



Document: **Response to the London Assembly Childcare Scrutiny, LDA Childcare Programme**
Date: **June 2005**

The Pre-school Learning Alliance has a network of over 15,000 community-based early years settings, that provide funded nursery education and childcare for half a million children. The Alliance is the single largest contributor to the National Childcare Strategy, the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative and will play a major role in the development of Children's Centres. Through our expansion project we have created in excess of 20,000 new childcare places over the past two years. For more than four decades the charity has provided vocational training for staff working in pre-schools and adult and community learning and family development programmes for parents.

The Pre-school Learning Alliance supports the Government's vision '**to ensure that every child gets the best start in life and to give parents more choice about how to balance work and family life**'. We welcome the substantial investment by Government in the early years and in the development of affordable, high quality childcare. In particular, the charity welcomes the significant attempts that are being made to combat child poverty, the biggest problem facing children in Britain today – and its consequences.

The charity has a long-standing relationship with DfES and the Treasury and works closely with officials, policy advisors and other key agencies and organisations, including the LDA, to ensure that pre-schools can continue to play a pivotal role in the delivery of the Government's ten-year strategy for childcare. The Pre-school Learning Alliance not only contributes to the achievement of the Government's five outcomes for children; being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and economic well-being, 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. The Alliance's mission is to help children to succeed; create the childcare which families need; and build learning communities. At the heart of all of our policies is our work with parents, and for parents, who we recognise as the main educators of their children.

Through the charity's London regional centre we have forged effective working relationships with the London Development Agency, mainly through Denise Freeland, Senior Childcare Manager.

Our London regional centre works across 32 local authority areas and provides advice and guidance to approximately 2,500 member pre-schools. Staff at LDA have been keen to meet with us in order to understand the issues that are facing pre-schools, parents and childcare workers in London.

The Alliance was invited to tender for the pilot programme work with the Treasury and DWP, focusing on supporting women back to work. While we are fully supportive of the pilot programme and LDA's role in taking this work forward, we made the decision not to take part

in the selective tendering. Our reasons being the charity's lack of infrastructure within 3 of the 6 targeted local authority areas.

We are aware of the work LDA is currently undertaking on establishing a London Childcare portal and would welcome a single point of information that provides information on childcare places, links with Ofsted etc. Parents and childcare workers currently need to liaise with individual CIS's in order to obtain information when moving across London.

During the past two years the Alliance has opened 28 neighbourhood nurseries, gaining a wealth of knowledge and experience on route. We are aware of the LDAs research into the costs of building and refurbishing childcare facilities from the NNI capital build programme, with a view to producing a booklet. Guidance and information is always welcome by providers, however we would point out that research needs to include organisation such as the Pre-school Learning Alliance, firstly as we have first hand experience and secondly in order to ensure we are not duplicating information.

We are also aware of the capital gap funding provided by the LDA that provided 724 additional childcare places. We were disappointed that the distribution of this funding was via local authorities only, the Alliance has four neighbourhood nurseries in London, all of which have sustainability issues. Our view at the time being that all organisations working with neighbourhood nurseries in London, should have had the opportunity to benefit from the capital gap funding.

The Alliance welcomed the announcement in the government's 10-year childcare strategy, of the LDA's role in the Childcare Affordability Programme, making childcare more affordable for families in London. We are aware of consultation taking place with local authorities and would urge that this is extended to the voluntary and private sector providers in London.

We would applaud and support the work of the LDA with whom we believe we have a shared view in the desire to provide affordable, accessible childcare for all families in London that want and need it.

While we recognise the role given to local authorities in being the market provider, we would urge that all consultations and research include voluntary and private sector organisations, which are well placed to represent the views of early years workers and parents. Furthermore, that our providers are able to participate in all new initiatives on a level footing alongside local authorities.