



Document: **Response to DfES consultation *Towards a strategy for working with the voluntary and community sector to deliver outcomes for children, young people and families***
Date: **July 2004**

Background

The Pre-school Learning Alliance welcomes this opportunity to contribute to this strategy, which will be crucial in ensuring the Government's agenda is delivered.

The Pre-school Learning Alliance supports 15,000 affiliated community-based pre-schools across England, which provide funded nursery education and childcare for 500,000 children. The Alliance is the single largest contributor to the National Childcare Strategy and to the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative.

Parent management committees run the majority of our member pre-schools; that is, people from within the communities they serve lead them.

The charity's mission is to help children to succeed; create the childcare which families need; and build learning communities. In the delivery of this mission, the charity not only contributes to the achievement of the Government's early years' and childcare targets, but also works to widen participation in further education, combat social exclusion, facilitate the move from welfare to work and support the eradication of child poverty.

We are a specialist national infrastructure organisation, with a regional and local presence. Our activity in support of groups includes start-up and development with a focus on best practice, funding and finance opportunities and personnel.

Response

A1, A2 & A3

We do agree with your analysis of the current situation, and we support your vision. We agree with the action you are proposing to take. We have many examples of our local branches working in effective partnership with EYDCPs – this has been the experience of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) in many local authority areas.

A4 & A5

We believe the paper is a good start; we would urge that the relationship between local authorities and the VCS needs to be considered in all strategic thinking and planning with the DfES. Crucially, the VCS must be involved at this early stage, not when local authorities have already decided on their preferred outcomes. Forums should be put in place to allow the VCS to come together with local authorities. We recommend that performance

indicators are introduced to monitor and evaluate the success of local authorities in engaging with the VCS and that any guidance documents produced by the DfES make clear that engaging with the VCS is essential, not desirable. Equal access is important: consideration must be given to ensuring that the representation of the VCS is fair and that each organisation has a voice, whether they are large or small. Local authorities should be encouraged to recognise the skills of the VCS in brokering relationships between different parts of the statutory sector i.e. education and social services. Finally, the DfES should take steps to ensure the Local Government Association is on board with the strategy.

B1, B2 & B3

Generally we agree with the thrust of this section, but believe strongly that the vision should include longer-term funding – a minimum of three years, not ‘up to’.

B4 & B5

We recommend that the DfES produces guidance for local authorities on making the commissioning process more transparent and accessible for the VCS. We would strengthen the wording of the third action to **insist** – not encourage – local authorities and children’s trusts to support VCS capacity building and infrastructure provision, by ring fencing part of local authority budgets. We believe consideration should be given to introducing incentive schemes for local authorities that provide evidence of effective partnerships, and support for capacity building and infrastructure provision in a strategic manner, for example introducing beacon status or other national awards. The Government should make better use of the intelligence provided by national organisations within the VCS in order to identify and promote examples of good practice. It would also be helpful if we had timescales for the review of national VCS funding streams, and for the publication of analysis and actions.

C1, C2 & C3

Generally we agree with this section but note that there is some repetition between it and previous sections. Again, we would strengthen the wording of the first point in the vision section so that the CYPFD is **advising** (rather than encouraging) local authorities to adopt more streamlined funding access for voluntary and community organisations.

The reference to the implementation of a new Integrated Financial and Information System (IFIS) from August 2004 raises the question as to whether this will impact on our current contract with the Department and what the implications might be.

We would alter the fourth point in the vision section to read that wherever **appropriate** (not possible) delivery by local VCOs is funded at local level. Some initiatives – for example, a helpline – may be better funded nationally.

A general issue is that contract delivery does not always allow for innovations and capacity building, or responding to new initiatives, and so can be quite restrictive.

C4 & C5

We recommend that an evaluation is carried out on the effectiveness of the Compact locally, taking in to consideration the experience of the VCO with regards to grant funding and contracting. We also believe that arrangements should be put in place to monitor the level of investment by local authorities in the VCS.

D1, D2 & D3

Again, generally we agree with the tone of this section. With the creation of the new Children, Young People and Families Directorate, and the implications of the green paper Every Child Matters, effective communication between the VCS and the department is essential. We support the vision and would urge that 'communication at an early stage' involves bringing VCOs to the table to engage in meaningful consultation and to learn from experiences at the start of discussion. A question that arises from this section is what is the timescale for funding opportunities to be publicised on Government funding portal?

D4 & D5

We have nothing to add here.