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Background

The information contained in this report details the first consultation exercise carried out by Working Group (WG) Five of the Early Years and Childcare Partnership (EYCP). The purpose of the exercise was to look at the choices made by parents about where their children would spend their pre-school year, from two perspectives. The first consultation, which was in July 2009 prior to the Nursery Education Fund (NEF) becoming available in September 2009, was to parents using registered pre- school Centres. The second consultation, which was in September 2009, sought information about why parents made the choice to send their children to a nursery class attached to a primary school.

The WG of the EYCP carried out the consultation as part of its responsibilities for Objective 5 of the EYCP Strategic Plan 2009 - 2012. Full information on the work of EYCP its membership and information on the Strategic Plan can be found on www.gov.je Objective 5 of the EYCP Strategic Plan is to 'Monitor the Impact of the Nursery Education Fund (NEF), which is the first State's Funding to be provided for parents whose children attend private sector registered Pre-School Centres (pre - schools and day nurseries). It is available to children who are four by August 31st in the year prior to them entering full time education, for up to twenty hours a week during school term time. Administration of the NEF is the responsibility of the Minister for Education Sport and Culture, who is also responsible for the EYCP.

The NEF funding, which was available from September 2009, meant that parents using registered Pre - School Centres had a greater choice about their children staying in their current setting until they went onto primary school, because of the financial support. The consultation with parents in this group was, therefore, planned to coincide with them making decisions about where their children would spend their pre- school year, and gain an understanding of what factors influenced their choices.

Children in Jersey are also able to access Nursery Classes attached to Primary Schools in the year prior to entering full time education, if they are aged four by August 31st. As this is a public provision there is no fee and children can attend for up to thirty hours a week. Although parents can apply for their children to have a place in any Nursery Class, this does not mean they will attend the school to which this is attached, as these decisions are made on residence in catchment areas.

The second consultation in September was to look at what had influenced parents' choice to send their child to a nursery class in their pre-school year.

Members of Working Group Five

Working Groups of the EYCP are made up of members from the many organisations represented in the Partnership. The people who are nominated to join a WG usually have a special interest in the work being carried out by the group, or their work role is pertinent to the EYCP Strategic Objective for which the WG is responsible. Membership of WG Five provides a good example of this mix:

Chair, Val Payne: who is also Chair of the Jersey Early Years Association (JEYA), which was instrumental in lobbying States Members to vote for the NEF, and manager of a day nursery that accepts children accessing the NEF.

Keith Posner: Business Change Manager at the Department for Education Sport and Culture (ESC) with responsibility for implementing the NEF.

Brenda Confrey: the person at ESC responsible for administration of the NEF to registered Centres, and Chair of the parent organisation Parents for Children, so also represents parents' views.

Gail Sparrow: manager of a pre-school and on the Committee of JEYA, representing pre-schools.

Jim Westwater: Head of Planning and Projects at ESC, with responsibility for the allocation of places in nursery classes.

Dr Sandra Mountford: Manager of Child Care Registration ESC, where administration of the NEF is located.

Linda McKenzie: a Primary School Headteacher, representing the Primary Heads Association.

Members of WG Five were responsible for the design of the survey in this report, and were supported in this by the Coordinating Team for the EYCP, which has been tasked by the Minister for ESC to support all aspects of Partnership working.

The Chair and Members of WG Five extend grateful thanks to managers of registered Centres and teachers in Nursery Classes for their invaluable support in distributing the questionnaires, and parents for providing this valuable information.

Contact can be made with the EYCP at eycp@gov.je or by telephoning the Lead of the Coordinating Team on 449490, for any further information about either the EYCP or this report.

Summary of Main Findings and Recommendations

- 1. Responses from the surveys to parents using private registered Pre-School Centres (pre-schools and day nurseries) and States Nursery Classes, have shown remarkable similarities on what influences parents' choice of pre-school in the year before their child started primary school. All parents rated preparation for school as the most important influence on this decision. Account will be taken of this by the Early Years and Childcare Partnership (EYCP) in its current work of developing a Pre-School Quality Framework, and parent representation will be given a key place in these discussions.**
- 2. Caring adults, and staff being trained, are also seen to be important influences on their choice of pre-school by both groups of parents. Taking account of this it is important their views are included in all discussions about the Qualification Framework for Early Years and Childcare in Jersey, currently being developed as part of the work of the EYCP.**
- 3. The influence of cost on choice of pre-school was given less emphasis than anticipated, in the first year the Nursery Education Fund (NEF) being available. A more direct question will be included in future consultations, after parents have experienced the benefits of the new States funding arrangement of the NEF.**
- 4. It was apparent from the questionnaire to registered Centres there was some confusion about the different types of settings available to children in their pre-school year. Members of the Jersey Early Years Association (JEYA) are to review information for parents, and information on the States of Jersey website and held at the Children's Information Service is to be updated to help improve communication.**
- 5. A wealth of information on the personal reasons for their choices of pre-school was given by parents, and this has been included in the report as means of improving communication with the provider.**

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to present the findings from two consultations, which were designed to obtain information on the factors that influenced parent's choice of setting for their children's pre-school experience in September 2009.

The first part of the report gives the results of the consultation to parents whose children were in a registered pre-school or day nursery in July 2009. The questionnaire, which was circulated to parents by the manager of the setting the child was attending, was designed to obtain the following information;

- what pre-school experience is the child having at the moment, are they at a day nursery, a pre-school, partly at home or are they having a combination of these experiences.
- what pre - school experience will the child be having in September 2009, will they be in the same setting and accessing the NEF, or at a nursery class attached to a primary school, or elsewhere.
- parents were asked to rate how influential a number of factors were on their choice of pre-school in September, by deciding whether the factor was very important, of some importance or not important or applicable
- parents were asked to narrow down the reasons for their choices by picking out the five most important factors that influenced their choice of pre - school in September, from a list of ten .

The second part of the report gives the results of a survey to parents whose children had just entered a nursery class attached to a primary school in September 2009. With the exception of the first question, which asks where the child is currently placed, the questions are the same as those asked of parents in the July survey. As well as answering questions by ticking a box in response to questions, parents were given space to make their own comments.

The final part of the report summarises the responses to both surveys, and highlights the main findings.

**Part One: Findings from Consultation One
Parents using Registered Pre School Centres
July 2009**

1. The Consultation

A total of 420 questionnaires were circulated to all parents whose children were in registered pre- school centres (pre- schools and day nurseries) at the beginning of July 2009, and 182 completed questionnaires were returned showing a 43% return. Table one below provides information on the spread of response, which are in answer to the question about where children were currently receiving pre school experience.

Table 1. Profile of returns by type of pre school centre

Type of pre - school centre	Number of returns
Day nursery	101
Pre-school	72
Nursery class	5
At home	1
with relative	1
other	2
Total	182

2. Pre-School in September

Parents were then asked to provide information on where their child would be in September 2009, and table 2 below provides information on their responses, plus the current setting

Table 2: Pre-school in September, plus current setting

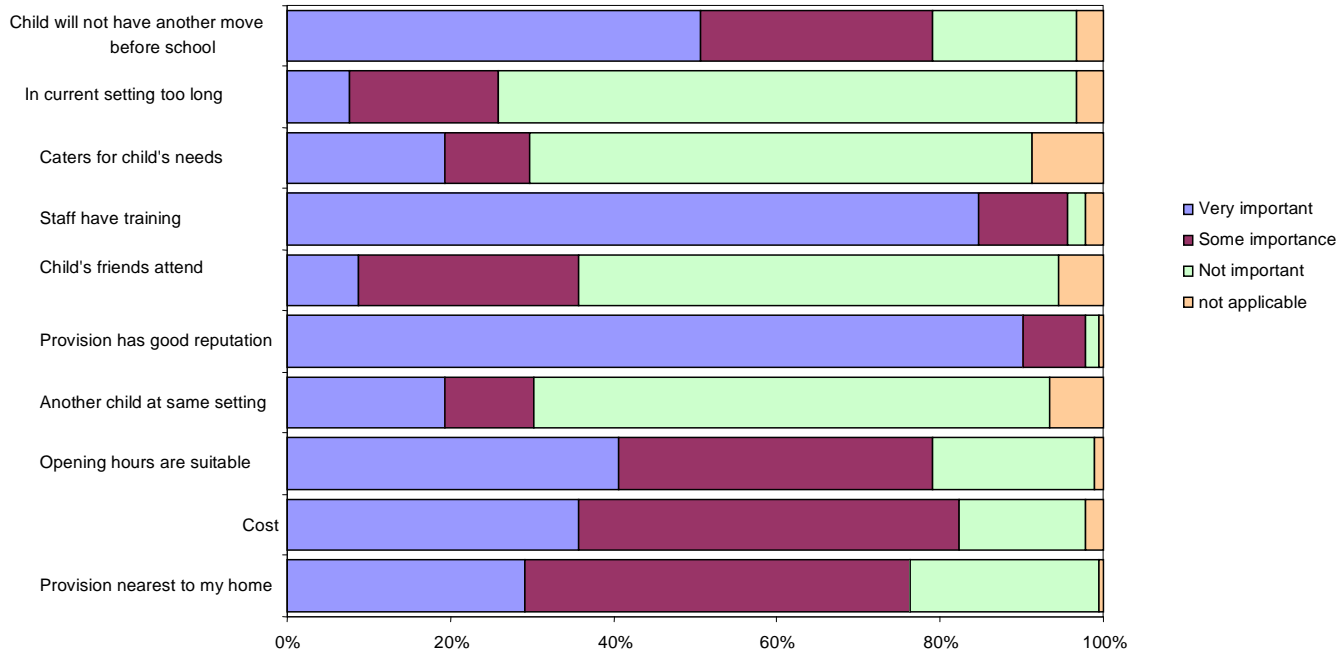
Current pre school experience	Pre school experience in September		
	Pre School	Day Nursery	Nursery Class
Day nursery	21	57	23
Pre - school	45	5	22
Nursery class	3	1	1
At home	1	-	
with relative			
other			
Total	70	64	48

It had been hoped from the details in table 2 to obtain some information on whether children were moving or staying in settings as a consequence of having greater choice, with the introduction of the NEF. However, it became apparent when inputting the information from the questionnaires that some parents were confused about terminology with regard to the various settings. Although 'pre school' is a category for registration for part time facilities, day nurseries often use it as the title for the section of the establishment that accommodates children in the year prior to entering school. Taking account of these doubts, it was decided by the WG to place lesser emphasis on the findings than originally intended, because of concerns about the validity of the information.

3. Influences on choice of pre-school in September

In the second section of the questionnaire parents were asked to rate the importance of ten factors as an influence on their choice of pre school experience in September, on a scale of very important to not important. Chart 1 below provides information on the degree of influence these factors had on parent’s choice.

Chart 1. Factors influencing parent’s choice of pre-school in September

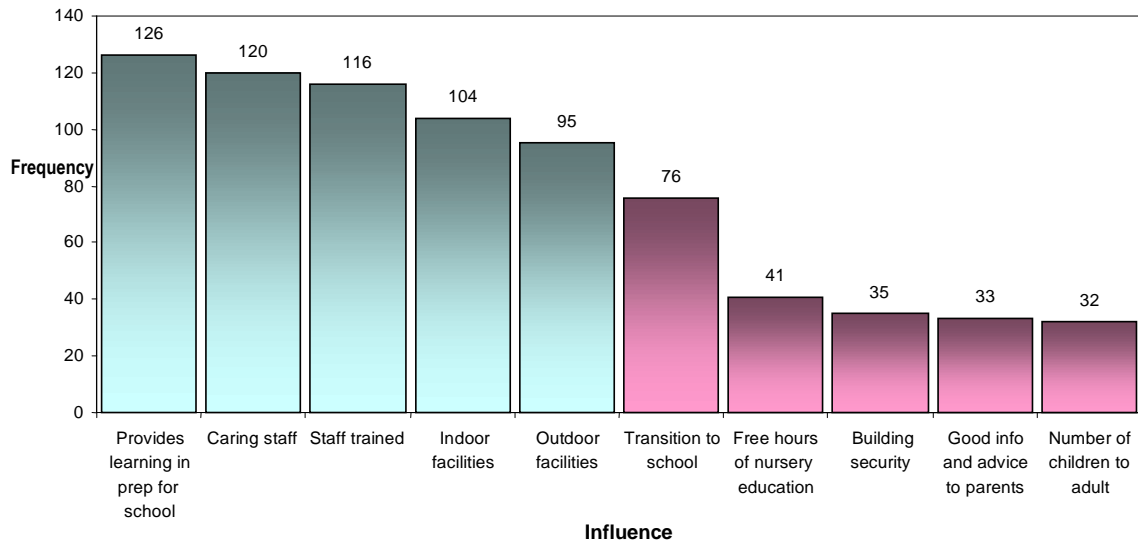


When promoting the NEF as a major benefit to children, early year’s professionals in Jersey stressed the importance of the funding to avoid children having too many moves before they entered full time education. As shown in Chart 1 this view is also shared by parents, indicated by the high response to it being an important influence on their choice. However, the two most important influences are clearly that the provision has a good reputation and that staff caring for their children are trained. A later section in this part the report, which gives the comments made by parents, provides additional information to supplement the findings in chart 1.

4. Five most important factors influencing choice

In the final part of the questionnaire, parents were encouraged to focus on their choices, by being asked to identify the five most important influences on their choice of pre-school, and Chart 2 on the following NEF page gives a profile of these influences.

Chart 2. The five most important influences on parents' choice of pre-school in September



Not unexpectedly, preparing children for school appears as the most important influence on parent's choice, as it is the year before their children enter school. Caring staff to look after their children is also not unexpected as a key influence. It is interesting that trained staff is ranked third, above premises. Although recent anecdotal evidence from registered pre-school centres has suggested that cost is a major factor in children leaving their setting in favour of nursery classes, this is not reflected in Chart 2.

5. Parent comments

The additional information provided by parents is given in this section of the report, and the original words of parents are used as far a possible, only changed to make sentences understandable. Of the 182 questionnaires returned 74 parents made additional comments. To make it easier for the reader as far as possible the comments have been organised under headings to which they apply from a-f

a) Family circumstances

The largest proportion of comments fell under this heading, so seemed to be the most important influences on parents' choice of provision. These included working hours, cost and convenience. Many comments also highlight the issues involved when both parents work full time, therefore care needs to be available for the whole day, and school holidays:

"I could not put in place childcare arrangements for pre/after school care in time to accept a states nursery place as work full time and cannot currently cut down hours"

"I work full time so the different options available to me are limited"

"A day nursery provision provides all year child care, whereas in the education provision would have to find holiday cover and wrap around care"

"...is the need to have your child with a provider that offers 8am to 6pm service for full time working parents"

"Day Nursery does not close through the holidays so I didn't have to find extra care"

"the hours at the current nursery suit my working hours"

Cost was an influence for some:

"Finances had a part in our decision...The private nursery our daughter attends is open all year round. Although the 20 hours is helpful we will have to pay in the holidays. We would like our child to have 30 hours of nursery care a week, but can not afford to pay for 30 hours during the holiday."

"Would only have sent my child to a pre school if I had a regular income so having free places in pre school settings is great"

"Same location as sister so only one drop-off and pick up, meaning can both go to breakfast club allowing me to do some supply work."

"The 20 hours free during term time will be of great help"

"The cost is a very important matter for parents and we feel the nursery fund should be offered a great deal of parents give up work for 3 to 4 years as they cannot afford nursery fees or it is not viable for them to continue to work. If this fund was available from an earlier age it would not only benefit parent and child but the government of Jersey."

"We were very relieved and pleased our child could remain at pre school...we would not have been able to afford 20 hours. We are extremely grateful the NEF is now available, Thank you."

b) Continuity, consistency and what is best for their child

Continuity and consistency of care and what parents considered to be in the best interest of the child are the next major influence on parents choice:

"It is most important I feel for him to have consistency rather than being at different places for each school holiday."

"It was important to me that my child did not move for one year before going to another school. She is extremely happy at the nursery she is already at so it seemed sensible to keep her there until school."

"My daughter is remaining at her day nursery because she is happy and settled there and I have confidence in the staffs ability to care for and nurture her... preparation for school is neither formal nor rushed."

"Child has taken so long to settle in so I think a move now would not help him... The staff have really got to know him and he feels very safe with them."

"We are very pleased our child will have continuity and stay with the friends she has made at pre school."

c) No choice

The comments in this section are about major issues for parents, as they wrote in far more detail in this than any other sections, and they seemed that they centred on pursuing a nursery class place.

“Although I am happy with my child’s current day nursery and I know he is happy there my choice of Pre School was not day nursery. It would have been States Pre School however his school does not have a nursery attached and we did not get a place in another states pre school.”

“the only reason our child will continue to go to the private nursery is because she did not get a place at the school nursery.”

“We would have liked our child to start at the school nursery and take the natural progression into the primary school. However she did not get a place at the school nursery.”

“I did not receive a free states nursery place, so I have been left with no choice but for my child to remain where he is.” (Day Nursery)

“I completed a form for my child to go to the school nursery as my elder child has been to this school from commencement, however, she was not given a place, to my total amazement and anger, as she did not fit the criteria...She has been in the Day Nursery unit since January and will be due to stay there until next September 2010 which I felt too long. I was offered a place at another nursery, but what is the point of starting her there when she will not be allowed to continue into reception as we are not in that catchments area.”

“we applied for a place in states school nursery but did not receive a place so have to continue where we are.”

d) Views on different provision

The comments in this section provided an insight into how parents’ views of the different types of provisions may have influenced their choices. There are some statements that indicate that school is best and there are statements that state that registered pre-school centres are best.

about nursery classes

“Teachers are best to teach, my child at pre - school just plays.”

“I have not been that impressed with the pre - school at the Day Nursery.”

“Teachers can do a better job at educating my child than staff who work in pre school.”

“I just want the best for my son; teachers are the best in a school place.”

“It is important to me that my child has the best possible start to her learning and development.” (move from Day Nursery to Nursery class.)

“The school is very tolerant, open and respectful of cultural diversity.”

“We find it v. important that appropriate learning and teaching takes place. The current day nursery our son is in does not do this and just ‘plays’. As a result we have noted him going backward in his learning development.”

“felt that a whole further 12 months @ day nursery was not going to be enough of a challenge in the latter stages of year and although there will be another change of school in 12 months time, there will be some consistency in approach/style that will benefit... (we’ll find out...)”

"The nursery class is involved in activities within our parish and we would like our children to benefit from that involvement."

"Even with the 20 hrs free, the system is still largely unfair as school nurseries offer a wholly different and more rounded experiences than day nurseries."

"Would be happier if the children did not watch television. It is an unnecessary extra. Private nurseries and their staff manage well without it – the schools should do so too."

"We have chosen to move our child to a nursery class as we feel it will provide our child with more of a social mix (currently v. limited no. of boys for example) and also because the values of the schools are highly important to us."

"Too many children to each adult but other advantages ended up outweighing this disadvantage."

about Pre-School Centres

"While we were offered a place at a school nursery this September, we declined the place."

"Caring and trained staff that provides the love and learning my child needs before anything else as this is the basis for a child's confidence and development which only accelerates their learning."

"My child goes to a pre school it is brilliant, he absolutely loves it. The staff are fantastic and will do anything to help. I am glad he will be staying for another year."

"she will have a cooked meal everyday."

"I find this nursery best for my children my elder one was their and he has very fine manners and great quality of learning experiences."

"I was happy to keep him in similar surroundings with staff who have known my son since he was 1 year old."

e) Reputation, positive relationships with staff and previous experience

The comments in this section are related to things that are particularly important to parents about the care of their child, and often give a personal insight on how these have influenced their choices.

"We experienced a smooth entry to school for our elder son because of the best staff and good care of one child so that is the reason." (Child at a pre school)

"The attitude of the workers at the pre-school is paramount."

"All my children have attended this pre school and I am happy and confident in the excellent care given."

Choice made because of "all round reputation."

"My son attended...now my daughter is following the same initial route. We therefore had a lot of confidence in keeping our daughter there for her last year."

"The pre school manager and staff are the main reason for my children going there, obviously the funding has confirmed the affordability for regular attendance, which we are grateful for."

"The Manager explained about recent research findings that 20 hours at this age provide the most benefit, so I do not worry that my daughter will be 'missing out' by not being at a school nursery."

"from previous experience with my eldest son the school nursery ticks all the boxes."

“My husband went to the same school it is also the closest to us and child’s childminder and good reputation.”

f) Miscellaneous: from parents who will be moving onto a setting other than a nursery class.

In this section are the comments from parents who, from what they say, are either moving their children from the current setting in September, but not to a nursery class attached to a primary school, or about particular points they wish to raise.

“While I appreciate I will not benefit from the NEF, its more important that I am happy with my sons pre school arrangement.” (This parent is choosing to pay for education)

“Some day nurseries even when offering 20hrs term time free care are expecting families to pay for their place in school holidays, whether they use it or not.”

“Better looking building”

“opted for St Georges nursery for 1 year... not sure however if St Georges have opted into the 20 free hours scheme which seems silly if they have not.”

“Why are some nursery classes attached to schools still charging the same cost as prior to the 20 hours free nursery?”

What is apparent when reading the comments from parents and this was equally so when collating the questionnaires, is that some parents are well informed about the different types of pre-school settings their child attends. However, other parents seemed less well informed, with some even confused about which type of setting their child was attending at the time they completed the questionnaire. What became apparent is that the comments clearly justifying choices seemed to come from parents that have a very good relationship with their provision.

This concludes Part One of the report, which details the findings from the first questionnaire to parents in registered Pre School Centres (pre-schools and day nurseries). The findings will be considered in further detail in the final section of the report, when compared with the consultation to parents using nursery classes.

Part Two: Finding from Consultation Two Parents using Nursery Classes September 2009

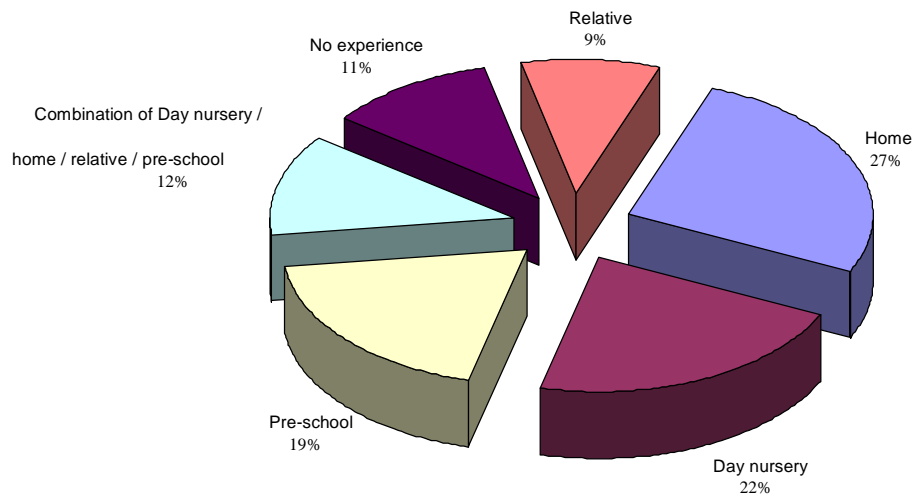
1. The Consultation

A total of 570 questionnaires were distributed to parents by the Nursery Teacher in the week that children started in September, and 273 questionnaires were completed showing a 48% return. The only question asked of parents in the first part of the questionnaire was about their child's pre-school experience before coming to the nursery class.

2. Previous pre-school experience

Chart 3 below provides an overview of the pre-school experiences children received before September. This information will be of interest to the professionals in the private regulated sector, which held concerns that nursery classes are mainly made up of children that have moved from their sector in the year prior to going to school. As Chart 3 clearly shows, almost the same number of children have not been in any other setting.

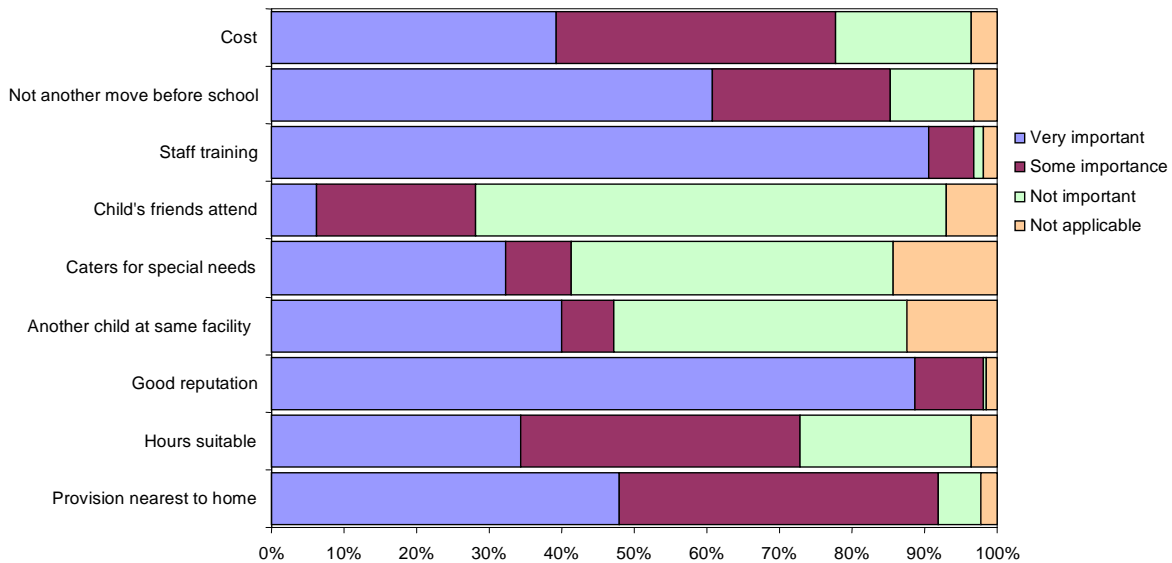
Chart 3. Pre-nursery class experience



3. Influences on parents choice of nursery class

Parents of children in survey two were given the same list of factors as the parents in survey one, with the exception of the question about the child being in the setting too long. They were also asked to rate the degree of influence on their choice of nursery class using the same scale of importance. The responses from the second questionnaire were collated using the same chart design as the first survey, and these are given in Chart 4 below.

Chart 4. Influence on choice of nursery class



What is interesting in these results is the high level of similarity between the two sets of information, with parents using nursery classes, as did parents in registered centres, placing importance on staff being trained and reputation as the major factors on choice. Again cost did not factor as high as had been anticipated as an influence on choice. Further discussion on the differences between the responses from the two parents groups is given later in the final section of the report, when the two sets of responses are considered in further detail.

4. Five most important factors influencing choice

As in survey one, the final question in the questionnaire asked parents to focus on the influences on their choice of a nursery class for their child, and the same ten statements were used. Chart 5 on the following page provides a profile of these choices.

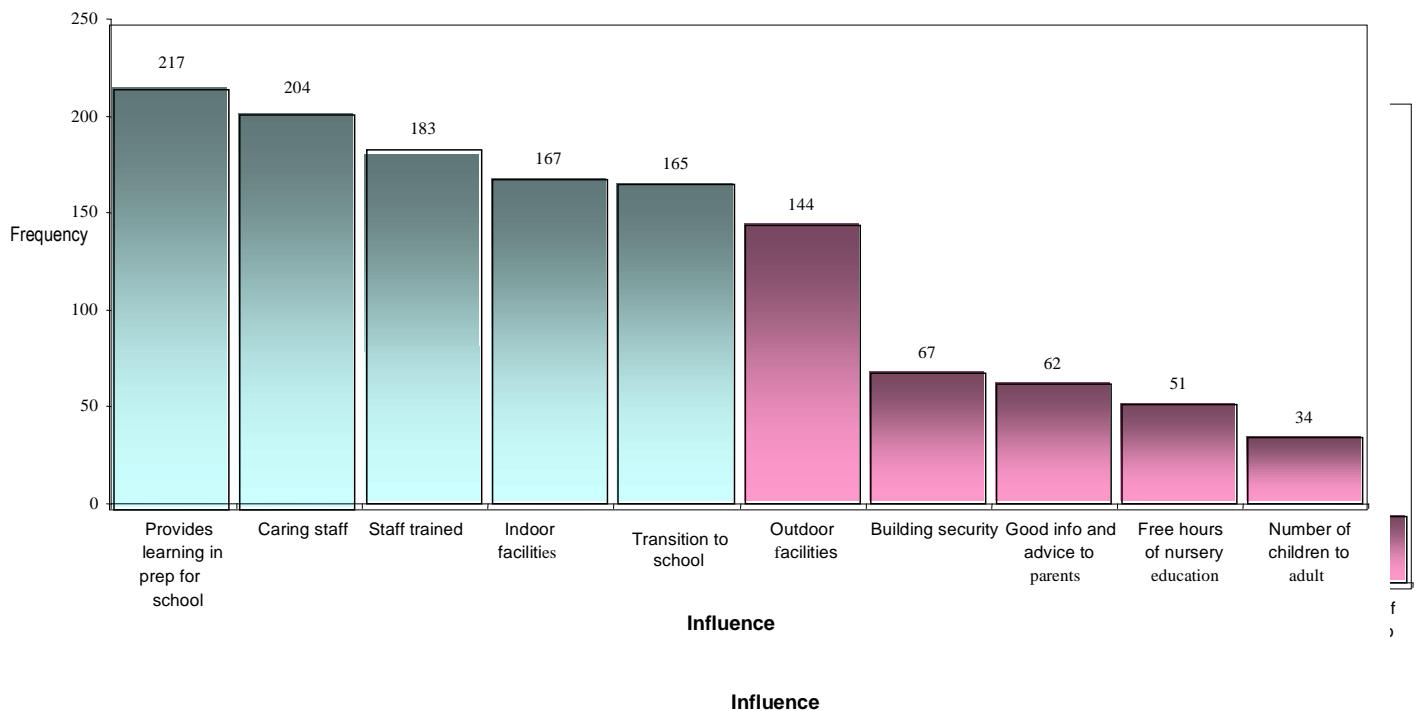
The findings found in Chart 5 below almost mirrors those found in the responses to Consultation One.

Not only is providing learning in preparation for school ranked first by both groups of parents, but the second choice of caring staff and the third of staff being trained are also given the same high priority as a major influence on choice.

Understandably, the parents of children attending nursery classes place the transition to school amongst their five choices, and this is also reflected in the parent comments from this group.

The information found in Chart 5 will also be of particular interest to the members of two other Working Groups of the EYCP, which are responsible for other Objectives in the EYCP Strategic Plan. The task of WG 1a to produce a Quality Framework for Pre School Children and its current work includes both teachers and practitioners, and WG 2 is tasked to produce a Qualifications Framework, which includes an evaluation of appropriate training for professional working in all aspects of early education and childcare.

Chart 5. Five most important factors influencing choice of nursery class



5. Parent comments

Of the 273 questionnaires returned 76 parents made additional comments, and as with survey one these have been organised into categories, which are from a-h.

a) School is the best nursery provision

This was by far the largest proportion of comments, and included what was considered to be the best for the child and for the convenience of the parents or carers. It is noticeable that some parents spent quite some time adding comments, saying what they feel about their children's care and education. Many of the parents took the opportunity to say thank you.

"The nursery offers an excellent learning environment, providing a good foundation for my child to enter into school. As a teacher I know the importance of an excellent nursery provision, preparing children for reception not just academically but socially and emotionally."

"Main reasons for moving to nursery class instead of staying at day nursery was benefits of school environment more focused learning making transition to reception easier.... Much happier having him at school nursery than a day nursery which I feel definitely does not offer the variety of learning and school structure which is beneficial for transition to reception"

"School also provides 'structure' to my son's daily routine"

"Ultimately it's the learning environment the trained staff provides"

"I chose a school nursery for my child as I believe this is an excellent introduction to structure of school"

"I am very impressed by this school nursery. This is my first experience of a school nursery and it has totally exceeded our expectations and meets all of the above criteria" (list on questionnaire).

"I want my daughter to have nursery experience in a school setting, with values that are shared with home. I want my daughters experience to be overseen by a qualified teacher who works within the whole school framework, and has access to resources used later on in the foundation stage e.g. ICT suite, school hall, reading books. A teacher knows what is needed in years ahead and can liaise with next class teacher. I want my daughter's nursery experience to be carefully planned to take advantage of the opportunities there are for class trips and visits. I want this planning/experience to be monitored by the head of key stage and head teacher. If I hadn't got a school based place I would not have used a registered centre. This is not a cost issue (with free 20 hours) but because of my opinion that a qualified teacher needs to oversee/ensure best practice. Incidentally, I am a qualified teacher. Thank you for asking us to complete this questionnaire and valuing parents' responses."

"Primarily I wanted my child to go to a nursery so that it would give them good stead to start school"

"I feel very strongly that nursery education should be valued as much as care and I think that all nurseries, private and states run should all have a trained teacher as well as nursery officers to ensure this balance is met."

"Attending the nursery provides the best transition, preparation and smooth changes as she moves up into big school"

"We are very impressed with the standards of care and general environment at this school, first class!"

"My child attended a day nursery for 3 mornings prior to joining the school nursery. I particularly wanted her to join the school due to the qualified teaching staff and fantastic facilities"

"The most important for me was the special needs department and facilities"

"I am very happy about the facilities the nursery gives to me and my child"

"The general feel of the area has always been very good. Since first visiting the new school this has only added that good feel factor of the area. Staff are very open and helpful. Child loves coming everyday, so much so she wants to come at weekends. Thank you"

"The staff at school have a professional approach in their teaching of the children but also have the caring and gentle nature required by nursery age children."

"The nursery is a warm, caring, social environment for my daughter. She is happy when she's there, and enjoys all aspects within the nursery"

"Surely starting nursery education at an early age can only be good for the child, interacting with other children/adults...prepare them for the future of school 'learning'!"

"It enables my child to be part of our local community and make friends in the parish."

"The most important thing for us was that our child was/is happy. Confidence in the staff and the facilities played a big part in that. Access to activities and educational toys is important and the environment with caring, professional staff and a group of peers was/is paramount (this as opposed to being in one class with varying ages from 2 to rising 5)."

"I moved my son from nursery to pre-school so he had a more structured day and learning activities in preparation for school. The teachers are brilliant."

"I believe that school nursery education will be of a better level and be better preparation for starting school. The staff at school so far are amazing."

"The main reason for my choice of pre-school is the staff and facilities on offer, including indoor and outdoor environment and what sort of activities happen throughout the day."

"It is important for me to know that my son is being well looked after by staff that have had the right training and are caring."

"My daughter has Autism and has a 1 to 1 keyworker accessing the 'Haven' provision. If my child continues through to reception onwards we will move our eldest to this school if there is a place."

"I like the fact that there are trained teachers and also Nursery Officers as I feel it makes a smooth transition into reception in terms of expectations."

"It is nice to see that the staff cares and look after our son so well when he is at nursery."

"...trained staff and child/adult ratio key for safety but caring staff also essential! Learning that keeps my child stretched (not bored) and is varied is also important."

"Could have ticked them all except 'has more free hours of nursery education, as they are all very important. It is the overall package that is key rather than just one thing over the other. Looking around is also important."

"The school is a fantastic nursery with great staff. It is a good foundation for children who continue their education at the school. Staff could not be more positive or supporting."

"The combination of a breakfast club and only one drop-off point for my two children means that I can do some supply teaching in schools and another parent, who has children in the same 2 classes, will collect them for me if need be."

"So the teachers are caring and trained so that they will care and look after my child and so that I know that my child is safe and has lots to do and learn. Thanks."

"I believe that states nursery schools offers my child the best introduction to 'school life' with great facilities, well trained staff and structure."

"I was extremely pleased when my daughter went to this school so it's nice to have her there."

"The staff at my child's nursery are trained and up to date with current practice. The equipment and resources at my child's nursery are up to date and well maintained. The outdoor learning environment is fantastic. There is an experienced nursery teacher. I am an early years practitioner myself and I am well aware of the difference in care/education that pre-schools and nursery provide."

"I have chosen these points because I believe it's not just about how good the play facilities are but I think if you have good, caring and trained staff to mind and prepare our children to what school will be like it's half the work done, I as a parent can't do everything on my own, so by having the teachers help and support, my child will be the best he can be."

b) Considered alternatives and reason for choice

"I visited many nurseries and spoke to many other parents before making the decision where to send my children"

"For me it was simple, once I had visited this preschool there was no question it was where I wanted my children to go. It was well run, clean, lots of toys inside and outside. The children are 'managed' well and not left and it has a wonderfully happy environment. My only worry was that I would not get a place. Now my second child is there I am delighted we made this choice."

"This school was the obvious choice as my older child is at the school"

"One of two nursery classes nearby, although pre-school is nearer and it was a hard decision to make regarding this. Although it does worry me a little that they do not have as much training as nursery teachers in pre-schools/non school nurseries, they should all do the same courses. One reason I was not sure about choosing a nursery class is the higher adult to child ratio at nursery classes. The resources are better at the nursery classes than other pre-schools"

"Staff trained in Makaton, which is very important due to being her main way of communicating when deciding which nursery was best"

"Our choice of nursery was based on many factors. Ensuring our child was safe and well cared for in a happy environment was our priority. We have been thrilled by every aspect of the dedication and commitment the nursery has shown our child and can only hope the nursery is setting the precedence for the rest of his school years."

"When we chose our nursery school for our child, it was paramount that it would suit both us and our child. All the staff are really good in caring for all the children which is very important for the child coming into a new environment and may find it all a bit strange. The facilities are well organised and each area of learning well marked out for all stages and ages of development, and the child learns through play, and yet follows routine which preps for the next stage."

"I don't live in the catchment area, but the school was chosen, mainly based on my sole childcare (mother) lives within walking distance to school (and she doesn't drive). I work

unsociable hours and I rely on my mother to drop off and collect my daughter when I'm working."

"I chose school because the nursery are friendly, helpful and have a clear understanding of my child's and my needs."

"Staff are extremely important, the fact that the staff at our nursery are approachable, flexible, professionally trained and experienced really influenced my decision."

"Grandparent looks after children before and after school, important that it's close to their home and suitable opening hours."

"We live in the parish so wanted our child to go to the parish school."

Choice made due to a good previous experience

"My older daughter went to this nursery and has now progressed to the school. She had such a fantastic time that I was keen for my youngest to share this, I was very impressed"

"I now have two children in this school..... as long as they are learning and they like their school, teachers and friends.....I don't care where the school is"

"My daughter attended the nursery and is now in Year 1, her year in nursery proved to us how good the nursery is together with the ease of her transition into reception."

"Our daughter attended this pre-school nursery class and we found the experience very positive."

"I went to the school as a child."

"It is reassuring for me to know that my daughter has been to this nursery and the same staff are now looking after my son. I know they will give him the best start in educating him into school."

Choice made due to a bad previous experience

"I lived next door to a private nursery for almost a year and did not enjoy seeing distressed children crying and being left to do so because there were insufficient staffing levels."

"My first son did not have a great pre-school experience and this did not help prepare him for the school environment."

c) Consistency and happiness of child

Consistency for the majority of parents seems to be a worry, with the exception of the first parent who had an alternative view.

"It does not worry me that they will not follow on to the school, children are open to change"

"It was really helpful with the move up into 'big school'

"The other important point to me would be having the choice not to move our child to their catchment primary school, having settled them in and then they have made friends"

"I am worried that my child will not get a place for reception at the school. We love the nursery and she has settled in very well and I would like consistency for my child's sake. If one gets a nursery place they should be offered a reception place"

"I think it is important for the children to have a smooth transition in school so they don't stay unsettled"

"My main concern is that my child is happy and settled and that is only possible if the nursery has the right atmosphere. This is achieved by a whole number of different factors and is different for every child and parent. It is also important that the home/school relationship is supported by both parties."

"We placed some importance on our child having continuity between pre-school and school. However sadly, there is no pre-school attached to our child's school. It concerns us that he may not be moving to school with friends."

"I believe it to be important for the transition to school to be as smooth as possible for my child. Attending the pre-school/nursery should help with this as I am sure the friends my child makes will also move on to reception so they already have friends and know the environment of the school. Thus making it easier to settle into school life."

"Making sure my child was happy and comfortable with a nursery place is vitally important and all the above statements are just as important as each other."

"Key factors are the happiness and well being of my child, both currently and in her transition into school"

"My child does not like change much, he loves his home environment, if we visit other relatives he always asks can I go home now.

When he first started nursery before he went he would say he did like that nursery and wanted to stay at his baby nursery. Once he started school nursery and noticed there was also a boy from his other nursery there, he was quite happy to stay. The only day he cried was when the other little boy was not at nursery one day and I received a telephone call to collect him as he kept crying and asking for Mummy. Once the teacher told him that Mummy was coming he stopped crying and we have loved nursery everyday."

"The ultimate goal is both the parents and kid are happy with the school."

"My child has consistency and a wonderful learning environment."

"Our child will hopefully go to reception class so the transition to school will be smoother and he can prepare properly."

d) Cost

Cost seemed to be an emotive issue for some parents but not for all. However, many parents took the opportunity to use the questionnaire to document personal views on this. Some parents chose to make comments about leaving the private sector and how this was a factor in their choice of nursery class.

"I am fortunate that cost is not an issue for me"

"Cost is not an issue for me, my other child attended this pre-school and is now at private primary school"

"Cost was a factor as we would like to have another child. This would have been impossible if we had to pay nursery fees as well as childminder fees"

"we were no better off financially, even with the 20 hours free" (This parent complained that the nursery needed to be paid year round even though she worked term time only)

"Cost is a factor to us however we are happy to contribute to nursery costs and the twenty hours is a huge bonus giving us a choice of nursery."

"I have two children both of which attended day nursery. This took up most of one salary coming in; my partner and I both bring in fairly good salaries. We think it is easier to stay at home with the children and sponge from the state but we both as hard working people have struggled financially for a long time in order to avoid doing this. Only when both children are at school will it be worthwhile for us both to be at work. Cost must influence everybody's decisions but it's not always the most important thing."

"The free hours are a bonus but the well being and education of my children is top of the list."

"My choice was dictated by the fact of cost. This reason is because my child was in a private day nursery, however, when school holidays occur, my husband and I can book holidays in turn, thus reducing the cost of child care cover. In private we would have had to pay."

"My husband and I struggled with the high cost of nursery fees with my first son and I have to admit that the school nursery 'free places' gave us the extra hours we needed as we could only claim 20 hours in the private sector. This was a bonus!"

"The cost was a main priority as we are hoping to have a second baby soon."

e) Reputation

"School and nursery have a wonderful reputation"

"My first choice of school was because of the reputation, but my child was allocated to another, I have seen this to be an excellent nursery too"

"Also, the nursery has a great reputation, a happy, safe environment, and lovely staff"

"I particularly wanted her to join the school nursery due to the excellent reputation"

"It also has a superb reputation."

"School has an excellent reputation!!"

"School has a good reputation based on important things, staff appear friendly, caring and helpful, school facilities. Nursery appears good and provides good learning."

"The school has a good reputation with an excellent provision."

"We chose this school nursery as it has an excellent reputation."

"I wanted our child to be at a pre-school with a good reputation, but most importantly to prepare for her first year of school next year."

f) No choice

It was apparent from these comments that most came from parents of children with special needs.

"location and siblings at school would have generally been important but in my case my son had one school to cater for his special needs so did not have the choice"

"I had no choice of nursery class as school caters for my sons special needs"

"My child joined school for its hearing unit, she is deaf."

"There was only one choice of school suitable for my daughter who is autistic."

"It is quite difficult to be in a position where parents do not know which school they will be allocated a place at, at the same time as selecting a pre-school. It would be helpful to have the place allocated at pre-school and school at the same time."

"No choice school nominated by states."

g) Private nursery not meeting our needs

"Sending our child to a private nursery would not have suited us as I work term time only. When looking at the private sector (we had been turned down by a states nursery place) we

were told that we had to pay during the holidays even though I would not have sent my child there during these times”

“We feel that day nurseries cannot offer the experiences school nurseries offer.”

“The nearest nursery does not seem to segregate the youngest (aged 2) from the eldest sufficiently (our son is one of the oldest in the class) and he was getting bored.”

“Was not happy with pre-school room of day nursery which my child attended which was the most important factor in making the move, so the move from day nursery to a parish nursery was not the easy option in terms of providing care as we are both full-time working parents, but felt it was best decision for our child, and their transition into school.”

“My son, who is nearly 4, needed more stimulation/education than offered at his old pre-school.”

“The outdoor area is important, as his day nursery outside area was in need of TLC.”

h) General comments

“I find it’s important for the staff to be caring to all the children. I think the security of the building is the most important. I love to know my child/children are safe. It’s important to me to be updated with all that goes on in school”

“The more important to my child is safety in the school, good staff to give her good learning. Thanks.”

“Nursery staff are excellent with all children calming them down when very upset, they are all brilliant ladies and very good at their jobs.”

“More education sessions to prepare them for school reception would be great. More time for lunch to be eaten.”

“Security is also an issue, but I would expect good security in any establishment where children of a young age got to!”

“Preparation for school and learning independence is key for me.”

“The hours are 9 to 2.45 which is a long period of time. I would have preferred say 3 hours a day, but the school is a good school, but is full-time. I do feel there should be more adults per no. of children. It’s not fair on the children or the teachers who must be under an enormous amount of stress looking after the care and safety of so many children.”

“I don’t have any problems for my little girl. I don’t have any answers.”

“Facilities indoor and outdoor are equally important.”

“Its important child/parent is listened to by staff. Its important child/parent trusts the staff. And they become an extension of our family.”

“Parents are very happy for the attention of all the nursery teachers with our child. Thank you for everything.”

“They are also very flexible with what hours my child attends which is an essential factor for me. Nursery placements should be ‘needs led’ not the child fitting into the hours of nursery.”

“Whilst freedom of choice is important, I do also strongly believe in encouraging parents to use settings close to home to encourage WALKING and avoid the car culture in this congested island.”

“It would be beneficial for working parents if a education fund was made available from an earlier age in order to assist parents who have to return to work.”

“School hours are school hours, so don’t really get why you have asked this question (the opening hours are more suitable for me).”

The comments found in this second questionnaire are understandably more focused than in the first one, as parents have made a decision about where their child would be placed in September, and this move had taken place when parents were responding to the questionnaire. It is also possible that some of the parents making comments in the July questionnaire had not yet made a firm decision, as the Nursery Education Fund was not available until September 2009. It is also possible that some parents answered both questionnaires, when taking account of the profile of children’s previous pre- school experience given earlier in Chart 3.

These points, plus others, will be considered further in the final section of the report that follows, which gives a summary of responses to the two questionnaires and considers the findings.

Summary and Conclusions

The intention of both surveys in this report was to look at the factors that influenced parent's choice of pre-school, in the year before their child entered full time education. One group of parents were in the position of having made this decision by September, whereas others were perhaps still contemplating it in July.

Whilst it could have been more informative to ask parents in Consultation One if they were going to keep their children in the current setting and access the NEF, it was decided to avoid this direct question. This was not only due to the system not being in place at the time parents completed the questionnaire, but because it was not the main purpose of the survey. However, future surveys will seek to obtain this information.

It can only be assumed, therefore, that a number of the parents surveyed in July have stayed in the setting and accessed the NEF, when taking account of the 365 children currently receiving funding at the time of writing this report.

It is also known, from fluctuations in this total, that some parents left the scheme to take up the late offer of a nursery class place between September and December 2009. It would be useful in further surveys not only confirm the reasons for this movement, but determine whether parents also refused a place in nursery class in favour of staying in the settings.

The high level of similarity between the two surveys about the key factors that influenced choice, gives clear message about parent's expectations. This is valuable information for WG One (a) in not only developing the Pre-School Quality Framework, but ensuring parents are part of this process.

The high expectation about trained staff also provides important information for WG Two which is currently defining occupational roles and associated qualifications for early years and childcare professionals in Jersey.

Parents in both surveys are clear that reputation is a major factor in choice. However, it was clear from responses in survey one that some confusion existed about the definitions of pre-school. The JEYA members on WG Five are keen to take this finding back to their organisation with proposals for a review of parent information, with the aim of achieving a unified term for the section of the establishment that accommodates children accessing the NEF.

The current review of the States of Jersey website is also taking account of the need for clear information for parents on the many definitions of early years and childcare.

There are some indications about cost being a factor in choice, but not to the level of importance anticipated. This could be explored in further detail in future consultations, in particular about the benefits of the NEF.

The rich information provide in the detailed parent comments are likely to be of great value to all early years and childcare practitioners. Not only in helping them review parent information, but understanding the range of factors that have influenced parents choice of pre-school. The personal comments will also provide an insight into why some parents accessed the NEF in a registered Centre, or others accepted a place in a Nursery Class attached to a States Primary School.

The valuable information provided in this first report will form the basis for all future consultations by WG Five in meeting its responsibilities for the Early Years and Childcare.