Location and accessibility' had an average rating of 'good'. The average response to every other criterion fell between 'satisfactory' and 'good'. 'Number of places', 'flexibility' and 'affordability' had slightly lower ratings, at 2.7.

Figure 3: Average ratings for different aspects of the childcare market



2.1.2 Differences between localities

Figure 4 shows differences in average ratings by locality. The table is colour-coded, with the localities with the top three ratings for a particular criterion shaded dark blue, and the localities with the bottom three ratings shaded purple. From this we can see some trends:

- Wantage/ Faringdon/ Grove and Didcot were in the top three localities for all but one criterion.
- Ratings from providers in Iffley and Cowley were consistently one of the lowest for every criterion.
- North Oxford/ Cumnor/ Botley and Thame/ Watlington were in the bottom three localities for all but two criteria.
- The largest range in ratings was for 'Number of places', with North Oxford/ Cumnor/ Botley the lowest, at 2.1, and Abingdon/ Berinsfield, Didcot, and Wantage/ Faringdon/ Grove highest, at 3.0.

Figure 4: Average ratings for aspects of childcare provision by locality

Locality	Quality	Range	Number of places	Affordability	Flexibility	Suitability	Location and accessibility
Abingdon/Berinsfield	3.3	3.1	3.0	2.7	2.7	2.9	3.1
Banbury	3.1	2.9	2.5	2.9	2.9	2.9	3.0
Bicester/ Kidlington	2.9	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.9
Carterton/ Burford/ Chipping Norton	3.1	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.8	2.6	2.7
Didcot	3.3	3.2	3.0	2.8	2.8	3.0	3.2
Headington/ Wheatley	3.1	2.9	2.5	2.4	2.9	3.0	3.0
Henley/ Sonning Common/ Woodcote/ Wallingford	3.3	3.1	2.9	2.8	2.8	3.0	3.0
Iffley and Cowley	2.8	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.7
North Oxford/ Cumnor/ Botley	3.0	2.4	2.1	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.9
Oxford South East	3.0	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.7	3.0
Thame/ Watlington	2.8	2.4	2.6	2.6	2.4	2.5	2.6
Wantage/ Faringdon/ Grove	3.5	3.2	3.0	2.9	2.7	3.1	3.2
Witney/ Eynsham/ Woodstock	3.2	2.7	2.6	2.8	2.8	2.6	2.7

2.1.3 Differences between types of provider

Figure 5 shows differences in ratings by type of provider (only those with five or more respondents to the questionnaire are shown). The table is colour-coded, with the types of provider with the top two ratings in dark blue, and the types of provider with the two lowest ratings in purple. Overall there is agreement across types of provider; however:

- Day nurseries consistently were among the types of provider with the highest rating.
- Breakfast clubs were among the types of provider with the lowest rating for every criterion.
- For 'Affordability' and 'Quality', the range of ratings was very small. Only three tenths of a point separated the

highest and lowest rating for 'Affordability', and four tenths of a point for 'Quality'.

Figure 5: Differences in views by type of provider

Type of Provider	Quality	Range	Number of places	Affordability	Flexibility	Suitability	Location and accessibility
Childminder	3.0	2.8	2.4	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.9
Day Nursery	3.4	3.3	3.2	2.8	2.7	3.2	3.3
Pre-School	3.3	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.9	2.9
Nursery Class	3.3	3.2	3.1	2.8	2.1	2.2	2.9
Crèche	3.0	3.0	2.9	2.6	2.8	3.0	3.2
Breakfast club	3.0	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.4	2.5	2.8
After school club	3.1	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.5	2.6	2.9
Holiday Scheme	3.2	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.8

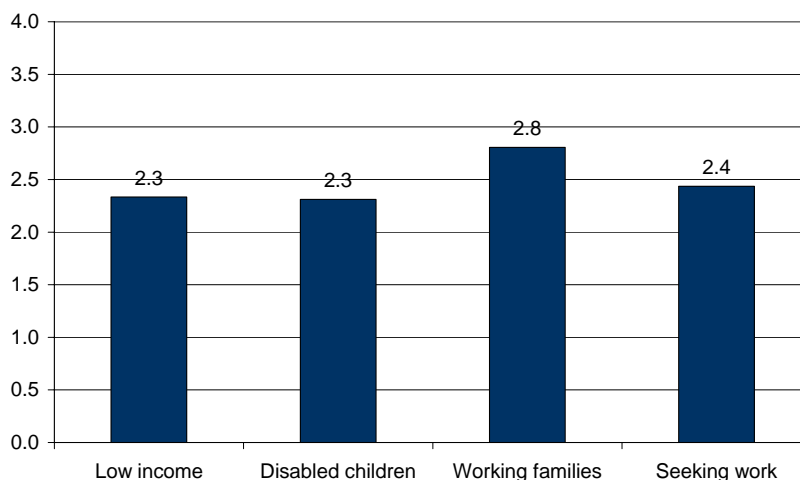
2.2 Meeting the needs of specific groups

2.2.1 Overall ratings

Figure 6 shows how providers rated childcare for four specific groups of parents / carers: working families, families seeking work, families with disabled children, and low income families. Provision for each group was rated between 'poor' and 'satisfactory'.

Provision for low income families and for disabled children was rated lowest at 2.3, i.e. 'satisfactory' but close to 'poor'. Provision for working families was rated relatively high, at 2.8.

Figure 6: Ratings for the ability of childcare to meet the needs of specific groups of parents / carers



2.2.2 Differences between localities

Figure 7 shows the differences in providers' views about the provision for these specific groups by locality. The table is colour-coded, with those localities with the highest ratings shaded dark blue, and those localities with the lowest ratings shaded purple.

- Providers in Abingdon/ Berinsfield, Oxford South East, and Wantage/ Faringdon/ Grove were among the localities with the highest ratings for provision for each of the specific groups.
- Iffley and Cowley was among the localities with the lowest rating for every group.

Figure 7: Differences in responses by locality

Locality	Low income families	Families with disabled children	Working families	Families seeking work
Abingdon/Berinsfield	2.5	2.5	3.0	2.6
Banbury	2.3	2.0	2.8	2.5
Bicester/Kidlington	2.2	2.1	2.7	2.3
Carterton/ Burford/ Chipping Norton	2.3	2.1	2.6	2.3
Didcot	2.4	2.3	3.1	2.5
Headington/ Wheatley	2.4	2.5	2.7	2.5
Henley/ Sonning Common/ Woodcote/ Wallingford	2.3	2.5	2.9	2.4
Iffley and Cowley	2.0	1.7	2.5	2.1
North Oxford/ Cumnor/ Botley	1.9	1.9	2.6	2.4
Oxford South East	2.6	2.6	3.0	2.8
Thame/Watlington	2.1	2.4	2.4	2.5
Wantage/Faringdon/Grove	2.6	2.6	3.2	2.6
Witney/ Eynsham/ Woodstock	2.3	2.4	2.7	2.4

2.2.3 Differences between types of provider

Figure 8 shows that generally different types of providers tended to give similar ratings for the provision for specific groups. The table is colour-coded, with those types of providers that gave the highest ratings for childcare provision for these specific groups shaded dark blue, and those that rated provision the lowest shaded purple.

- Breakfast clubs consistently gave lower ratings to whether childcare is meeting the needs of specific groups.
- The biggest range in ratings was for disabled children, with the lowest rating of 2.1 (from childminders) and the highest rating of 2.7 (from crèches).

Figure 8: Differences in responses by type of provider

Type of provider	Low income families	Families with disabled children	Working families	Families seeking work
Childminder	2.2	2.1	2.7	2.4
Day Nursery	2.5	2.5	3.2	2.7
Pre-School	2.4	2.4	2.7	2.4
Nursery Class	2.4	2.6	2.8	2.6
Crèche	2.4	2.7	3.0	2.3
Breakfast club	2.0	2.2	2.7	2.3
After school club	2.2	2.3	2.7	2.4
Holiday Scheme	2.1	2.2	2.7	2.5

2.3 Improvement suggestions

Providers were also asked to make specific suggestions for how childcare could better meet the needs of these groups. The following sections identify common themes arising from the suggestions put forward.

2.3.1 Improvement suggestions for meeting the needs of low income families

The main barrier highlighted for low income families was funding and affordability of childcare. Providers suggested a number of related improvement suggestions, e.g. more funding, free or subsidised places, expanding NEF to include children under age three, greater flexibility in the use of funding for parents / carers and paying the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit directly to providers.

Another improvement suggestion was to raise the awareness of, and increase the access of information to, low income families. This was in relation to childcare available, funding that they could access and tax credits.

Providers also suggested help with transport costs, especially for rural families.

Figure 9 shows the main themes in providers' improvement suggestions and some selected comments from within each theme.

Figure 9: Summary of improvement suggestions for low income families

Theme	Evidence ¹
Free/ low cost places or increased funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give more free places to help them go back to work. This would be better than child tax credit. Free places (Government funded) should be for all ages. More free places or help with payments. • Higher government funded sessions to allow provisions to cover costs & to allow low income families access to more sessions. • Perhaps more funding should be available – i.e. not just for parents on income support. • More funding available. • Free places at after-school club for children who the school identify would benefit. • Parents can't afford to work as the cost of childcare is too much, they need more help towards the cost of this. • Availability of more low cost nurseries and playgroups, or more help from the government for low income families. • Families in our area find themselves in a difficult situation in they have to work for quite a large number of hours before it is worth their while the high cost of childcare makes this equation even more difficult.
Expand NEF to cover children under three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early years funding should be available to 2 year olds. • Lower the NEF age limit. • Funding available for younger children. • Funding from 2yrs. • More support/grants for the under 3's. • Lower age of nursery grant to 2 1/2.
Better information about help available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More information on grants or funds available to them for children to attend who aren't funded. • There should be more information and advice for families on low income, so they could access and find out how they would benefit this. This information should be given to all childcare and family providers in the local area, even voluntary groups because the smaller groups are used more with families rather than the family centres. • Maybe highlight to families about tax credits, what they're entitled to and possible options of working with childcare involved i.e. - both parents (if app). • Raise awareness of support available. • More information on where additional funding can be obtained. • Working tax credit needs to be promoted and explained. • More information direct to those parents about funding. At present we only tell them when they can come to us with problems to do with fee payments. • Leaflets to give out telling parents what help is available and from where. It is difficult to talk to parents about money unless you know them as they tend not to want you to know they are on a low income.

¹ Sample comments. Providers' comments have been slightly edited for grammar and punctuation to help the flow of this report.

Theme	Evidence ¹
Payment of childcare assistance directly to providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childcare subsidy paid to provider. • WFTC to be paid direct to nurseries or in vouchers as the money they receive does not always go to childcare. • Specific childcare funding paid to the provider. • Low income families rely on WFTC to pay % towards childcare. In my experience, this money often gets used for other things & childcare expenses are left to be overdue or owing WFTC should be paid direct, then we know we are going to get monies at the end of the month!
Help with transport costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with transport i.e. taxi costs. • Financial help for provision in rural areas so low income families don't have added expense of travelling to get childcare.

2.3.2 Improvement suggestions for meeting the needs of families with disabled children

A number of providers commented that they rarely, if ever, receive enquiries about care for disabled children. The most commonly suggested improvement was grants to allow providers to upgrade facilities and better integrate children. This includes partial improvements that would allow for wheelchair access.

Increasing training and information to providers on caring for disabled children was consistently highlighted.

Providers also suggested that increased funding would allow them to provide more and better trained staff and one-to-one attention for the children.

Available services should be better marketed so families know what is available and the number of providers should be expanded so parents had a real choice.

Finally, respite care to allow parents some time away was a common suggestion.

Figure 10: Summary of improvement suggestions for disabled children

Theme	Evidence
Grants to allow providers to upgrade facilities and integrate disabled children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants to expand facilities to help disabled children integrate with all children. • The government should provide funding for all childcare settings to enable them to adapt their settings when needed to. This will help all childcare settings to meet the inclusion criteria. • More grants for childminders to change houses. • Grants to help carers/providers create better facilities for impaired children. • Better integration into mainstream. Funding for adaptations where necessary. More facilities specifically for most disabled. • Funding for settings to improve • Grants available to subsidise any alterations (ramps etc) needed. • Capital for upgrading old premises.
Training for staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better training for childcare providers. • Training for providers of home-based care. • Specific and targeted training to help settings deal with individual needs. • More training at times to suit. • Better staff training in nurseries / help with staffing
Increased funding and other improvements to enable providers to offer one-to-one staff attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More access to one-to-one support for disabled children. • More money for one-to-one support if required. • Funding to allow staff to spend more time with children with SEN. • Access to 1 to 1 care is difficult not because of funding, but finding suitable people who want to work such short hours. • ...also as a disabled child may need more care, i.e. 1 to 1 rather than 1 to 3, the cost of the 2 spaces not being used would need payment.
Better information about services available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More marketing of available facilities • Photographs on the Oxon CIS + SureStart websites. • There's no list of places available if access more able to buildings and carers, types of [impairment] that people can help care for everyone is different. • More advertising locally about what facilities are available and where. More contact with health visitors as disabled children rarely attend in the private and voluntary sector as many of them have access and specialist facilities.

Theme	Evidence
Give parents a real choice of providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I feel parents should feel that they have the same choices as any other parent. They need to be made aware that nurseries would like to cater for all children. Unfortunately they do not always have the ideal facilities or funding to purchase the equipment needed. • More financial support in place to give parents more choice. • More of a range of places to go and be able to attend. • It is my impression that there are not enough places to go.
Respite care for parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More respite care automatically offered. Parents in Bicester seem to have to beg for help and it is quite minimal when you consider the impact on the whole family specifically trained childminders promoted. • Respite care available. • It is not really just those with disabled children. It is the capacity to provide respite care on a short term basis when a family is in crisis i.e. mental health/family breakdown/illness where other children need hospital visits. • Again good provision with schools. But more respite for parent required at evenings & weekends.

2.3.3 Improvements for families seeking work

Providers saw the main childcare need for families seeking work as flexible day care, including longer opening hours and ad hoc or part time sessions during interviews. Providers also noted that families seeking work needed funding to pay for childcare, especially during the job search and as they are starting new jobs.

Providers also noted the need for better information about what childcare is available and also what help is available to help pay for it.

Some providers thought better provision of certain types of care, e.g. after school clubs or Children's Centres, would be helpful.

Finally, the need for more affordable and/ or free places was seen as an aid to help families while they are looking for work.

Figure 11: Summary of improvements for families seeking work

Theme	Evidence
More flexible care arrangements/ longer opening hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible open day care sessions. • Help with finding childcare which can support them around school hours. • More flexible care which would almost certainly need to be subsidised plus certainty of availability of childcare if successful in obtaining employment. • More flexibility in LEA settings for families to take funded places as whole days rather than rigid 5 morning or afternoon places. • Flexible hours. • More part time hours offered in nursery/playgroup providers. • Longer opening hours. • Wrap around care should be available next academic year on school site.
Funding to pay for childcare while seeking work/ starting work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable help while looking, going for interviews to be back in the work place. Childcare funded for them so they not worried about the child/children left without proper adult care. • To be able to get funding for childcare before working to enable interviews + time to look. • We have had parents seeking training who have had no access to funding for childcare and therefore have not felt able to take up training. The same difficulties apply to families seeking work as those on low income. • Child care vouchers for all children to be used in all settings up to 18 yrs. • Funding required as they often end up paying more than those who work because they can claim child tax credits. • More child care around hours people work at a price they can afford with out it taking up all their wages. • Grants etc for childcare, so time to job search/interview. Mainly private provision in this area. • More financial assistance could be given to parents to pay for childcare while they are waiting for their tax credits to be approved. • Maybe childcare could be paid by jobseekers agencies for a set amount of time to enable their client to look for work/take up interviews etc.
Better information about what services are available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More advertisements for groups and childcare facilities on the village. • More information availability... • More one to one conveying of what is out there. • Help with connections between parents and providers. • Children's information service having more information on au pairs.

Theme	Evidence
Different services available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crèche facilities. • All your funding & resources are based in central & North Oxon. Just because there is an element of affluence in the South and rural areas, surrounding Henley, Sonning Common etc, you assume no one requires help. It is hard to be disadvantaged in an affluent area than in other areas where you have saturated assistance. • SureStart centre. More childminders.
More affordable care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give more free places to help them go back to work. This would be better than child tax credit. Free places (Government funded) should be for all ages. • ... certainty of affordable regular care. • Affordable help while looking, going for interviews to be back in the work place... • Again, cheaper provisions cannot at present provide care to cover working day. Settings providing care from breakfast to bed time are expensive + inaccessible unless you have a car. • More affordable care.

2.3.4 Improvements for working families

The most common suggestion from providers on improving childcare for working families was increasing the length and flexibility of hours. Working families would also be helped by breakfast and after school clubs.

Providers suggested that working families needed more affordable care. This was especially true for families with both parents working full time, who would have higher child care costs.

Coverage during half term and summer holidays was also suggested.

More childminder and Children's Centre places were also suggested.

Figure 12: Summary of improvements for working families

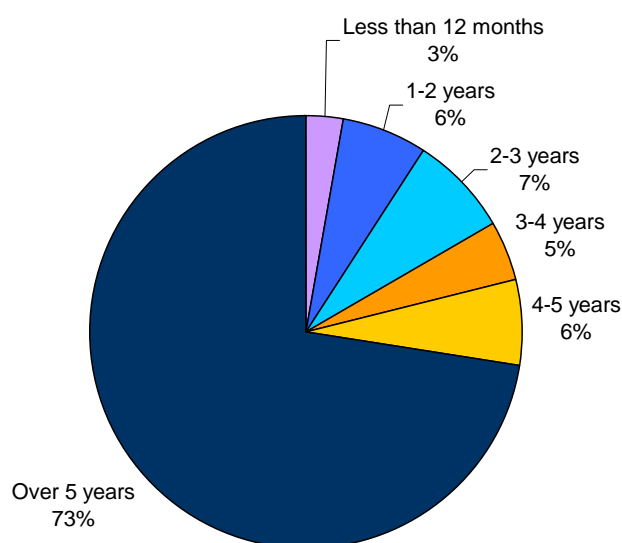
Theme	Evidence
Length and flexibility of hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakfast clubs for early morning starts. • Groups of childminders to be associated with specific primary schools providing flexible before and after school provision. • Increased opening hours or settings • Separate staff employed for breakfast/after school care that is funded through fees. • More plans for children 8am - 6pm 5 days a week. • Wrap around services made more user friendly. Earlier school (walking) bus pick up. • Play schemes need to open earlier and finish later. Also have sessions to choose from. • As far as I am aware, only one provider in Chipping Norton takes children from 8.30 until 6pm. Other provision for out of school hours commands an extortionate price. • Need flexibility at local after school club to allow for parents being held up on the way home or having to work a little extra.
More affordable care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra funding for full-time working mums or after school care. • So childcare doesn't take all of a parent's wage when they are married so instead of two incomes coming in there's only one. • Affordability. • I think there should be more free childcare offered by the government. • Childcare which is at a reasonable cost some parents find they work and most of their wages go to childcare (if they work less than 16 hours they can't apply for help with costs) • Payment of fees, while tax credits being sought, or 'fee guarantees' being offered by DWP. • ... More incentives for families with 2 + children to find cheap childcare.
Half term and summer programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More childcare for school holidays... • ... Holiday schemes for younger children. • A playscheme service for half term holidays and summer holidays with a low amount charged to parents.
Different types of care available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe something on a weekend that parents can go to. And something after school times too i.e. Internet cafe or teenager group. • More childminders, small settings City centre (small venue) children's 'mini' centre/drop in for university children. • Need to recruit more childminders as very few locally at the moment. • Childminders seem the last childcare option for working families because of the flexible hours but childminding is becoming ever more daunting due to legislation so we are all struggling and many are giving up. • SureStart centre. More childminders.

2.4 Future plans

2.4.1 Continuing to provide childcare

73% of providers reported that they planned to continue as a provider for more than five years. 6% of providers planned to continue for 4-5 years. 5% said 3-4 years, 5% said 3-4 years, and 7% said 2-3 years. 6% of providers planned to continue for 1-2 years, and 3% for less than 12 months. Figure 13 shows this distribution.

Figure 13: How long do providers plan to continue?

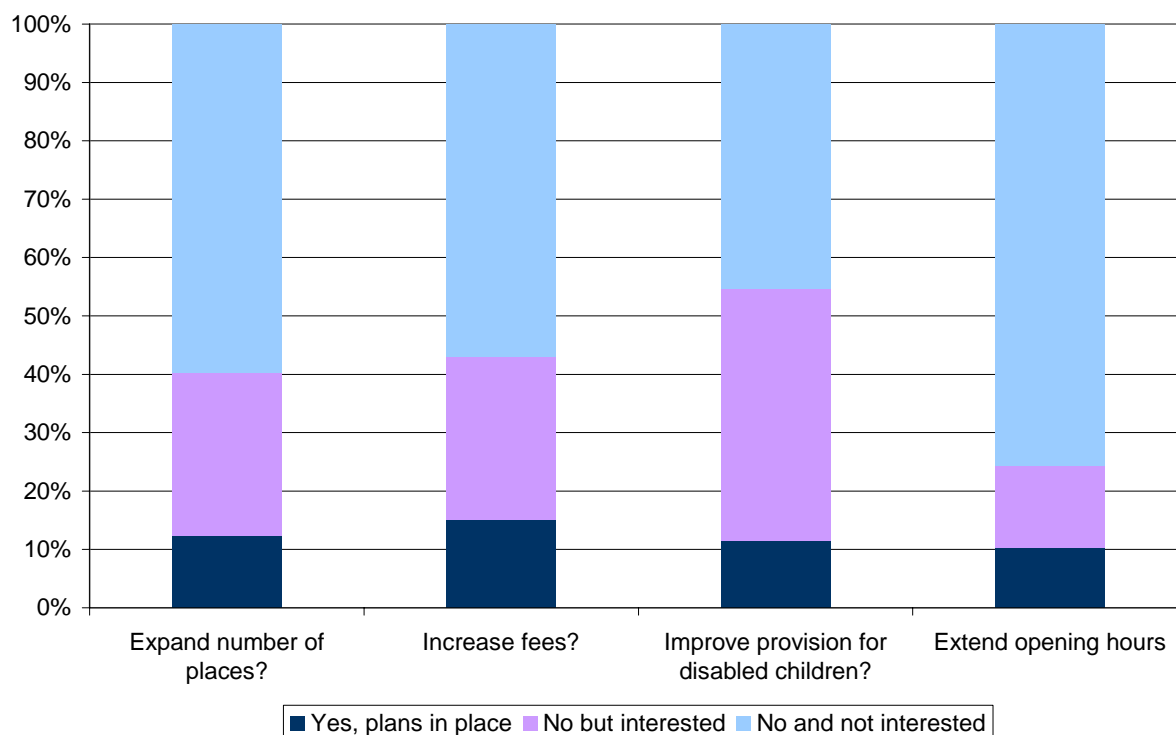


2.4.2 Changes anticipated

Figure 14 shows whether providers have plans in place to change different aspects of their provision:

- 15.1% of providers had plans in place to 'Increase fees'. 12.3% had plans in place to 'Expand number of places'.
- Providers were more likely to be interested in 'improving provision for disabled children' (54.7%) and 'expanding into different geographical area' (50.4%).
- Providers were least likely to be interested in extending their opening hours (75.6% of respondents said they had no plans and no interest in doing so).

Figure 14: Future plans



2.4.3 Changes anticipated by locality

Figure 15 shows the changes that providers anticipate by locality:

- More providers in Henley/ Sonning Common/ Woodcote/ Wallingford have definite plans to increase their fees.
- Wantage/ Faringdon/ Grove have the most providers with plans to expand the number of places that they offer.
- There were more providers in Carterton/ Burford/ Chipping Norton who had plans to improve provision for disabled children.
- Witney/ Eynsham/ Woodstock have the most providers with plans to extend their opening hours.

There were no providers in Headington / Wheatley and in Iffley and Cowley with plans to extend opening hours.

Figure 15: Number of providers with definite plans in place to change their provision by locality

Locality	Expand number of places	Increase fees	Improve provision for disabled children	Extend opening hours
Abingdon/ Berinsfield	4	7	3	6
Banbury	6	6	6	6
Bicester/ Kidlington	6	2	4	5
Carterton/ Burford/ Chipping Norton	6	3	6	4
Didcot	4	5	5	3
Headington/ Wheatley	2	4	4	0
Henley/ Sonning Common/ Woodcote/ Wallingford	3	9	5	5
Iffley and Cowley	1	1	2	0
North Oxford/ Cumnor/ Botley	3	4	1	3
Oxford South East	2	3	2	2
Thame/ Watlington	2	5	3	1
Wantage/ Faringdon/ Grove	8	7	2	2
Witney/ Eynsham/ Woodstock	5	7	5	7

2.4.4 Changes anticipated by type of provider

Figure 16 show that more childminders have plans in place to increase fees. They also have more plans in place to expand their number of places. More pre-schools had plans to extend their opening hours and improve provision for disabled children.

Figure 16: Number of providers with definite plans in place

Type of Provider	Expand number of places	Increase fees	Improve provision for disabled children	Extend opening hours
Childminder	23	33	14	9
Day Nursery	13	14	10	5
Pre-School	18	17	16	27
Nursery Class	1	1	1	1
Crèche	4	2	5	3
Breakfast club	4	4	3	4
After school club	9	8	10	10
Holiday Scheme	4	6	4	7

2.4.5 Further details provided about expanding the number of places

Providers were asked to provide further details about their specific plans for the future in relation to expanding the number of places. Responses are summarised in Figure 17:

- A number of providers have plans to increase the number of places but are awaiting planning permission or local redevelopment plans.

- Many of those providers who are expanding highlighted that they are changing to serve younger children, as increasing numbers of older children are going to school-based provision.
- By far the most common response, however, was from providers who highlighted that they had no plans to expand their number of places because there was no demand.
- In contrast, a large number of other providers responded that they were at capacity already, either for space or under the terms of their registration.

Figure 17: Further comments on plans to expand number of places

Theme	Evidence
Awaiting redevelopment/ planning permission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applying to local council to extend the building to accommodate more children. • Depends on college redevelopment • Planning received for 9 children cost £300 need to speak to Ofsted next to up numbers. • The college where we are is redeveloping, so with a new building in the offing we have thought about increasing numbers.
Expanding to younger children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding in Jan 08 for 12 under 2s. Already have children in place. • We have recently expanded the number of places for 0-2; to try to ameliorate effects of loss of younger 4 year olds.
No demand for more places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not busy enough. • We do not have the demand. • We have 16 places and because of the new age intake at nursery school & the children centre we are very! worried about not filling our pre-school. We can-not fill these places now as nursery is taking them earlier. We will not survive. • No need or demand. • There are so many providers of childcare in my area that I am struggling for work. I wonder if I'll be able to afford to continue as a childminder. • Places not taken up - less that 50% take up.
Providers at capacity already	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We cannot increase our number of places because of the constraints of our building - we use the local community centre and are restricted in times we can use the building and the size of the building. • The size of our building will not allow extra places. • No as I am full. • My places are limited by OFSTED as a childminder.

2.4.6 Further details provided about increasing fees

Common themes / issues highlighted by providers were:

- Many providers responded that they will have a small increase in fees annually to keep in line with inflation.
- Some providers noted that if they increased fees parents would go elsewhere.
- Some noted that the amount of the fee increase would depend on their demand.

Further detail is provided in Figure 18.

Figure 18: Further comments on plans to increase fees

Theme	Evidence
Small increase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I raise my prices yearly at roughly 5% • Yes, but only inflation linked. However to insure the continuing quality of day care we ought to be significantly increasing fees, but parents could not afford this. • Cost of living increase only in April. • Reviewed March and September each year. • Fee for non-funded children to be increased over next year to be in line with Government funded amount.
Parents would go elsewhere/ Too much competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you charge too much, parents aren't able to pay you with under school age children. • Can not raise fees, too much competition. • No point in raising fees as I would lose those clients I have to cheaper childcare elsewhere. • I find that even though I have been childminding for 15 years and am an accredited childminder and a member of a network where I do 12 hours of training a year and I am more qualified than many other childminders, parents are only interested in the cheapest they can find. • Would like to earn a decent wage myself by increasing fees, but the parents wouldn't be able to afford it. That is why I cannot continue in this line of work much longer. • Fees are already at the biting point of what parents can afford. The Government will kill private childcare provision though by forcing us to build Rolls Royces when our parents (and OFSTED) are happy with the Ford Mondeo service they can afford to buy today. Parents will not be able to afford the fees providers will need to charge for all the so-called "improvements". Private sector will die and public sector will be left to pick up the pieces. Government will end up paying far more to subsidise the over-specified childcare services delivered through the expensive and inefficient public sector.

Theme	Evidence
Depends on demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fees may have to rise in the short term if occupancy levels fall further but this would be the beginning of the end for this provision. Depends on how many 4 year olds go into school. If we have more 2 year olds we will have to increase fees.

2.4.7 Further details provided about improving provision for disabled children

Figure 19 shows the main themes highlighted by providers in relation to improving provision for disabled children were:

- Many providers already have adequate facilities to serve disabled children.
- Some providers have plans to improve access.
- Some providers could not serve disabled children without improvements.

Figure 19: Further comments on plans to improve provision for disabled children

Theme	Evidence
Adequate facilities in place/ in progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School will become fully accessible when our building work is complete. Plans are not necessarily required as we have wheelchair access & toilet facilities and until specific other requirements are needed, when we will do these as & when. New building has provision in place for disabled children. We already accept disabled children and feel that we are fully able to cope with the needs of those who come + are referred to us. We have just taken on a child with severe epilepsy and are fully able to cope with his needs. We have access for disabled already. We have had 'soundproofing' in place for children with hearing impairment and ramps by doors. Refurbishing a new bus to better serve disabled children.
Would need improvements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As I work from home, some alterations would be needed and this may need planning permission, also cost is a factor and would see if grants available. It would be lovely but we are unable to afford the extra work to be done. We have ramps to pre-school, ramps into the garden and railings Not able to improve provisions due to space + finance.

Theme	Evidence
No demand/ already sufficient provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have no plans at present as there is no call for it for us. If we have any disabled children join us we will obviously meet their needs. Provision is extremely good for disabled children. Not a need at the moment. This would entirely depend on demand. One gets the distinct impression that many in social services are opposed to placing disabled children in private provision. We might if we had any disabled children within our community. To date, I have had no enquiries for disabled children, but if I did would go on relevant course and where possible make changes to house to accommodate.

2.4.8 Further details provided about extending opening hours

Comments from providers show that:

- Providers that have plans to extend their opening hours are usually intending to establish breakfast clubs, lunch clubs, or after school clubs to provide care around school hours.
- Many providers do not believe that there is sufficient demand for increased hours.
- Providers very commonly are already working long hours and do not believe that further opening hours are needed.

Figure 20: Further comments on plans to extend opening hours

Theme	Evidence
Breakfast club/ Lunch club/ After school club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breakfast club – asking parents to see who needs it. Hopefully start Jan 08. Would have started Sep 07 but not a great deal of interest and cannot offer to start up without the children. Breakfast club. We have a breakfast club. Breakfast club. After school club. Feasibility study currently underway: Wrap around care Lunch club Breakfast club After school club. Greater demand for earlier & later childcare so will consider. We are providing a lunch club on Monday and Wednesday so effectively sessions run from 9.15 - 1.15pm.

Theme	Evidence
Not sufficient demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe, in partnership with pre-school on site provide breakfast club, but at moment financially not viable. (Not enough interested parents). • I will extend opening hours if the parents require it, but my parents don't require it at present. • No demand - service open Mon-Fri 3-6pm. • I meet all requirements of families I care for in my hours are usually 0730 - 1800, but I am flexible, as I understand about emergencies, traffic even cover shifts if needed. (I do not care overnight at present) Weekends negotiable on situation. • Do not believe that there is demand in this location.
Already open too many hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I work 7.30am – 6pm 5 days a week as on my own could not physically do more. • Am open from 7am to 7pm. • I am already available from 6am - 7pm and have often worked these hours if required. • My hours are completely flexible. I can work 6 days a week if needed from 6am to 9pm, again if needed. • Already work 7am - 7pm overnight care and weekends. • We are already open 8.30 am -6pm 50 weeks per year. It might be that we have to open less hours to reduce costs. • Already long enough! 8am - 9pm!!

2.5 Expansion into different geographical areas

Providers were also asked whether they were interested in expanding into different geographical areas. 7.9% responded 'yes, definitely', with a further 42.5% responding 'yes, maybe'.

Figure 21 shows that more providers in Bicester/ Kidlington are definitely interested in expanding into a different geographical area; whilst Figure 22 shows that more childminders and more day nurseries are definitely interested in doing so.

Figure 21: Number of providers who are definitely interested in expanding into a different geographical area by locality

Locality	Number
Abingdon/ Berinsfield	5
Banbury	3
Bicester/ Kidlington	8
Carterton/ Burford/ Chipping Norton	4
Didcot	2
Headington/ Wheatley	2
Henley/ Sonning Common/ Woodcote/ Wallingford	0
Iffley and Cowley	2
North Oxford/ Cumnor/ Botley	3
Oxford South East	1
Thame/ Watlington	1
Wantage/ Faringdon/ Grove	1
Witney/ Eynsham/ Woodstock	2

Figure 22: Number of providers who are definitely interested in expanding into a different geographical area by type of provider

Type of Provider	Number
Childminder	12
Day Nursery	12
Pre-School	11
Nursery Class	1
Crèche	3
Breakfast club	5
After school club	11
Holiday Scheme	5

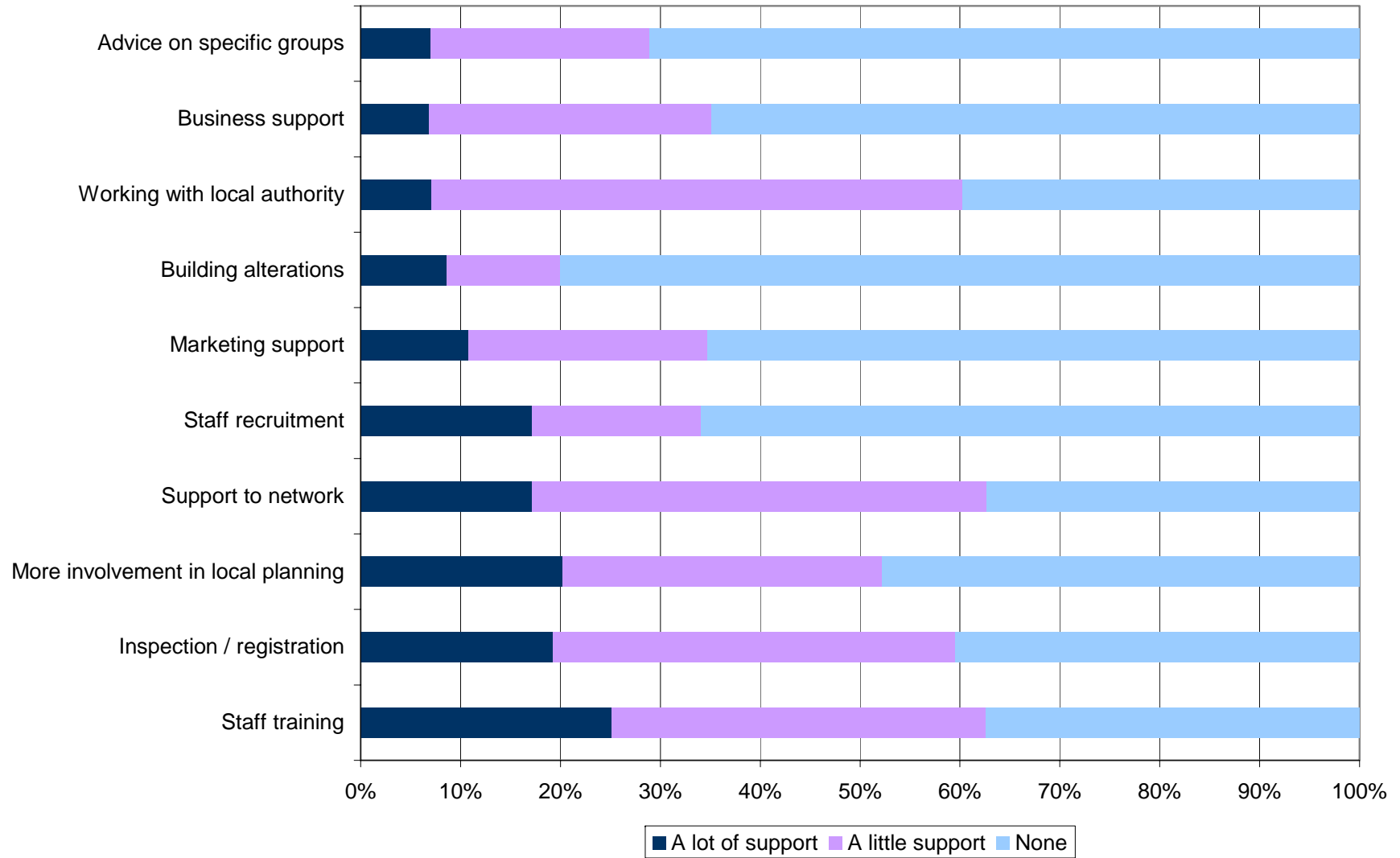
2.6 Support needed

2.6.1 Overall trends

Providers were asked about the level of support that they may require (either from the local authority or from elsewhere) on a range of different topics. Figure 23 shows the level and range of support required by providers:

- Providers were most likely to definitely need support with staff training (25.1%), more involvement in local planning (20.2%), and inspection/registration (19.2%).
- Providers were most likely to need at least a little support with staff training (62.6%) and support to network (62.6%).
- Providers were least likely to need help with building alterations (20.0%).

Figure 23: Support required by providers



2.6.2 Support needed by locality

Figure 24 shows the number of providers requesting 'a lot of support' by locality:

- Providers in Abingdon/ Berinsfield and Didcot were most likely to need a lot of support with 'staff recruitment and retention'.
- Providers in Banbury most need 'marketing support' and 'more involvement in local planning'.
- Providers in Bicester/ Kidlington, Headington/ Wheatley, Henley/ Sonning Common/ Woodcote/ Wallingford and Wantage/ Faringdon/ Grove were most likely to need a lot of support with 'staff training'.
- Carterton/ Burford/ Chipping Norton providers were most likely to need support with 'staff training', 'inspection/ registration', and 'working with the local authority'.
- Providers in Iffley and Cowley need most support with 'staff training' and 'more involvement in local planning'.
- North Oxford/ Cumnor/ Botley providers need support with 'inspection/ registration', 'support to network', 'working with the local authority', 'more involvement in local planning' and 'advice on specific groups.' Two providers specified the groups with which they need support, as 'disabled' and 'SEN + children in care'.
- Providers in Oxford South East most need 'staff training' 'marketing support' and 'business support'.
- Thame/ Watlington providers need most help with 'Inspection/ registration'.
- Providers in Witney/ Eynsham/ Woodstock needed a lot of support with 'building alterations' and 'working with the local authority'.

Figure 24 Difference between localities for providers requesting 'a lot of support'

Locality	Staff recruitment and retention	Staff training	Marketing support	Business support	Building alterations	Inspection / registration	Support to network	Working with local authority	More involvement in local planning	Advice on specific groups
Abingdon/ Berinsfield	28	18	19	7	6	5	17	17	2	19
Banbury	0	5	6	3	5	2	4	5	6	2
Bicester/ Kidlington	4	13	5	4	7	2	3	7	8	6
Carterton/ Burford/ Chipping Norton	1	3	1	1	1	3	2	3	1	1
Didcot	22	8	11	9	3	1	11	9	0	8
Headington/ Wheatley	2	3	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1
Henley/ Sonning Common/ Woodcote/ Wallingford	4	6	2	1	3	3	2	1	1	2
Iffley and Cowley	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	2	1
North Oxford/ Cumnor/ Botley	0	3	1	3	3	4	4	4	4	4
Oxford South East	1	2	2	2	0	1	0	1	1	1
Thame/ Watlington	0	3	2	3	2	4	1	1	2	1
Wantage/ Faringdon/ Grove	24	26	3	2	4	25	22	2	23	3
Witney/ Eynsham/ Woodstock	1	1	0	0	3	1	1	3	2	0

Figure 25 shows the number of providers requesting at least a little support with various issues:

- Providers in Abingdon/ Berinsfield were most likely to need at least a little support with 'staff recruitment and retention'.
- Banbury, Didcot and Oxford South East providers were most likely to need at least a little support 'working with the local authority'.
- Bicester /Kidlington and Witney/ Eynsham/ Woodstock providers needed support with 'support to network' and 'working with the local authority'.
- Carterton/ Burford/ Chipping Norton needed support most with 'Inspection/ registration' and 'support to network'.
- Providers in Headington/ Wheatley, Henley/ Sonning Common/ Woodcote/ Wallingford, and Wantage/ Faringdon/ Grove needed most support with 'staff training'.
- Providers in Iffley and Cowley needed most help with 'staff training' and 'support to network'.

- North Oxford/ Cumnor/ Botley providers needed most support with ‘staff training’, ‘inspection/ registration’, and ‘working with the local authority’.
- Providers in Thame/ Watlington need most support with ‘staff training’, and ‘Inspection/ registration’.

Figure 25 Difference between localities for providers requesting at least a little support

Locality	Staff recruitment and retention	Staff training	Marketing support	Business support	Building alterations	Inspection / registration	Support to network	Working with local authority	More involvement in local planning	Advice on specific groups
Abingdon/ Berinsfield	39	34	26	16	10	21	36	46	12	27
Banbury	9	28	19	20	11	30	30	31	24	18
Bicester/ Kidlington	12	31	21	25	14	32	35	35	29	14
Carterton/ Burford/ Chipping Norton	7	16	11	10	4	19	19	18	11	7
Didcot	25	16	14	12	7	10	23	27	9	13
Headington/ Wheatley	2	8	2	3	3	5	2	4	4	3
Henley/ Sonning Common/ Woodcote/ Wallingford	12	19	11	10	7	15	17	13	14	6
Iffley and Cowley	5	6	3	4	4	3	6	5	5	2
North Oxford/ Cumnor/ Botley	6	13	10	11	5	13	12	13	10	9
Oxford South East	3	3	2	3	1	6	4	8	4	3
Thame/ Watlington	1	10	6	8	2	10	8	8	8	2
Wantage/ Faringdon/ Grove	30	43	16	17	10	40	40	37	35	10
Witney/ Eynsham/ Woodstock	5	16	11	14	5	16	21	21	17	10

2.6.3 Support needed by type of provider

Figure 26 shows the number of respondents requesting ‘a lot of support’ by type of provider:

- Childminders were most likely to need support with ‘inspection/ registration’ and ‘staff training’.
- More day nurseries said that they needed ‘a lot of support’ with ‘staff recruitment and retention’, and ‘more involvement in local planning’.
- Pre-schools were most likely to need help with ‘staff training’.
- Few nursery classes needed a lot of support, but two providers each needed support with ‘staff training’, ‘marketing support’, ‘business support’ and ‘advice on specific groups’. One of those providers specified that the help was needed with ‘special needs’.

- Crèches, breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday schemes were most likely to need help with ‘staff training’.

Figure 26: Differences between types of provider requiring a lot of support

Type of provider	Staff recruitment and retention	Staff training	Marketing support	Business support	Building alterations	Inspection / registration	Support to network	Working with local authority	More involvement in local planning	Advice on specific groups
Childminder	9	22	16	11	9	23	19	14	14	12
Day Nursery	31	44	8	4	6	31	30	7	37	4
Pre-School	23	38	18	14	20	24	20	7	23	5
Nursery Class	1	2	2	2	2	1	0	0	1	2
Crèche	2	4	2	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
Breakfast club	0	5	3	3	2	2	1	0	4	3
After school club	9	15	6	5	6	8	5	1	9	5
Holiday Scheme	0	9	3	3	2	2	1	2	3	2

Figure 27 shows the number of providers requesting at least a little support with various issues:

- Childminders were most likely to need at least a little support with ‘inspection/ registration’ and ‘support to network’.
- Day nurseries, pre-schools, breakfast clubs, after school clubs, and holiday schemes were most likely to need at least a little support with ‘staff training’.
- Nursery classes highlighted ‘business support’.
- Crèches were most likely to need at least a little support with ‘staff recruitment and retention’ and ‘staff training’.

Figure 27 Differences between types of provider requiring at least a little support

Type of provider	Staff recruitment and retention	Staff training	Marketing support	Business support	Building alterations	Inspection / registration	Support to network	Working with local authority	More involvement in local planning	Advice on specific groups
Childminder	19	75	59	67	30	110	106	101	75	48
Day Nursery	57	74	26	20	18	59	59	61	55	13
Pre-School	51	96	54	55	30	72	81	75	70	34
Nursery Class	3	3	4	5	3	3	4	2	3	3
Crèche	9	9	5	3	2	7	6	5	5	5
Breakfast club	8	18	9	10	9	11	13	15	16	7
After school club	27	36	21	20	13	29	28	30	25	15
Holiday Scheme	10	17	8	7	7	18	15	15	15	12

3 Focus groups with providers

3.1 Reasons for using childcare

Most practitioners cited providing cover whilst parents/carers were at work as the *main* reason that their services were accessed. This ran across all types of provision.

Secondary reasons given for doing so (in decreasing order of frequency) were:

- to give parents/carers more time to themselves/leisure;
- to provide an inclusive setting in which children can socialise (especially for disabled children);
- to provide respite for parents/carers of disabled children;
- to provide continuity of care and a familiar setting;
- to provide flexibility for parents/carers;
- location of provider (e.g. close to parents/carers, situated on school premises);
- quality and reputation of provider and/or staff;
- parents/carers who are studying/training;
- to access early education to prepare for school;
- for ad hoc/emergency cover.

In terms of differentiating between different types of cover and localities, the following issues were raised:

- Providers from Montessori nurseries felt that parents/carers often accessed them as they were one of the only Montessori settings in their local area.
- Flexibility was raised as an important reason for using particular providers – this was flagged up in respect to a pre-school that kept some sessions free to ensure parents/carers who needed emergency cover could be accommodated, and a childminder who was able to offer childcare to parents/carers who worked shifts and charged on an hourly rather than daily or weekly basis.

3.2 Suggestions for improvement

In line with Department for Children, Schools, and Families guidance, providers were asked to consider improvements to childcare provision which would impact most strongly on two targeted groups of parents/carers: those who are seeking work; and those with disabled children. Findings are presented below.

3.2.1 Parents/carers who are seeking work or wishing to remain in work

Information and affordability were seen as the two main issues affecting this group of parents.

Information

Respondents felt that parents/carers did not have enough information about both the childcare provision available and financial support that could help with the costs of childcare.

A review of both the content and mode of dissemination of current information for parents/carers was suggested, since it was felt by one group that at the moment there '*...seems to be a scattergun approach, not a one-stop shop*'.

It was felt that the awareness of Oxfordshire Children's Information Service (OCIS) and the services and resources it provides needs to be improved since parents/carers often did not know enough about it. In addition, two groups suggested information guides/booklets for parents. The Childcare Link website was also thought to play a part in helping parents, and specifically one group suggested improving the capacity of the website to refine searches so that parents/carers can specifically narrow down where or what type of childcare provision they are looking for.

Providers also felt that the content and quality of information being relayed *to them* could also be improved. This was in respect to the funding that is available to parents/carers so that providers are better placed to support parents/carers who need it.

Finally, one group thought that as a priority for providers, they should regularly and proactively update OCIS with information about their own provision so that centrally collated information is as up-to-date as possible.

Affordability

It was felt that childcare was very expensive, especially for those parents/carers trying to enter work. Some groups suggested as improvements supporting parents/carers who were looking for work with these costs, or instead reducing their fees. Affordability was seen as critical in explaining why some parents/carers did not currently access formal childcare and

why they instead relied on family or friends or other informal networks of support.

There were some comments in relation to benefits and grants that were available to parents/carers and how these systems did not always work effectively. In particular, groups raised the following issues:

- It may be better to pay the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit funding directly to childcare providers, or to provide parents/carers with vouchers which are redeemable against their childcare costs.
- Adapting the current systems of benefits so it would more effectively encourage parents/carers (back) to work.
- Greater recognition of the fact that some parents/carers lose benefits when taking low-paid jobs which may not prove to be cost effective.
- Information about subsidies and grants is often only relayed on a 'need-to-know' basis.

Other points raised in this part of the discussion which were related to the financial impact of using formal childcare were:

- Some parents/carers should be offered childcare for free.
- Childcare costs were seen to be especially high in Kidlington.

Other suggestions

The groups raised a number of other issues/suggestions that may impact on parents/carers remaining in, or trying to go back to work. These were:

- For the Local Authority, ensuring that there was sufficient choice for parents/carers and not adopting a 'one size fits all' approach.
- Addressing the needs of parents/carers who need to transport their children between school and out of school care (e.g. parents/carers currently dropping children too early, not picking up on time).
- How parents/carers practically manage the childcare needs of more than one child.

3.2.2 Parents/carers with disabled children

The main issues that were brought up in relation to supporting parents/carers or carers of disabled children were related to ensuring *suitable* childcare options, costs and funding of such provision and information and awareness for both parents/carers and staff.

Suitable provision

More than one group highlighted the need for providers to have facilities which were adequately adapted and that fully catered for the needs of disabled children. This could include adapting buildings or equipment, or providing extra staff to ensure 1:1 provision where appropriate. It was generally felt, however, that this may prove problematic for providers and that it incurred substantial costs (financial or otherwise). As such, it was recognised that many providers do not themselves feel able or willing to take on some disabled children. This is an issue that is also highlighted in the discussions with parents/carers and carers and in other research carried out in this area².

Flexibility was also something that was felt to be very important for this group in the context of emergency/unplanned respite. This was often needed to provide parents/carers with time to themselves (or other children), or to carry out important tasks (e.g. going to appointments).

For those parents that utilised different types of provision, transporting children between providers also came up as an issue. This may be a bigger issue for this set of parents given the generally higher dependence needs of their children.

Costs and funding of suitable provision

Given the issues raised above, it was felt that those few providers that were geared for the needs of disabled children tended to be substantially more expensive and that it was unfair to pass on this cost directly to parents. A knock-on effect of these higher costs would be that parents/carers had less choice of provision for their children. Again, this was also something that was raised by parents.

The suggestion was put forward that an external body was required to buffer the difference in price between the 'average' cost of childcare, and the actual cost that is incurred to provide inclusive childcare for a disabled child. One group thought that it was unsustainable to pass these costs onto parents/carers or onto providers. Participants were unclear however, who, or what should be plugging this gap.

In relation to funding, one provider made the comment that current short-term funding for certain forms of childcare for

² Hoskins, V (2007) Literature review – childcare needs of families with disabled children, Oxfordshire Early Learning and Childcare

disabled children (in her case, after-school clubs) was not helpful in ensuring continuity of good quality services. Increased funding into this specific sector of childcare was also felt to facilitate the inclusion of disabled children into mainstream provision.

Finally, one group thought that adequate financial support should be given to those parents/carers who choose not to (or cannot) work, but who support their disabled children on a full-time basis.

Training and information

Many practitioners felt that more training was needed for staff either already working with this group of children or to facilitate it in the future. It was felt that there was a lack of awareness about the needs of disabled children amongst childcare staff and that this could bring about some reluctance to accept disabled children into childcare provision.

From the perspective of parents/carers, staff thought that they did not always have sufficient information about both the availability of suitable childcare provision and about any support they are entitled to with the costs of these services. Providers felt that parents/carers should also be made more aware of the fact that their child should not be excluded on the grounds of impairment.

Two groups raised the issue of fear or worries from both parents/carers and staff. It was felt that parents/carers tended to have anxieties about using formal childcare for their child, given their particular support needs. However, parents/carers tended not to voice these concerns to prospective childcare providers in the fear that this may dissuade providers to take them on. At the same time, providers felt that they could not always openly discuss these issues with parents since they felt a certain lack of awareness of all the relevant issues concerning caring for disabled children.

Practitioners therefore believed that support and re-assurance for both parties about the care provided and any difficulties that may occur would be beneficial, and that this could also be facilitated through better communication and more joined-up working between those professionals working with disabled children (not only those in childcare).

Other issues/suggestions

One group felt that it would be extremely beneficial for parents/carers to have a Liaison Officer within the Local Authority who could support them in the process of finding suitable childcare provision. It was envisaged that this person could have the role of matching existing services with parents'/carers' specific needs for their children.

Another group felt that it is was an important priority for childcare providers to improve access to mainstream provision, (especially after-school provision) for disabled children.

3.3 Areas for support

Finally, practitioners were asked about areas they felt they needed extra guidance and/or support in to improve their individual and collective working practices. The areas below are reported in decreasing order of importance that participants assigned to them.

3.3.1 Staff training

In addition to issues raised in relation to working with disabled children, all groups raised issues around training.

It was felt that Early Years training should be made available to all staff members although in reality many providers only had a limited number of places. However, practitioners also flagged up the tension between the benefits that would come from having a fully trained workforce and the problems that compulsory training had on staff who could be *'reluctant to engage'*. Participants suggested that this was more of an issue for low paid and part time staff, for whom extra training often had to be done in their own time. Another issue was raised about the formal training needed for those staff *'...who love working with children as a vocation rather than a career.'*

3.3.2 Support to network with other providers

Many practitioners felt that they would benefit from further support in this area. Specific suggestions for this support were:

- Childcare Development Officer (CDO) to arrange regular networks three times a year.
- Encouraging a greater variety of attendance from childcare providers at meetings.
- Visits to other out of school groups or special schools for shadowing purposes – organised and funded by the Local Authority.
- A twinning system for providers for mutual support.

3.3.3 Working with the Local Authority and more involvement in the local planning of provision

One group raised the point that the Local Authority could do more to facilitate better working relationships between schools and providers.

Another group raised the point that they were keen to be involved with the Local Authority and more involved in local planning. This was especially pertinent as the decrease in school-entry age is felt to be affecting the sustainability of some childcare providers since they are increasingly 'competing' for the same children. They highlighted that providers who currently provide nursery places already support each other in relation to this perceived problem.

Two other groups raised the point that it would be useful to keep abreast of childcare development issues from the Local Authority in their local areas to aid their own service development.

3.3.4 Other issues

Groups highlighted other issues which they felt they needed more support to address:

- Two groups highlighted wanting further support around the needs of specific groups of children - one stipulated this was in relation to disabled children, echoing previous findings.
- One practitioner highlighted a problem about high staff turnover and how they could be supported to retain staff in the future. Another group felt that there were difficulties in getting suitably qualified staff to work for short hours and that perhaps there was a role for either OCIS or the CDO.
- One group wanted further support from the Local Authority in the area of funding.
- Local Authority to provide a person to fulfil a negotiating role to work between providers and parents/carers (e.g. where there may be problems or disputes)
- It was felt that at times the Local Authority expected staff to use much of their own free time (especially those who work part time) to attend meetings or training.

4 Conclusions

The following conclusions have been drawn from the evidence above:

- Overall, providers have a positive view of their local childcare market, rating 'quality' and 'location and accessibility' between 'good' and 'excellent', and all other aspects between 'satisfactory' and 'good'.
- Wantage/ Faringdon/ Grove and Didcot were the localities where providers consistently had the highest opinions about different aspects of childcare. Iffley and Cowley was the locality where providers consistently gave the lowest ratings.
- In terms of childcare for specific groups, providers rated provision between 'satisfactory' and 'good', with provision for working families rated the highest.
- Providers were most likely to suggest free or low cost places and increased government funding as a specific improvement to provision for low income families.
- In questionnaires and focus groups, providers feel that provision for disabled children would be improved by ensuring that settings were able to properly support the needs of these children. This may be about upgrading facilities or ensuring one-to-one support. Either way providers highlighted the extra resources required to support disabled children and that grants or other sort of funding should be in place to enable providers to do this. A request for more training was also made in focus groups.
- Funding for flexible care and more flexible hours and provision were the improvements most likely to be suggested for families seeking work. Focus groups also raised the need for improved information (about provision and about financial support) and greater affordability of provision.
- Providers were most likely to suggest increasing the hours that childcare is available and improving flexibility to improve childcare for working families.
- The childcare market in Oxfordshire is relatively stable with 73% reporting that they would remain in business for over 5 years and 84% reporting that they would remain in business for over 3 years.

- Of all the possible changes providers intend to make, they are most likely to increase their fees.
- Support offered by the local authority to childcare providers should be focused on staff training, involving providers in local planning processes, support with networking and help with registration and inspections. The support, however, should be tailored to different types of provider and localities.

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Glossary

Explanations of types of childcare are drawn from the Sure Start document *Looking for childcare? A SureStart guide to help you make the right choices*. It is available at:

<http://www.surestart.gov.uk/doc/P0002413.doc>

Term	Explanation
After-school club	See out of school activities below.
BME	Black and minority ethnic group.
Breakfast club	See out of school activities below.
CDO	Childcare Development Officer
Childminder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registered childminders look after your child along with other children, usually in their own home. They are allowed to care for up to six children under the age of eight, including their own – but only three of them can be aged under five. Self-employed, they decide on working hours. Most are willing to work early mornings, evenings and weekends, as well as part-time. All registered childminders are required to undertake a basic training course, including first aid, and most go on to do further training and professional development. Your child should experience learning and development activities suitable for their age.
Children's Centre	See Sure Start Children's Centre below.
Day nurseries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A day nursery provides care and education for children between the ages of six weeks and five years. (Many also offer out of school care for five- to eleven-year-olds.) Day nurseries can be run by the council, the community, based in the workplace or privately run. Opening times are from around 7am to 7pm (hours vary but many nurseries may start before 8am), 50 weeks of the year. You can send your child full or part time. Your child should experience learning and development activities suitable for their age.
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families. Further information is available at www.dcsf.gov.uk
IDACI	Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index. This is a subset of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Further information is available at www.communities.gov.uk
Nannies and other home-based carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nannies and other home-based child carers are employed by you to provide care for children, usually in your home. They will fit in with unusual working hours, and work part time or even live in. Some may agree to do additional jobs around the house (cooking, tidying etc.). Shared nannies work for you and another family. Most nannies and some other home-based child carers have a recognised childcare qualification or nursery nurse training, but this isn't compulsory.
NEG/NEF	Nursery Education Grant or Nursery Education Grant. This is the grant to childcare providers in order to provide the free entitlement to 15 hours of childcare per week for 38 weeks for children aged 3 and 4 years.

Term	Explanation
Nursery schools and classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nursery schools and nursery classes provide early education and childcare for children between three and five years old (some will take children from two and a half). Some schools and classes are part of the state education system; others are run by private and voluntary sector organisations. Private provision charge fees which vary across the country. Nursery schools are open during school hours, usually 9am to 3:30pm in term time for full or half-day sessions. Many have extended their provision to cater for the needs of working parents. Your child should experience learning and development activities suitable for their age. Some may also offer out of school care before or after school during term time and in the school holidays, which could include a range of services for children under five and their families.
OCIS	Oxfordshire Children's Information Service. Further information available from www.oxoncis.org.uk
Ofsted	Responsible for regulating and inspecting care of children and young people and education and skills for learners of all ages. Further information is available at www.ofsted.gov.uk
ONS	Office of National Statistics. Further information is available at www.statistics.gov.uk
Out of school activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many schools offer a variety of formal childcare and other activities outside usual school hours. These range from formal childcare in primary schools to music, art, sport and other study support activities. As a result the school is often open from 8am to 6pm, including during holiday periods. Breakfast clubs are normally open from 8am. After-school clubs are typically open from 3.30pm and up to 6pm. Holiday play schemes tend to be open from 8am to 6pm and run outside of term time. Sometimes referred to as out of school clubs, these services are based on school sites, but may also be in youth clubs, community centres or nurseries. Some schools organise the childcare themselves, but others will work with local voluntary groups, private providers and childminders, who will provide staff and sometimes facilities.
Pre-school and playgroup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-schools or playgroups provide care and most offer early education for children between two and five years old. A pre-school or playgroup can be organised by the community on a not-for-profit basis, often with help from parents. They offer sessions from two-and-a-half hours to four hours, during term time, every day or for several days a week. Your child should experience learning and development activities suitable for their age. Some are developing their services to offer longer sessions or full-time daycare.
PVI	Private, Voluntary and Independent. Usually refers to a type of childcare provider that isn't run by the local authority.
SEN	Special Educational Need.

Term	Explanation
Sure Start Children's Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sure Start Children's Centres provide a range of easily accessible and flexibly tailored services for families and children from pregnancy until the age of five. Their services include integrated early years provision and health services for children. • They will also offer parenting education, family support services, outreach to parents, a base for childminders and links with Jobcentre Plus, Children's Information Services (CIS) and adult learning. • They are open a minimum of 48 weeks a year, five days a week, ten hours a day. • Many centres will be developed from Sure Start local programmes, Neighbourhood Nurseries and Early Excellence Centres, Maintained Nursery Schools and health centres, and will involve private/voluntary provision. • A Sure Start Children's Centre usually serves a community with about 800 children under five years old. In rural areas with a more dispersed population numbers may be smaller. Note: early years provision means early learning integrated with care.

Appendix 1 – Consultation materials

Questionnaire to providers



Making life better for children and families in our county

A survey of childcare providers in Oxfordshire: your views on the local childcare market

Oxfordshire County Council's Early Years and Family Support Service is interested to find out about your views of childcare in your local area and your plans for the future. Your opinions are important to us and will help to ensure that Oxfordshire County Council provides the support that you need. It will also help to ensure that quality and accessible childcare services are provided throughout Oxfordshire.

This questionnaire is being administered by a research company called Cordis Bright. It is being circulated to all childcare providers in Oxfordshire, including day nurseries, pre-schools, childminders, crèches, and out of school providers. Results will be presented to Oxfordshire County Council, as part of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, but no one will be able to identify you or your response from it. Thank you in advance for completing this questionnaire. Please complete and return by **Tuesday, 23 October 2007**.

If you have any questions about this piece of research, please contact Liane Low at Oxfordshire County Council on 01865 810 517 or liane.low@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Question 1 – About you

- (a) What is the postcode for your work base / organisation?
- (b) What type of childcare provider are you? Please tick all that apply.
- | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Childminder | <input type="checkbox"/> | Day nursery | <input type="checkbox"/> | Pre-school or playgroup | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Nursery class in school | <input type="checkbox"/> | Crèche | <input type="checkbox"/> | Nanny or au pair | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Breakfast club | <input type="checkbox"/> | After-school club | <input type="checkbox"/> | Holiday playscheme | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please state)..... | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- (c) Which sector are you in?
- | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| Local authority | <input type="checkbox"/> | Private | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Voluntary | <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- (d) Do you provide Nursery Education Fund (NEF) places?
- | | | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> | Don't know | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|

Question 2 – The local childcare market

(a) Thinking about the range of childcare that is available to parents / carers in your local area, how would you rate the following?

	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Don't know
Quality of provision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Range of, or choice in, providers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Number of places	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Affordability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Flexibility of provision and sessions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Suitability of opening times	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Location and accessibility of childcare	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(b) How would you rate childcare in your local area for these specific groups of parents / carers?

	Poor	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent	Don't know
Provision for low income families	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provision for disabled children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provision for working families	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provision for families seeking work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(c) If you have any specific improvement suggestions for how childcare could better meet these groups' needs please tell us here. (Please continue on a separate sheet if required)

<i>Improvements for low income families</i>	
<i>Improvements for families with disabled children</i>	
<i>Improvements for working families</i>	

Improvements for families seeking work

Question 3 – Your future plans

(a) Approximately for how long do you as a provider expect to continue to provide childcare?

- | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Less than 12 months | <input type="checkbox"/> | One to two years | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Two to three years | <input type="checkbox"/> | Three to four years | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Four to five years | <input type="checkbox"/> | More than five years | <input type="checkbox"/> |

(b) Do you have plans in place over the next 18 months to expand the number of places?

- Yes, plans in place No plans but interested No plans and not interested



Please provide further details below:

(c) Do you have plans in place over the next 18 months to significantly increase fees?

- Yes, plans in place No plans but interested No plans and not interested



Please provide further details below:

(d) Do you have plans in place over the next 18 months to improve provision for disabled children?

- Yes, plans in place No plans but interested No plans and not interested



Please provide further details below:

(e) Do you have plans in place over the next 18 months to extend your opening hours?

Yes, plans in place No plans but interested No plans and not interested

Please provide further details below:

(f) As a provider, are you interested in expanding into a different geographical area?

Yes, definitely Yes, maybe No

Question 4 – Support required

In order to meet your plans for the future what support do you require?

	None	A little support	A lot of support
Staff recruitment and retention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marketing support / advice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business support / advice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Building alterations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Inspection / registration support / advice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support to network with other providers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working with the local authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
More involvement in local planning of childcare provision	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advice on needs of specific groups of children (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your details & prize draw

It would be helpful to know who you are. Please provide your details below. Also all childcare providers who complete a questionnaire are eligible to enter a prize draw to win £50 in Early Learning Centre vouchers to spend in their setting.

Your name: Telephone:

Organisation: Tick here to enter the prize draw:

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return it FREEPOST to Cordis Bright, FREEPOST LON19516, Epworth House, 25 City Road, London EC1Y 1AA by the deadline of Tuesday, 23 October.

Focus groups with providers

1. Introduction

We'd like to start off by getting to know you and your local area a bit better. Could you tell us a little bit about the childcare that you provide and what you think are the main reasons parents / carers use childcare for in your local area?

2. Improvement suggestions

We'd like to move onto ways that childcare could be improved in Oxfordshire. Specifically, we want to focus on how childcare could be improved for two groups of parents / carers:

- Those seeking work or wishing to remain in work
- Those with disabled children

I'd like to split you into teams to consider the needs of one of these specific groups. You have 20 minutes to put together a list of improvement suggestions. I'd like you then to present the top 2 changes that you think will have the most impact. One should be what the local authority can do and the other should be what childcare providers can do.

3. Areas of support

The last section of this focus group is about the areas of support that you may need over the next 18 months to help meet the needs of local parents. We have put up on the flipchart some areas of support that you may need:

- Staff recruitment / retention
- Staff training
- Marketing support / advice
- Business support / advice
- Building alterations
- Inspection / registration support / advice
- Support to network with other providers
- Working with the local authority
- More involvement in local planning of childcare provision
- Advice on needs of specific groups of children
- Other

Please use the three post-it notes to vote for which areas, if any, you might like support in. Please use the three post-it notes however you choose: you can use them to vote for three separate areas or put them all on one area.

This support may be from the local authority, from each other or from somewhere else.

[Using the voting as a guide...] X area appears to be the most popular. What kinds of support or advice would people most like in this area? Why?



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Cordis Bright is a consultancy working for social care organisations, children's services and allied partnerships, across both statutory and independent sectors. Our work is grounded in quality research, robust technical skills and a deep knowledge and understanding of the sectors we work in.