Rt Hon Frank Field MP  
Chair, Work and Pensions Select Committee  
House of Commons  
SW1A 0AA  

15 November 2018  

Dear Chair,  

Thank you for your letter dated 29 October regarding the evidence I gave to the Committee. Firstly I would like to thank you and the Committee members for the opportunity to represent the views of the nursery sector on this important inquiry which affects parents, families and childcare providers.

National Day Nurseries Association strongly believes that a simplified payment approach for all childcare support to parents is needed and we welcomed the opportunity to share this with the Committee. Having further considered the Committee’s questions about whether government departments making direct payments to providers would negate the need for deposits to reserve a child’s place we feel this would still need to be an option available to providers.

As highlighted in my oral evidence, nurseries need to be able to plan in advance for how many children will be taking up places with them. Statutory staff-to-children ratio requirements mean that rotas and staffing levels have to be set according to the number of children at a setting. This may mean nurseries taking on additional staff according to demand or increasing the contracted hours of existing staff.

Staff to children ratios:

- For children aged under two there must be at least one member of staff for every three children
- For children aged two there must be at least one member of staff for every four children
- For children aged three and over there must be at least one member of staff for every eight children or one member of staff for every 13 children where the staff member holds qualified teacher status.

In addition to the ratio consideration, nurseries must also ensure that a proportion of staff have attained a specific level of qualification. It is right that childcare and early years settings are highly regulated to ensure the safety, welfare and development of children whilst they are with a childcare provider. These requirements do mean that nurseries need to be able to accurately assess how many children will take up places with them.

To ensure they can plan for their next intake, that staffing levels are safe and legal and ensure the sustainability of their businesses, nurseries need to be able to take deposits from parents to hold places and receive payments in advance. Deposits secure against a risk of parents declining to take up an offered place at the last minute, when costs may have been incurred in preparation or other children turned down due to capacity issues. There is a risk involved for the provider, just as with other large purchases or commitments to venues for events.
On the Committee’s second question of usual waiting times between having a confirmed place and starting at a nursery we would suggest that the 4-6 week figure would be the norm. We don’t have any detailed data from our members on this point as it hasn’t featured in surveys we do with the sector. Individual nurseries will have different approaches and this time period may fluctuate depending on capacity, staffing and the family’s circumstances as well. There may be circumstances where a place can be arranged and filled much more quickly but the norm would be to have a period of weeks between acceptance and taking the place.

I hope that this information helps answer the Committee’s questions in this inquiry. If I, or NDNA, can be of any further assistance on this or any other matter, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

Jonathan Broadbery
Head of Policy & External Relations