

# THE 2004 GROUP MEMBERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE:

## An overview of the sector

The Group Membership Questionnaire (GMQ) is the Alliance's annual survey, sent to all members for completion every February. The GMQ gathers information from settings to improve our response to members' needs as well as information that allows the Alliance to effectively lobby government and other agencies on pre-schools' behalves. More importantly, the GMQ provides the organisation with a profile of its members and of a significant part of the sector more generally.

In the next few issues of *Under Five* we will reveal the results of the 2004 GMQ. We will take a look at the common trends and differences in service provision, operations and users across both provider type and geographical region. We will also feedback findings on the important issues of staffing; pay levels; training and qualifications; inclusion; and income and expenditure. In this issue we present an overview of differences between types of setting.

### Responses

In February 2004, 9,382 questionnaires were mailed out to Alliance members. 3,939 questionnaires were returned, representing a relatively high response rate of 42 per cent. This figure was slightly down on 2003 when the response rate was 47 per cent. Thank you to all who took the time to complete the forms. Given the numerous and important purposes that the GMQ data serves we strongly encourage all members to complete and return the questionnaire. The more groups that participate, the more comprehensive the result and therefore we receive a stronger indication of our members' needs. This increases our ability to tailor our services and products to our members' requirements and increases our 'bargaining power' when lobbying policy-makers and government.

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage response rates by childcare provider. As you can see the highest response rate by far was from sessional daycare providers of up to 3.5 hours.

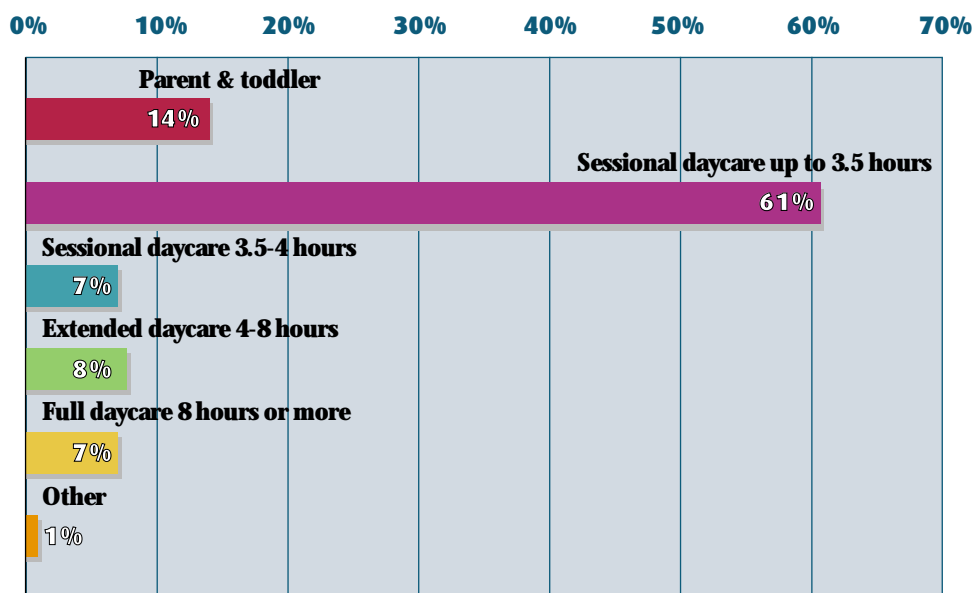


Figure 1

**Figure 2 demonstrates the regional distribution of the returned questionnaires. Members in the South East were the most likely respondents and those in London the least likely:**

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PROVIDERS Parent and toddler groups

Parent and toddler (P&T) groups differed significantly from other types of providers. They generated the lowest income and expenditure, opened for fewer hours (circa 2 hours) and for fewer times a week (circa 2.3 sessions a week compared with a national average of 6.2). However P&T groups were the most likely to rely on volunteers (4 attended P&T groups compared to a national

average of 2 in other providers) and were the most likely to be located in church buildings: 44 per cent vs. 31 per cent as a national average. Unsurprisingly, these groups were less likely to have a manager with a formal childcare qualification (35 per cent have no formal childcare qualifications compared with 1-4 per cent for other provider types). P&T groups also had fewer parents with English as a second language (1 per cent vs. 3-10 per cent for other providers). This was the same for children and staff from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups: the number of incidences of one child from a BME group in P&T settings was 25 per cent vs. 44-53 per cent for other providers.

## RESEARCH AT THE ALLIANCE

Research serves a number of important purposes for organisations like the Alliance. Research projects and information-gathering exercises help raise the external profile of the Alliance among key professional audiences. Research also produces valuable and relevant advice and support specifically tailored to meet Alliance members' needs and to benefit their work at a practical level. It also enables the Alliance to identify gaps in policy-making and current service provision, making necessary recommendations based on research findings and evidence to shape services and to form the basis of 'asks' to government and other agencies.

The Research Team has four main strands of activity:

- Information-gathering, including the Annual Group Membership Questionnaire.

- Internal research advice, support and consultation.
- Relationship-building with the research (both academic and non-governmental organisations) and policy-making communities, including forging research partnerships with external agencies/individuals and contributing to debate forums.
- Developing new and unique research such as the current research on asylum-seeking children in pre-schools.

The outcomes and findings of research projects influence and enhance the Alliance's contribution to key early years sector debates, initiatives and discussion forums. They also underpin the on-going development of new internal policies and the regular review of current policies, suggesting frameworks for their successful implementation.

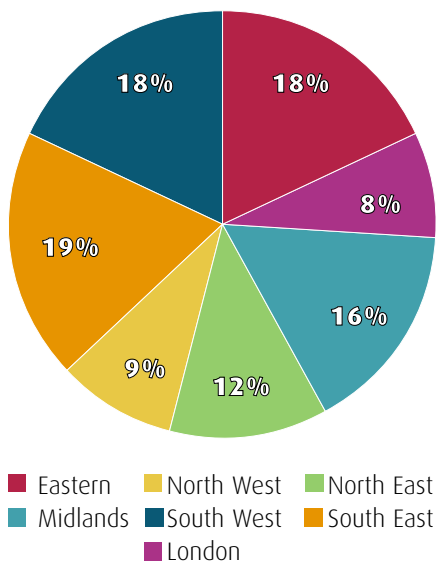


Figure 2

### Sessional daycare and Extended daycare

Sessional daycare providers of up to 3.5 hours and 3.5-4 hours and extended daycare providers displayed similar profiles. These types of providers were most likely to be located in community buildings – in fact, 20 per cent of extended daycare providers are attached to a school. They are also most likely to be registered with national schemes and grants (95 per cent of these providers are registered for NEG funding). Certain differences were visible between these providers however. For example, sessional providers lasting up to 3.5 hours were most likely to be located in a Sure Start area (56 per cent vs. 49 per

cent for all other types of providers). Sessional providers, regardless of session length, were most likely to carry out fundraising activities and to rely a lot on fundraising (between 83-85 per cent of these providers carried out fundraising). Extended providers caring for children with special educational needs were the most likely to have children who had reached Early Years Action Stage, Early Years Action Plus or Statutory Assessment (44 per cent vs. 39-41 per cent for other providers, excluding P&T groups).

### Full daycare

Like P&T groups, full daycare providers differed significantly from other groups. They were more likely to: operate as private businesses; own their own premises; and incur significant costs (one-quarter spent £100,000 or more a year). Full daycare providers tend to cater for larger numbers of children (61 children on average registered vs. 34 for sessional daycare between 3.5-4 hours and 51 for extended daycare); and employ staff qualified to Level 3 (7 staff vs. 3 staff for extended providers) and a manager qualified to Level 4 or 5 (26 per cent of managers in full daycare settings were qualified at these levels). Full daycare providers were also the most ethnically diverse provider with a much stronger presence of BME children and staff, as well as having around one-third of children funded by the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit.

We hope that the findings above have provided you with useful information and that they enable you to draw comparisons as to how your own pre-school contrasts with other similar providers and with other provider types. The GMQ is a valuable and crucial resource tool for the Alliance; it allows us to understand our members and their needs. This is all the more important in the present context given that early years services and the sector are undergoing rapid change. This information also aids us in creating services that meet those needs and increases our negotiating influence with government, funders and other agencies, as well as your own with local authorities and funders.

The Group Membership Questionnaire for 2005 will be arriving at your pre-school in late February. Given the variations in response rates by regions and by different provider types, we strongly urge all members to complete and return their questionnaire as soon as possible. **Help us by completing and returning your questionnaire and we'll make sure that your pre-school's voice features in how we develop our services and in our dealings with government and external agencies. ■**