**Delivering the new extended free entitlement (EFE) in partnership: assessing demand**

**A practical guide to establishing what demand looks like for providers**

1. **Why consult parents on the likely demand for the EFE?**

Whilst local authorities have a statutory duty to undertake an annual *childcare sufficiency assessment* (CSA)to assess the supply of and demand for childcare in their area (including in relation to the EFE), providers might also find it useful to know a bit more about the intentions of the parents who currently use, or are planning to use their nursery or provision to help inform your business model. Knowing how many parents are likely to be eligible for and take up the their EFE, and when they would like the additional hours will help you think through, for example, the impact on:

* Income - if fee-paying parents are anticipating taking up their EFE, how might this affect how much money you receive?
* Places - if you have a lot of parents who are likely to be entitled to the EFE and would like you to provide it, can you accommodate the extra demand?
* Opening times – if a significant number of parents would like childcare outside your ‘normal business hours’, could you, and will you respond to this?
* Staffing – if you make any changes to your delivery model such as longer hours, do you have the staff to provide the additional childcare?
* Working with other providers – having worked through the implications for you as a provider, are there opportunities for you to team up with another provider to deliver a flexible offer that meets your business needs, the needs of parents, and the needs of children?

1. **Who to consult**

You will already have a good relationship with parents who use your provision. You will have parents who will become entitled from September 2017 and you may also have parents with younger children who may not be entitled now, but who could become entitled later. You will also have parents on your waiting list.

1. **How to consult**

There are a number of ways in which you can get feedback from parents on their likely entitlement to and take up of the EFE:

**Using a survey**

One way is to design a short survey of questions regarding the parent’s current childcare use, and future needs if they believe they would be eligible for new EFE. If you only have a relatively small number of parents you will probably find it easier to use a paper-based survey, but if you have large numbers of parents you might want to consider using an online survey. Paper based surveys are best given out to parents (rather than posted or emailed) and, you may find you get more back if staff are able to help (or at least) remind and encourage parents to complete them. Sometimes people use a prize draw to encourage people to complete and return surveys.

**Tips on designing and using a survey**

* Keep the questions specific and constant. If you change the wording or miss any out you will get inconsistent results.
* Ensure you only ask one question at a time.
* Try and keep the survey short and to the point – you will get more results and they will be better quality.
* Try to ensure questions have definitive answers – e.g. numbers or yes/no or choose from a list of options, not open-ended questions or ones requiring a descriptive answer. You will find these answers easier to collate and analyse.
* Decide on a deadline about three to four weeks away and aim to get all surveys back by then so they can be analysed together. Be clear about the deadline and how to return the survey.
* If possible, give face to face reminders regarding returning surveys if parents are completing them at home.

**Using a focus group**

This will involve bringing together a small group of parents who are representative of your parents as a whole group, and asking them a small number of questions. Focus groups encourage discussion and debate, so may be useful for capturing ideas and concerns of parents rather than the number of people likely to take up your service. Focus groups work best with a small set of standard questions that are designed to prompt further discussion.

1. **What to ask**

First of all, explain why you need to ask the questions and what will be done with the results. It is important to be honest but positive and emphasize how the results will help you provide a better service for children and parents.

Include a data protection statement, to reassure parents that the data will be kept secure, not shared with anyone and used for the purpose described. If you do intend to share the results of the survey, for example with the local authority make it clear that this will be in a format which will not identify any personal data.

Briefly explain the new EFE and how parents can access their annual 1,140 hours. Set out the current eligibility criteria (see [**FAQs**](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/FAQs%2030%20Hours%20Free%20Early%20Education%20Entitlement.docx) for detail about the eligibility).

Ask if the parent thinks they would be eligible, and if so ask the following:

* Name of parent – contact number or email address and postcode
* Number and ages (or dates of birth) of children aged two, three or four years
* Whether the parent thinks they may be eligible for the EFE
* Current childcare arrangements for any children under four now (from a list which should include friends and family)
* What days/hours would they require when accessing EFE (give a set of options here e.g. 7am - 5pm, 8am - 6pm or 9am – 7pm) including any requirements during holidays.
* Do they have any special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); if yes, please describe)

If you have already decided to work with another provider to deliver the EFE through a partnership approach, you might want to describe how you will do this and ask if parents would be happy to use this type of childcare.

Any [**Example of a Short Demand Survey**](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/Example%20of%20a%20short%20demand%20survey.docx) can be downloaded from this section of the toolkit.

1. **Analysing and using the results**

Depending on how responses you have, you can either read through the surveys and ‘get a sense’ of the responses or use a simple spreadsheet to enter the information and help you analyse it.

The things you would want to find out about are:

* Number of current children who are likely to be eligible for the EFE from September 2017 or at a later date.
* Number of current children who are likely to take up the EFE from September 2017 or at a later date
* Days and hours of EFE required for these children
* Number requiring holiday EFE
* Number of children with SEND

Using this data, you can start to plan their provision considering;

* are we able to offer enough places to meet the likely demand in 2017?
* are we offering the hours and days parents need EFE in order to work?
* if not, what could be changed, in the way of opening hours and staffing?
* is there a need to expand or open new premises?
* is there funding to support this?
* could we link up with another provider or group of childminders to offer more flexible access to the EFE offer, covering holidays, weekends, evenings, and overnight care if these are required?
* how can we ensure children with SEND have fair access to the offer, and benefit from high quality childcare?
* what is the demand likely to be in the long term, and will we be able to meet it?

These are demanding questions, but they will need to be tackled if the roll out of the Government’s new EFE is to be implemented, and the sooner you have an idea of the likely demand, the sooner you can start to make arrangements.