

EXPANSION IN EARLY

Findings from the 2004 Group Membership Questionnaire

In our final special report on the findings of the Group Membership Questionnaire (GMQ)

The GMQ is the Alliance's annual survey of all member groups. The response rate to the survey was quite high, with 42 per cent of all member early years settings completing and returning the questionnaire. As a result, the findings presented here are representative of the developments on the question of expansion across Alliance member groups for 2004.

The early years sector has experienced significant expansion in recent years, connected to the growing importance that both policy-makers and parents attach to early years services and the positive value of accessing settings for children, particularly in terms of positive outcomes for children's development (cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural) and their future life chances. This expansion is visible in the growth in the number of services provided, the number of children attending and the operational hours of Alliance member groups' early years settings.

The data analysis of the GMQ indicates that over one quarter (26 per cent) of all member groups expanded their provision in some capacity in 2004. However, great variation exists depending on the type of provider. While **extended daycare** operating between 4 to 8 hours expanded significantly (49 per cent did so), **parent and toddler groups** (P&T groups) expanded the least (only 9 per cent).

Interestingly, certain regions expanded their early years provision considerably more than others. Early years providers in **London** and the **North East** were the least likely to have expanded their provision in 2004, with only 23 per cent in these regions expanding. However, in London we witnessed a greater expansion in provision for **P&T groups** – 11 per cent when the national average is 9 per cent. Providers in the **South West** were the most likely to have expanded their provision, with 32 per cent doing so against a national average of 26 per cent. Expansion in the South West is visible across the vast majority of childcare provider types and is around 4-7 percentage points above the national averages. This expansion in provision in the South West does not include **full daycare** where only 31 per cent expanded when the national average is 36 per cent.

The data analysis of the survey indicates that, on the whole, expansion took the form of three possible routes: taking on younger children (31 per cent of providers nationally expanded this way); opening for longer hours (again 31 per cent); and opening a lunch club (26 per cent). **P&T groups** and **sessional daycare** providers (both up to 3.5 hours and between 3.5 and 4 hours) were, however, more likely to choose just one route for expansion, whereas **extended daycare** providers often took multiple routes of expansion, on average between two to three expansion routes.

Around one-third of providers, irrespective of the provision that they provide, expanded by taking on younger children; this was the most likely route for expansion for **P&T groups**. On the whole providers of **sessional daycare** lasting 3.5 to 4 hours expanded by opening a lunch club and thus expanded both in terms of services provided and in terms of operational hours. Providers of **extended daycare** tended to opt for expanding their operational hours, increasing the number of **full daycare** places and providing additional activities or services, either a breakfast club or a lunch club and occasionally both. Providers of full daycare showed a more diverse choice of options when expanding, focusing less on expanding their operational hours, in part because their operational hours were significantly longer than those offered by other types of providers. Indeed, full daycare tended to opt for developing additional services. These include holiday schemes, after-school clubs, taking on older children and breakfast clubs. A third of full daycare expanded their provision by increasing the number of full daycare places and thus display a similar form of expansion to extended daycare. On average, full daycare mentioned over two possible routes for expansion.

Significant variations were visible at the regional level. Early years settings in the **North East**, **South West** and **Eastern** regions tended to expand by taking on younger children. In **London**, the **Midlands**, **North West** and **South East** expansion took the form of opening for longer hours. Across all regions there was a 5-18 percentage point increase in the number of Nursery Education

YEARS SETTINGS

Lia Antoniou presents the findings on pre-school expansion.

Grant funded places. In London, expansion was also seen in the number of new groups that opened, 14 per cent in London opposed to 5 per cent as a national average.

Providers also expressed an interest in further expanding their provision in 2005. Analysis of the data regarding their future expansion plans suggests that **more expansion routes would be selected by early years settings if they could**. Thirty-nine per cent would hope to open for longer hours, 28 per cent would open a lunch club, 18 per cent hope to create full daycare places and 17 per cent by taking on younger children. Interestingly only

3 per cent would consider taking on older children and 11 per cent would consider opening a new group. However, this shows an increase in the number of settings hoping to open a new group from 5 per cent in 2003, which may be representative of the sector becoming more sustainable.

We hope that you have found the information and data that we have been feeding back via *Under Five* useful in your roles and for your early years setting. We urge you to fill in the questionnaire that you have received for 2005 in order for the Alliance to provide you with the most accurate and up-to-date information.

