**Case Study: Delivering the new extended free entitlement (EFE) through a partnership between a Nursery School and Children’s Centre and a local Childminding network**

**The new EFE for three and four year olds**

The new EFE three and four year olds which comes into effect from September 2017 will principally be available to children whose parents are working 16 hours or more per week and earn at least an average of 16 times the national minimum wage (NMW) or national living wage (NLW). At the current rate, this means that a parent must earn a minimum equivalent of £115.20 for over 25 year olds and around £107 for a 21 year old. The upper limit is £100,000. In two-parent households, both parents will have to be working and meet the criteria individually. For more information about the eligibility criteria please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section of the toolkit in [**Overview**](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/overview-dfes-30-hours-mixed-model-partnership-toolkit).

Currently 94% of three year olds and 99% of four year olds nationally are using some or all of the current EFE entitlement (the universal offer)[[1]](#footnote-1), although there is some variation locally, with lower uptake in more deprived areas.

Children whose parents do not meet the criteria for the new EFE will continue to have access to the universal offer.

**Childminders as a key partner in a ‘blended’ offer**

There are a series of opportunities for childminders to become a key player within a blended approach. For example a childminder could:

* work 50% of the week off domestic premises in partnership with a school and/or private, voluntary and independent (PVI) provider
* continue to deliver from home in partnership with a school and/or PVI provider to split the childcare across providers and premises
* become part of a childminding agency to work in partnership to deliver the offer.

**What is a blended offer?**

A blended offer is where a partnership of providers share the delivery of the offer between them. The partnership might include:

* schools
* PVI sector, including sessional and specialist, providers e.g. for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and those who currently only deliver out of school (OOS) provision
* childminders
* children’s centres (CCs).

The key principles are to maximise the use of space in buildings across the day and year and use a pool of staff available locally to achieve efficiency in delivery. Children’s wellbeing is also at the heart of a blended offer.

In some cases of a blended model, children stay in one building and staff from two providers deliver a joint offer. In another approach, the children move between buildings in the course of the day or year. Finally, there might be a situation where both staff and children move across sites.

For more information about partnership delivery please see the [**Overview**](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/overview-dfes-30-hours-mixed-model-partnership-toolkit) and [**Partnerships**](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/partnerships-dfes-30-hours-mixed-model-partnership-toolkit) sections of this toolkit.

**Why a blended offer?**

The DfE 30 Hours Mixed Model Partnership project (the project) demonstrated that one of the challenges for group providers of the EFE for three and four year olds is finding sufficient space to deliver the offer themselves solely on their own site and remain sustainable.

Despite those challenges, there are few good examples nationally of childminders being considered as a natural partner in resolving the issues posed for group settings by the new EFE.

Childminders have long had to struggle to establish a reputation as professional providers of high quality early education. Both the DfE 8-6 Extended School projects and this project have demonstrated that there is still some distance to travel in the development of a full understanding across the early years sector of their contribution to good and outstanding outcomes for young children through the same delivery of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) that applies in group settings[[2]](#footnote-2).

Apart from the generic role of providers of early education, childminders can play an especially beneficial role in delivery. Some children would benefit from spending at least part of the week in a small setting, like that provided by childminder in their own home, rather than in a group provision where there may be as many as 13 children to member of staff[[3]](#footnote-3). In any group setting, there will be at least eight children per member of staff. Often children with SEND can derive particular benefits from being with a childminder because of their greater ability to meet the individual needs of children in a small group.

**Challenges**

There are different challenges in delivering a blended offer depending on the current business model of each provider. Each of them offer opportunities for the involvement of childminders as part of a solution. Some of them are:

* **Sessional delivery model:** schools and pre-schools have traditionally had a delivery model based on two sessions per day, term-time only (TTO). This is a 15 hour per

week offer since the 570 hours of entitlement are split over 38 weeks. In this scenario, the majority of settings will take the maximum number of children their space permits and, therefore, even where only 80% of children are entitled to the new offer, there simply will not be sufficient space to accommodate the number of children as before.

In the case of schools, the intake to reception class is factored on maximising the number of children in nursery class(es) and a reduction in the number of nursery children could cause risks to the school because of a consequential lowering of the number of children in reception class. This sessional offer also can involve parents purchasing additional hours which can be the basis of the sustainability of the provision.

* **Sessional model for mixed age groups:** some providers in the project are currently delivering a sessional model for a mixed age group over a short day TTO and were community nurseries that additionally offered affordable childcare for low income parents. This took the form, for instance, of a session for three and four year olds in the morning, one for two year olds entitled to the early education entitlement in the afternoon and spaces for paying parents from 9am – 4pm. In this case, the sustainability of the provision was at risk if they were to deliver the new three and four year old EFE alone.
* **Full day all year round:** other providers in the projectcurrently deliver an all year round offer that combines sessions or full days of EFE for three and four year olds and the availability of paid additional hours all year round. In this situation, the concern of providers was the potential reduction of income if the local hourly funding rate was considerably lower than their charge for paid hours. (For more information on the proposed new National Funding Formula[[4]](#footnote-4) please see the FAQs document in the [**Overview**](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/overview-dfes-30-hours-mixed-model-partnership-toolkit) section of this toolkit).
* **Sessional TTO model already delivered in a loose collaboration with childminders:** a number of sessional TTO providersin the projectalready had established a loose collaboration with childminders to deliver additional hours over and above the current universal offer. In order to remain sustainable when the new EFE entitlement is introduced, they were planning to extend their own hours of delivery but did not want to undermine the businesses of local childminders.

**An example of delivering a blended model with childminders at its heart:**

This example describes how one partnership that took part in the project is developing a blended offer.

The partnership is led by a nursery school and children’s centre and eight members of a 17-strong childminder network. The network meets once a week at the children’s centre and a crèche is provided for the children so that the childminders can spend their time discussing their business needs, sharing business practices, undertaking training etc.

The school has a 120 place nursery with an attached children’s centre. Both were inspected a couple of years ago and judged to be Outstanding.

There are 72 places for three and four year olds and 48 two year old places (this is increasing to 60 shortly as the nursery will be using the children’s centre stay and play room in the afternoons). All children receive either EFE or the two year old early education entitlement. There are no fee paying parents.

The nursery is open 8.45am – 11.45am and 12.35pm – 3.35pm term time only.

There are three teachers plus nursery practitioners and the nursery operates on a ratio of 1:8.

The childminders operate a mix of fee paying and funded children with numbers varying as children come and go. Many of them already either pick up from or drop off at a nursery and many provide additional hours over and above.

The partnership is in one of the early implementer local authorities and the partnership has been allocated 12 places, delivered over 38 weeks from September 2016. The nursery had to submit a bid to the local authority on behalf of the partnership and had to detail the approach they were going to take. The options were defined by the local authority. Only outstanding or good providers will be used (plus those who have just registered and have not yet been inspected by Ofsted).

The blended model, which will run for the project period only in the first instance, will involve children spending 15 hours with a childminder and 15 hours at the nursery with any additional hours being delivered by the childminder and paid for by the parent(s). The proposal is that the first 15 hours will be paid at the current rate (around £4.80) with the additional 15 hours funded at £5.17 during the project period. Childminders will either pick up from or drop off at the nursery and walk children between the two settings. The 15 hours with the nursery will most likely be three hours a day for five days. The 15 hours with the childminder could be more flexible

The responsibility for checking eligibility will be with the local authority during the project. Because places are limited priority will be given to children with identified SEND and children who are already attending or have a place confirmed at a selected trial provider in September 2016. If all places are not taken up, then any other eligible children will be considered.

**Emerging issues from the partnership**

The local authority is an inner city, outer London borough with a high density population and high levels of deprivation. The local authority has assessed that it will need an additional 415 new places – 25% of which will be for children with special education needs and disabilities (SEND).

There has been a detailed discussion about whether it is better for children to be at a childminder in the morning and the nursery in the afternoon or vice versa.

A benefit of having a child at the childminder in the morning and the nursery in the afternoon was that children could do their energetic play (bikes, climbing frames etc) in the afternoons which parents say helps them to sleep better in the evening.

A benefit of having a child at the nursery in the morning and the childminder in the afternoon was that children could have some quieter time in the afternoon so that they would be more relaxed when picked up by their parents.

The conclusion was that it is probably more down to the individual child than any specific pattern that could be applied across the board. In this respect this model provides an opportunity to tailor the childcare arrangements to suit the needs of each child.

A number of challenges to this blended approach were identified which will be worked on during the project year:

* Allocating places so that provision best meets the needs of the child but also supports working parents.
* Tracking children’s learning and development. The council has an online EYFS tracker in place which the partnership could explore more fully so that the two practitioners are using the same recording system and have access to view each other’s input. This could also be shared with parents. Another option that is being explored is for practitioners to meet formally once a term to discuss each child’s strengths and areas for development.
* Giving feedback to, and sharing reviews with, parents. The nursery currently closes for a day and arranges appointments to meet parents to discuss their child’s learning and development. Childminders tend to have these meetings in the evenings when they don’t have children. Feedback to parents could also be streamlined either through a three-way approach or with one practitioner taking the lead so that parents are given a consistent message.
* Settling in and whether this should be done simultaneously or whether children should settle with one provider before settling with the other.

**Key lessons**

Relationship building is important. Different practitioners work in different ways and it is important that these are understood. Similarly, ensuring there is professional respect with all practitioners delivering high quality learning and development that meets Ofsted’s inspection requirements.

Sharing tracking and joint progress reports so that feedback to parents is consistent.

Providing a crèche for childminders to attend meetings is effective and enables them to attend meetings during the day but this has to be carefully balanced with parents’ expectations that they are paying for the childminder to look after their child and not to leave their child in a crèche.

Managing and understanding messages to parents in relation to how the model operates, benefits to children, safety issues etc.

Managing parents’ expectations, particularly during the project period where not everyone who would be eligible during the full roll out will be able to access the enhanced entitlement. This has been done by having clear eligibility criteria and by centralising applications through the local authority.

**The legalities and other practical matters relating to a blended offer**

There are a range of issues that need to be tackled in order to make such an arrangement to work smoothly, effectively and safely. Please see the [**Partnerships**](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/partnerships-dfes-30-hours-mixed-model-partnership-toolkit)section of this toolkit for more information and helpful tools.

1. The current entitlement (the universal offer) is 570 hours per annum of free early education for all children commencing the term after their third birthday. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ofsted’s ‘[Childcare inspections and outcomes](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/childcare-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-march-2015)’ show as of 31 March 2015, 85 per cent of providers were rated as good or outstanding during their most recent inspection, up from 78 per cent a year earlier. Of those judged as good or outstanding, 84 per cent were childminders, an increase of eight percentage points on the previous year. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This refers to a provision where there is a qualified teacher present for three and four year olds. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The details of the proposals and the projected hourly rates for each local authority can be found at: <https://consult.education.gov.uk/early-years-funding/eynff> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)