



HOUSE OF LORDS

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Inquiry on

AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE

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Questions 55 – 73

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10.35 am

Witnesses: Gill Jones, Sandra Mathers and Ivana La Valle

Professor Cathy Nutbrown

Members present

Lord Sutherland of Houndwood (Chairman)
Lord Brabazon of Tara
Baroness Massey of Darwen
Baroness Noakes
Lord Patel
Lord Sawyer
Baroness Shephard of Northwold
Baroness Tyler of Enfield
Baroness Walmsley

Examination of Witnesses

Gill Jones, Deputy Director for Early Education, Ofsted, **Sandra Mathers**, Senior Researcher, University of Oxford, and **Ivana La Valle**, Research Consultant, University of East London.

Q55 The Chairman: Welcome. We appreciate you being with us. The written evidence that has come in from Ofsted has been processed and thought about, and we can talk about some of that in the course of the next hour or so. The Committee names are all round and I will not ask them all to say who they are. My name is Sutherland. I have the pleasure of chairing this Committee on a very important topic and we hope to report some time in the early spring in good time for the discussions that will take place around the general election. There are a couple of practical points. A record is being taken verbatim and will be published. You will have a chance to see that just to make sure any points can be accurately represented in relation to what you have said. The other thing is, we are now online and on camera so every little twitch is being beamed across the globe. That should put you off forever. Just to remind you of that, we are online and we are being broadcast.

The work of the Committee is now in full flight, positive flight, and we have a string of witnesses coming over the next few weeks. If at the end of the session you take the view that there are things you wish you had said or perhaps you were not as clear about as you

might have been, feel free to be in touch with the Committee Office and send in further notes.

Shall we move, then, to begin the questioning? But as we do so may I ask you just briefly to say who you are for the microphone so those recording it will take a voice and an opinion and put them together throughout, just very briefly.

Gill Jones: I am Gill Jones. I am Deputy Director for Early Education at Ofsted.

Sandra Mathers: I am Sandra Mathers. I am from the University of Oxford.

Ivana La Valle: I am Ivana La Valle from the University of East London.

Q56 The Chairman: Thank you. The first question just to start may sound a bit naive, but it is my job to be naive and then learn and be informed from you: what is quality in childcare and in early education? Do you have a succinct view about what defines quality in this area? Who would like to start?

Gill Jones: Our view is that it is the care and the education that is provided for a child, the conditions that allow a child to learn and to make progress and to be at a standard and level of development that will be typical for their age. The conditions for quality include high-quality practitioners who understand a child's development at the different stages and what they need to do in order to help them to make progress.

The Chairman: Thank you. I take it that is what would inform an Ofsted inspection or report, that picture of what quality is?

Gill Jones: Yes; the health, the care, the welfare and the education.

The Chairman: Thank you. Sandra Mathers?

Sandra Mathers: Yes, so I would add what research tells us that children need. We know that they need warm and responsive interactions with sensitive adults—adults who like being with children. They need support for their communications, their language, their

learning and their thinking. They need stimulating activities and resources—toys and materials, for example—and they need opportunities for physical activity. As Gill has said, there are various conditions that help us to achieve those things: good qualifications and good ratios, for example.

I would add an extra dimension for disadvantaged children. For them, because they might not be experiencing everything that they need at home, it is particularly important that good-quality early years provision is part of a wider system of integrated support for the children and for families as well.

The Chairman: Can I ask just ask a little supplementary on that? Does what you say apply to all ages up to the age of five or would you differentiate between very early years and, say, later—three, four or five years old?

Sandra Mathers: Yes, I think many things are the same for all children but for children under three it is the relationships that are most important: secure and stable relationships with adults who know them well and with whom they can develop secure attachments. The ratios are particularly important here. Also, I think, staff who know how to set down foundations for learning, who know, for example, that it is important to talk to babies even though they might not be able to talk back yet. Then as children get older I would say that you need staff who increasingly can support their learning and their thinking, and challenge that. Supporting children's interactions with each other becomes increasingly important as well, because peer learning is important.

The Chairman: Do you want to add anything?

Ivana La Valle: Yes. My expertise is doing research with parents and their views of early education and childcare, so that is why I am the parents' voice here, based on the extensive research I have done in the past 15 years. When you ask parents what a good-quality setting

is or what good care is, what they are looking for is for someone who will care for the child as well as they do or even better than they do in some respects. It is linked, inextricably linked, to being a good parent. A good parent will send a child to a good setting. This applies particularly for very young children, children under the age of three, but the need to find someone who is a substitute parent does not stop at three and they want someone who can meet the child's individual needs.

The things that parents look at in a setting are very similar to the ones we have been discussing. They will go to a setting and decide it is good quality if there is a lot of interaction between staff and children, so there are enough staff to look after the children. They will look at how much staff talk to parents about the child: what the child has done during the day, what the child has eaten, was he or she happy or sad, what happened during the day. They would also want a setting that supports or can support the child's development. In that sense they would look round the setting and look at the quality of the staff, and whether they have enough experience or qualifications to look after the children properly and support their development. Again, they would see a good setting as someone who will help parents respectfully to support their child's development at home, to tell them what they can do at home to support the home learning environment.

A good setting for parents is one that supports children to be healthy. They will look at things like what children eat, whether there is enough space to run around and whether there is an outside space for the children to go. Again, a sign of a good setting for them is someone where respectfully they might give some hints to parents what they can do to support children being healthy at home. These are the more general criteria parents use, but then it is very much an individual thing because it is about an individual child, so there are very specific needs some parents and children have. For example, for parents of disabled

children a good setting is one that has enough expertise and resources to support the needs of that child. Many disabled children do not attend an early years setting because there is not that expertise available.

There are also parents who need support with their parenting skills or with other issues they have in their lives. An early years setting can open a door to that kind of support, either low-level support that can be provided from setting staff or referral to more specialist support. That is very important for a small minority of families and has a big impact.

For parents from ethnic minority communities, a good setting is one that will respect and celebrate their culture and their traditions. Last but not least, a good setting for some parents is a setting that is flexible in terms of when it is open, when it is available. That is particularly important to working parents but also to others who might be doing some training or education or simply have to co-ordinate a number of childcare and school arrangements.

The Chairman: Thank you very much; that was very helpful.

Q57 Baroness Massey of Darwen: Thank you very much for giving us your time. I want to ask a couple of questions rolled into one to start with—and it is about quality again. Do you think there are variations in the quality of early education childcare in the most deprived neighbourhoods compared to the least deprived? Following on from that, could you say a bit more about the learning aspects of this? I am not talking about learning to read at the age of two. I am talking about learning through play and language and communication skills. I suppose this is mainly directed at Gill. Do you find there is some neglect of the learning aspects of early years as opposed to just the caring aspects?

Gill Jones: Firstly, yes, there is a difference. Our inspection judgments show there is a difference between settings that are in more affluent areas and settings that are in more

deprived areas. The inspection judgments generally are higher in the more affluent areas than in the more deprived areas. That is also reflected in our school inspection data as well, so there is a pattern there. Certainly one of the main reasons why settings in more deprived areas do less well is because the quality of teaching, of interaction and children's learning as a result of that is poorer. That is linked very closely to the language and communication skills of the providers themselves. If we have providers in deprived areas, say a childminder in a deprived area, who herself has very low-level language and communication skills, the quality of education she gives to the child is lower than where that is different. Sadly, we tend to find that in areas where we struggle to get childcare the people who put themselves forward tend to generally have a lower level of skill.

I would say, though, in November 2012 we did a big tightening of our registration procedures. We made the gateway to become a childminder, to become a provider, much harder to get through. We know it is harder because more people drop off before they get to registration and there is an increase in those that we do not register. What we did in that toughened registration was look at providers' understanding of the early years foundation stage. Through our registration we could test their knowledge and their understanding and their ability to put that into practice when they took up their positions. That, we feel, has made it much better and we know that that is the case because our inspection outcomes on quality are much better at the first inspection for those that have been registered after 2012 than for those who were registered before.

The Chairman: Do you have something you would like to add?

Sandra Mathers: I would, yes, if that is okay. I would just say that I did some work for the Nuffield Foundation recently, looking at the same area, and we found similar results but also some different results. In the private, voluntary and independent—PVI—sector, we did find

that quality was lower in disadvantaged areas and particularly in the aspects that are most important for children's development: the quality of support for children's language and for learning was lower. But we found that in the maintained sector, in schools, quality was comparable in disadvantaged and more advantaged areas. I wonder whether the difference is because perhaps we had a specialist early years judgment that Ofsted did not at the time.

Gill Jones: Yes, now we have introduced the early years judgment into section 5 we may well find a similar pattern. Of course, at the moment our section 5, the historical data we have, is for when children are 11. There is an issue about how children who do well in the foundation stage are able to go on and achieve at the age of 11. We need to see where provision is strong in the foundation stage that it is continued throughout the school and the support for parents and families is strong enough to enable them to keep the rate of improvement going. What we find is that the support for parents in the early years is very good. Parents come to the door where they drop their children off, they come into the classrooms, they talk with the teachers and teaching assistants, but as the child gets older that tends not to happen so much, so that constant interaction and constant help that is given to parents alongside the child drops off. I think that might have an impact on standards that are achieved as well.

Sandra Mathers: I could also add something about what we do about that if that is helpful. We also in our research looked at the possible reasons for this, and particularly why quality was lower in disadvantaged areas in the PVI sector. We found that training and qualifications were important; in the PVI sector the tendency for quality to be lower in disadvantaged areas was much stronger in the settings that did not have a graduate member of staff. We think this is maybe because those non-graduate settings can cope in the more advantaged areas but they struggle to meet the challenge of providing good quality for disadvantaged

children, which is harder because they are more likely to be behind in their development and more likely to have a broader range of needs. I think the key is training and qualifications. Of course, in schools all classes are led by a qualified teacher.

The Chairman: Baroness Walmsley, would you like to continue this?

Baroness Walmsley: Yes, certainly, but we have a supplementary before we move on to mine.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: I would like to ask a supplementary. It is about the early years pupil premium. Do you think this will make a difference in quality for disadvantaged children and how do you think providers might use that pupil premium?

Sandra Mathers: It has the potential to make a difference, although the amount is quite small. But I worry that the potential might be lost, unless settings are given some guidance on how they should spend it, and that it might be frittered away. Based on our findings, I think it should be used on staffing, particularly to increase graduate leadership in the PVI sector and particularly in settings serving disadvantaged children, because we know those settings are most likely to be low-quality and so they are least likely to know what to do with it. It does have a lot of potential but we need to do all we can to make sure it is spent effectively. Also, more funding could be needed, because the premium follows the child and varies year to year, so it is not really secure. That is quite a risky pot of money to use for employing a graduate if you do not know you are going to have exactly that amount the following year. But, yes, I think it has the potential to make a difference.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: Do you think staffing is the only issue? What do you mean by frittered away?

Sandra Mathers: I am thinking of what we saw with some schools when the pupil premium was introduced: a lot of interactive whiteboards were bought. It is not that whiteboards are

not important, but we know quite a lot about what makes the most difference for disadvantaged children and it seems sensible to use that to give some guidance as to how it should be spent, I would say.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: That is interesting, thank you.

Gill Jones: Would you like me to add something? When the early years pupil premium is introduced we will be looking at how it is spent through our inspection judgments, and linking that to our leadership and management judgments. I share Sandra's view that it may not be used effectively, not because people will not want to use it effectively but because they will not be very sure how to use it.

We need to look at strong local leaders who we know are currently making a difference for children in the most disadvantaged areas. We have the precedent of some schools where it has been spent very well with very strong leadership and it has made a difference. I think what the early years providers need to do, and perhaps local authorities or local leaders, is to use some of the information we already have and approach people to support local settings. If there is a good primary school that has done outstandingly well in using the pupil premium, reception leaders might be able to work with local settings and childminders to help them make best use of that funding. It would be a waste if it just goes to an individual provider with no overview locally of how it is being spent.

Ivana La Valle: I would say from the parents' perspective there are many ways, as Sandra says, of using the premium but access for disabled children is probably the biggest issue at the moment. Many disabled children are being denied an early education place in a way that many other children, even very disadvantaged ones, are not.

Q58 Baroness Walmsley: We have talked about the variation in quality in different areas. Could you say whether you feel that there are variations in qualities in different types of setting between maintained nursery schools, childminders, PVI and all the rest?

Ivana La Valle: If you talk to parents, their perception matches very closely the research evidence—amazingly, given that they are never thinking about the research evidence. If you talk to them about nursery classes they are implicitly trusted. That is the place where children go when they are three. It is part of their education and prepares them for school—they are in school. If you talk to them it feels like they are in a league on their own, they do not seem to be aware that they are regulated and inspected in exactly the same way. Parents who do use day nurseries, childminders and playgroups and so on, have more concern and they recognise there is more variability in terms of quality and they need to be judged.

The one real success of the early years policy in the last few years, which is unique in the education system, is that the overwhelming majority of disadvantaged children are in nursery classes and the settings are better. They might not get all the other things that you get in day nursery such as a longer day and more flexible childcare, but in terms of quality I think they are getting the best-quality childcare or early education.

Baroness Walmsley: Does anybody else want to add anything to that?

Sandra Mathers: I would just add, reiterating what I said before, that the research evidence, as Ivana said, tells us that quality is higher in the maintained sector, in schools, but the study I talked about earlier suggests also that they are better at providing for disadvantaged children.

Q59 Baroness Walmsley: Given that, that gives the Government a bit of a decision. Should the Government be investing more in existing good-quality providers, whoever they are, or

should they be concentrating on increasing the quality in the less good providers across the sector? Which do you think should be the Government's main focus?

Gill Jones: That is a very difficult question.

Ivana La Valle: The big investment at the moment is early education for disadvantaged two year-olds. The reality of the free early education for three or four year-olds in many ways has been a success both in terms of the quantity of places created and there being places for disadvantaged children of good quality. That cannot be replicated certainly in the short term for two year-olds because traditionally schools are not taking on two year-olds. Looking after two year-olds is very different. Although they are being encouraged to do so, currently only 6% of schools have agreed to provide a two year-old offer.

Although in the longer term one would want to look how schools can take on more two year-olds, in the short term I do not think that is a solution. Those schools are very inflexible and early education and childcare is for children but also parents who need to go to work and do other things. I think that would be an issue if the free offer was also used to encourage parental employment.

Baroness Walmsley: You seem to suggest that a school, although it is able to offer quite high quality, may not be the right setting for two year-olds. Is that what you think?

Ivana La Valle: Yes. They need a lot of adaptation, both in terms of the environment but also the staff. Sandra will tell you, she is the expert.

Sandra Mathers: It depends very much what kind of school you are talking about. Schools have a huge advantage in that they have their teacher trained workforce. The PVI sector is better at nurturing, I suppose you might call it, and I think primary schools particularly have quite a lot to learn about this and quite a lot to learn from the PVI sector. They are good at education but they are not so good at some of the other things. Nursery schools, on the

other hand, have the best of both because they have their trained teachers but they also have an early years specialist leader—and in Ofsted inspection reports 96% of nursery schools, I think it is, are graded good or outstanding.

For me it is not necessarily about pitting one sector against another. We have a mixed economy and we have to be honest about that. It is going to be like that for the foreseeable future. We should make the most of nursery schools to lead practice in the PVI sector, maybe to train staff. We should draw on the potential of primary schools, but if they are going to be providing particularly for two year-olds then they are going to need some training and support to do that and they could learn from the PVI sector. I think we also have to work on increasing graduate leadership in the PVI sector because we cannot afford not to: so many children are there.

Gill Jones: I will just add one thing to that because I think there is a group of schools we have not mentioned here and those are the primary schools that have PVI settings on site. You have a school that is run as a school, following a school day, but alongside that school there is a private provider that is sometimes managed by the governing body and sometimes works alongside the governing body. We see some excellent practice in those settings because the influence of the school, the teachers working with the PVI setting and the PVI setting preparing the children for school, which from an education perspective is the key to what is good for children, that they are well prepared in all areas to start school formally.

Baroness Walmsley: None of you is accepting the either/or that I gave you, but make the best of what we have and spread good practice.

Sandra Mathers: Yes, and understand how the sectors are different and how that affects quality.

Gill Jones: Without doubt quality has improved over the last seven years so I think it is important that we recognise that, moving forward with the policies we have.

The Chairman: Can you give us any help with the number of schools that have a PVI facility? Not now but if you could perhaps drop us a line of what the percentage is. Is it 2% or 40%? It would be very interesting.

Gill Jones: We have that information and we put a diagram in the annual report that shows the number of two year-olds who are currently educated on a school site.

The Chairman: That is really helpful. Thanks very much. Baroness Tyler.

Q60 Baroness Tyler of Enfield: My question is very much about the role of regulation and inspection in both maintaining and, hopefully, improving quality. I would be interested to know how the inspection framework assesses quality both of learning but also of caregiving and whether that is done differently, how particular quality thresholds are established when inspectors go in and what factors other than quality are also inspected, so how the overall judgment is reached.

Gill Jones: Ofsted is both the regulator and the inspector of private providers so we have our registered inspection framework. Within the maintained sector we are just the inspectorate, we are not the regulator, so there is a difference in the way we inspect currently maintained nursery settings and the non-maintained PVI sector. However, the core of what we look at is essentially the same in terms of learning and development of children. In both sectors we look at children's progress, their learning, the typicality for their age of whether or not their levels of development are what you would expect for a 20 to 30 month-old or a 30 to 50 month-old. Inspectors have that knowledge and will ask questions of the setting, and use their observations to assess whether or not children are performing at levels you would expect.

As part of that they would also look at the quality of the interaction between the adult and the child. That is a very strong focus in both inspection frameworks. In the early years inspection framework we do a joint observation with the manager, and that joint observation is looking directly at children's learning—so they might observe children playing in a sand tray, for example, and the quality of the dialogue between the adult and the child, and they will have a discussion about that and make an assessment as to whether or not the adult is helping the child to make progress, to develop greater understanding and to develop concepts that would be appropriate for their age. That is part of the quality work we look at. In addition we have leadership and management judgment, looking in particular at staff development: the professional development of staff, the courses put in place for staff to improve, the training given onsite and offsite, the use of things such as ECAS, systems that are used to develop staff's knowledge and understanding of the early years. That is included in our leadership and management judgment as well as other aspects. That is to do with quality but the care, welfare and safeguarding aspect feeds into that as well because it is very important for young children that the environment they are learning in is an appropriate one; that there is enough space, that the equipment is safe, and that staff are assessing the risks to children in the activities they are giving them. That falls into our welfare judgment—and that would be in our welfare judgment in both frameworks. It would be welfare in the early years registered framework but in the schools framework it comes under behaviour and safety, so there is a safeguarding element to it as well.

Quality and welfare are not separate. Although we are regulating welfare requirements we are also regulating learning and developing requirements because they are all part of the early years foundation stage, which is the framework within which we operate.

Baroness Massey of Darwen: Do you weight things? Is learning, for example, given more weight than, say, the environment or is it out of a certain number of points? How does it work?

Gill Jones: There is no weighting as such. In the early years framework we have three judgments and those three judgments carry equal weight. I would say that it is quite difficult to separate out the judgments. It is quite difficult to separate the impact that the welfare and care of a child has on their learning because a child who is not well cared for and is not comfortable also is not going to learn well. The interactions of the staff feed across both judgments so the judgments tend to come out at fairly similar levels. So although we have three, you will find that all three require improvements and lead to the overall effectiveness of the three requiring improvement—or if it is outstanding all three judgments would tend to be outstanding, which leads to an overall effectiveness outstanding judgment. We do not weight them against each other, no.

Q61 Baroness Walmsley: How do you take into account the different baselines of development of children entering the setting and judge what the setting does for the child on the basis of that, because it is going to be very different in some areas compared to others?

Gill Jones: That is the most difficult task for inspectors in all settings, because in the early years there is no standard baselining in the way that you get before a child enters a secondary school, for example, where there are national tests we can give as clear assessments. The data in early years are very variable.

Baroness Walmsley: Does the two year-old check come into that?

Gill Jones: The two year-old check is not shared in all settings. In an ideal world, if we could have an integrated two year-old check from the EYFS and from Health and we had some

data around that, that would be quite helpful in giving us some form of baselining evidence. But there is also a health warning around that because children's development does not go in nice, neat, easy stages: they may be exceedingly able in one area and developmentally behind in another. My own son was a very, very late walker, and as a mother I was worried sick, so development is at different times. I just thought I would share it, offload it.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield: I just wanted to have one main follow-up. That was very helpful, what you said. It is about your role in helping providers improve. Perhaps they have had the inspection. You said in your written evidence that you are trying to produce shorter, sharper reports so providers find it easier to understand what they need to do to improve. Is there more of a role you think you could play there? I also noticed in your written evidence that you said Ofsted must be placed in a stronger position to be able to hold all early years providers to account. I just wonder why you thought that was the case and what that would achieve.

Gill Jones: In terms of holding providers to account, in the registered inspections over the past we have not used children's levels of development sufficiently in that. We have not had an achievement judgment, for example, in the early years framework. We have an achievement judgment in the schools framework and I think that is quite a big difference. When we go and inspect a nursery school currently, a maintained nursery school with three and four year-olds and two year-olds in it, we judge their achievement. There is no national data, apart from the Early Years Foundation Stage profile at the end of reception, that enable us to make that judgment in a nursery school. All we are making that achievement judgment on is the evidence that the setting provides us with and also our observations as inspectors as to whether or not that looks reasonable.

We do what we call samples: we take some evidence from one or two children and check it against what we know as inspectors. We do not currently do that to the same degree in our private providers. We do not have the picture of children's achievement across private providers. It is more complex because within a private provider a child may go to two or three different private providers: they may go to a PVI, they may go to a nursery, or they may go to a nursery school.

There are complexities around it but we do need to make a clear judgment. Parents would want to know whether children in this setting are working at the stages that would be typical for their age and whether a setting is adding enough value for them. Are they helping them to develop in a way that would be expected? We have work to do and we are working towards a common inspection framework.

Currently we have three different frameworks in the early years and we are looking to make the judgments across the frameworks the same. We are consulting at the moment on the future of education inspection—consultation is out for the next six weeks—where we are asking the sector whether they would like to see common inspection judgments across schools, across early-years settings and across further educational skills.

The Chairman: I am not sure if Baroness Shephard has a further question in this area.

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: It is not a further question, it is a comment.

The Chairman: Please, yes.

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: That is an extremely important point that has just been made, which the Committee will want to take very much on board.

The Chairman: Good, thank you.

Q62 Baroness Noakes: The Committee is looking at affordable childcare and so we need to understand what drives costs in childcare. I would be interested in your views on the

relationship between cost and quality and whether putting more money in gets higher-quality care—and, if so, how?

Ivana La Valle: Perhaps I can start, just because I do not work in the childcare markets. Obviously employing better-qualified staff with more experience and providing them with good training and development does cost more than employing lower-qualified staff and so on. But because a lot of providers—day nurseries, childminders and playgroups—operate in a market, the cost of providing the staff and the premises is only part of the equation of the fee. The other one is how much demand there is and whether there is a demand.

A constant finding of research they have done in childcare markets is that in more affluent areas, where there is a lot of demand from affluent parents or parents who go out to work, fees are higher. The staff qualifications are not necessarily higher, it is just the demand that is driving prices up. In more disadvantaged areas you could have equally qualified staff but because there is less demand fees are lower because a lot of day-care provision is provided by business and businesses need to make a profit.

Baroness Noakes: Does higher quality always mean higher cost?

Ivana La Valle: Up to a point. If you want to employ a graduate we know that is a good approximation for quality: it will cost more than if you do not employ a graduate. But on top of that it is the market forces that determine the cost. There is a lot of confusion. When we talk about cost you have to distinguish between what parents are being charged and what the cost is of providing places. What parents are being charged it is the result of market forces, as well as the cost of providing that place. The cost of providing that place will be higher if you employ better people. But what parents are being charged is also determined by market forces and by the need of businesses to make a profit—and make a higher profit if they can, if there is enough demand to do so.

Baroness Noakes: Does it cost more to deliver high-quality care for disadvantaged children?

Ivana La Valle: Yes, yes. I was involved in two evaluations of the two year-old offer and there was a concern about providers and about the fees that were being paid, particularly in more affluent areas in line with the fees that are being charged for fee-paying parents. But particularly at that time the offer was very focused on disadvantaged children, so it is more expensive to cater for these children because they have additional needs and their parents have additional needs. Even the most committed settings, like children's centres, which are there for disadvantaged children, say, "We will not be able to take more than one or two" because it is a drain on resources and the fee that is being paid just does not cover that.

Baroness Noakes: It is because of the intensity of staff cost?

Ivana La Valle: Yes. Among the 40% most disadvantaged there will be a small group who have behavioural problems, developmental problems, where parents might need support. There are children with a disability who might need extra support. It does not mean that all disadvantaged children need extra support but there will be a proportion there that do have involvement with other agencies, and that is very time consuming for the setting.

Baroness Noakes: You are saying that these problem children are more heavily concentrated in disadvantaged groups—that children with disabilities or behavioural difficulties are more likely to be found in disadvantaged groups and therefore they cost more?

Ivana La Valle: Yes. It does not mean that all disadvantaged children have these problems, but these problems are more prominent among those children.

The Chairman: Thank you. Baroness Shephard will now move from comment to question, please.

Q63 Baroness Shephard of Northwold: Absolutely, yes. My question has partly been answered by Ivana La Valle because it is about parents' priorities, what they think is

important in childcare. I do not know whether any of you want to add anything to Ivana's definition of what parents find important. What I would like to know is whether you find that the priorities vary according to the neighbourhood, because they certainly would if you were looking at parents' expectations of schools according to neighbourhood. How concerned are parents about qualifications and, indeed, graduate qualifications for people working with early years children? Does that vary according to neighbourhood as well? Are parents getting enough information to help them ask the right questions?

Ivana La Valle: Yes. They vary in terms of neighbourhood. In neighbourhoods where employment, particularly maternal employment, is low, there would be less concern about flexibility because they have less use of childminders. Childminders are mainly used for early years by parents who work and they provide that kind of flexibility the other settings might not.

Parents who did not work would be very, very unlikely, even if they did not have to pay, to use a childminder. Only if there were very specific needs—maybe a disabled child who needed a particular type of care the childminder could provide. Otherwise it would make no sense. They would definitely go more to nurseries. This is why disadvantaged children are much more likely to be found in group settings, but there will be more need for that additional support in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

When we did the evaluation of the two year-old offer it was amazing how, for parents, just six hours of early years education for their child opened all sorts of doors for them. Mothers who were suffering from postnatal depression and had not been out of the home: the fact they had to take the child to a setting that meant they went to a setting and found lots of other things there, if it was, for example, in a children's centre. Having this range of other services available is very important in some neighbourhoods.

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: My question is about whether parents are concerned about whether they should be seeking quality or availability and, if so—

Ivana La Valle: Yes, yes. Quality is very important for them and the way they express it and talk about it is not very different from the researchers: maybe they talk about staff having experience rather than about the qualification. It is very rare that a parent will admit they are sending a child to a setting that is not of good enough quality, but they do make compromises. In their head they do rationalise them, so there are things that are negotiable. If the setting is not very good in terms of the meals they provide, they think, “I will give them a packed lunch but the rest is okay”. It would be very rare for a parent to say, “I sent my child there, it was a terrible place”. There are places they will not send their children; there are places that might not be perfect but they find ways of dealing with this imperfection and they say, “They do not go outdoors but I make up for that because I take them out when they are at home”.

The advice certainly from the research communities, for example, with the two year-old offer is that it would be better to focus on the quality, even if it means providing a smaller number of hours, rather than providing a lot of hours and lower quality.

Gill Jones: We did some research for the Early Years Annual Report about the availability of childcare and how easy parents found it to access childcare. We found that for the parents we asked it was quite a confusing picture. They were not sure what they were looking for and would enjoy better information. One of the things that parents found was a barrier was the fact that although we published childminder reports we do not say where those childminders live because of data protection. We will have reports on our website that talk about childminder 123792, but where that person lives and how you find that outstanding childminder is quite a tricky thing.

We found that the information that local authorities provided was very variable. There were some local authorities where all the childcare that was available within the area was on the local government portal and you could search for different types of childminders or different types of settings—that information was quite readily available. But then, equally, you could go to the neighbouring authority and there was nothing at all. There was tremendous inconsistency in what was available to parents.

We also found that where parents lived had a dramatic effect on the quality of childcare and the availability of childcare. Although there might be an outstanding nursery that is quite close to them, that nursery would be full, so they would be having to take odd days at different nurseries and having a multiple variation of childcare: a day with a childminder, a day with grandma, another two days in a nursery that they can get them into and another day somewhere else. In terms of availability of childcare, it is quite a complex picture, quite difficult for parents and very different depending on where you live.

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: But more complex in rural areas, obviously, where parental transport immediately becomes a big issue.

Gill Jones: Yes—and not just in rural areas. I can think of a place in Wigan, for example, which was a children's centre providing settings for children, but only for three year-olds. They did not have the two year-old offer there. Parents who lived in a very deprived area had to catch a bus to go to a setting where they could get their two year-old a place. You can imagine parents with three tots, a baby and one of those multiple pushchairs, getting on a bus so that they could get to their free place for two days out of the five. It was a barrier for them taking up that offer. We know that not enough parents take up the offer that is there for them.

Sandra Mathers: Could I just add something very briefly?

The Chairman: Briefly, yes.

Sandra Mathers: Briefly, okay. It was just to pick up on a couple of things that have been said already. I would just emphasise that parents do want quality and that obviously they need information, they need to be able to make choices—Ofsted reports are much more accessible than they used to be—but the important point is that they tend to overestimate quality. Parents do want the same things as experts but, as Ivana said, they tend to overestimate. They do not often say, “Yes, my child has been in a poor-quality setting”. Although parents need information we cannot rely just on parental choice to drive quality, particularly in disadvantaged areas where very poor families have got a lot more to think about in terms of feeding their children than thinking about researching good-quality early years provision. That is an important point to make as well.

The Chairman: Thank you. Moving on quickly, Lord Sawyer.

Q64 Lord Sawyer: Good morning. I would like to ask you quite a big-picture question about quality. What impact has government policy had in recent times on the quality of childcare? Maybe if you can answer that and then go on just to say what future government policy would provide a good headline and have an impact.

The Chairman: There is a temptation for you, yes.

Sandra Mathers: A big question, yes.

Lord Sawyer: I just could not resist asking it.

Sandra Mathers: Firstly, policy has focused on improving the quality of childcare and early education and , under that definition, it has improved quality to some extent. The Early Years Foundation Stage has given us a common framework, which is based on sound research-based principles. Ofsted inspections have improved quality, particularly at the bottom end—lifted the tail, if you like. Initiatives like the Graduate Leader Fund have been

successful in increasing the number of graduates in the PVI sector, and we know from evaluation that it has had an impact on quality.

Recent moves to make qualifications more robust and to increase the entry requirements are very welcome. But overall quality is still too variable, and policy does not yet fully reflect good quality or support good quality. We still have a very large proportion of private, voluntary and independent settings that do not have a graduate. Cathy Nutbrown's very sensible recommendation to have all staff qualified to level 3 as a minimum was dropped, and I think that would be something very important to come back to.

Overall we have got furthest to go on quality for disadvantaged children and quality for under-threes. We know that quality for under-threes is often lower than for older children and that the least qualified staff are quite often deployed to work with the youngest children. In the evaluation of the Graduate Leader Fund we had trouble measuring the impact of graduates on quality for children under three because there were not enough graduates working with this age group to get a true sense of their impact. Also, we know that private and voluntary settings in disadvantaged areas are of lower quality. For me, that is the worry. As Ivana mentioned, my particular concern would be around some of those early education places for two year-olds—for disadvantaged two year-olds. We need to do some work there.

The Chairman: Although we are running right out of time I am very keen to get another short, sharp question in, but if there is anything urgent on this, please—

Gill Jones: I would just like to say that the problem does not start in the early years: there is a cycle here. People who go into childcare should have education: their qualifications and the link to having a GCSE grade C or above in English and Maths is a very important policy that will drive up quality, though the sector is finding that very difficult to cope with and

pushing back on it a great deal. But to push back on something that is quite crucial in terms of a standard or experience that we want for our very youngest children to have would be a mistake. We need to be quite strong in this area.

The Chairman: Thank you, I am glad we got that comment in, it is rather important. Lord Patel.

Q65 Lord Patel: My question follows on from Lord Sawyer's in a way and is related to free early year education. Do you think the funding that is currently available is sufficient to deliver good-quality places in terms of education for early years? You might also comment on how one goes about setting the level of funding.

The Chairman: As ever—briefly, please.

Gill Jones: Okay. The level of funding, of course, is set by the department: Ofsted does not have anything to do with the level of funding, I am quite glad to say. But on whether it is enough, I would say that for the most deprived children 15 hours a week is a very short period of time out of their week: 15 hours is not very much. We know that the more high-level interaction children have with qualified staff to develop them, the more beneficial it is. In an ideal world there should be more; that is my answer.

Ivana La Valle: When we did the evaluation of the two year-old pilot, we found that because you do not have the childcare markets you have hundreds of individual markets where prices are different. It might be that there are some very disadvantaged areas where there is very little demand and it would not cost a lot, so the actual fee that is paid may well be enough—but in other areas, in the more affluent areas, it may not. At the moment the only distinction that is made is between what is paid in London and what is paid outside London. Basically, one would need a much more refined mechanism for allocating money, because fees will vary and the cost will vary enormously. Possibly the alternative might be for a local

authority to have some freedom in how it uses that funding in terms of ensuring that the quality is high, even if it means that fewer hours are provided or fewer children are reached.

Sandra Mathers: Could I add something?

The Chairman: Yes, please.

Sandra Mathers: I just wanted to draw attention to the difference in funding between the sectors, because that is important. We talked earlier about the fact that the maintained sector is of higher quality, I looked up the funding per place per hour and it is £7.31 for a nursery school but it is £3.92 for a PVI setting. For me, on the question of whether the funding is set at a high enough level for quality, I would say that it depends on the sector. We know that the maintained sector is of good quality. It does not mean that every school is of good quality but the funding is sufficient.

But in the PVI sector the funding is only sufficient to employ staff at the current level. That is a manager at level 3—that is A-level standard—and half of the rest of the staff at level 2, which is only GCSE standard. At the moment a private provider who wants to employ a graduate is financially disadvantaged. There is no incentive for them to do that. Many of them do but the funding, I would say, is not enough to support a graduate-led workforce within the private and voluntary sector. That is an important thing to think about.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed. I thank all three of you for an excellent session. A lot of food for thought for us—and I would just re-emphasise that if there are any additional points or expansions, do please be in touch with us and let us have them. Thank you for your time and your energy.

Examination of Witness

Professor Cathy Nutbrown, Head of the School of Education, University of Sheffield and author of the *Nutbrown Review*.

Q66 The Chairman: I welcome Professor Cathy Nutbrown, whose work we all know something of. We are all looking forward to the discussion to come. I will just remind you that there will be a transcript made, we are on air, it is being broadcast but we will come back to you for further comment in due course. The labels are on all of us. My name is Sutherland. I am delighted to meet you. I will just start with the first question to make maximum use of our time. Do you remain of the view—this is something we think you have already committed to—that improving the qualifications of the childcare workforce is making a significant difference and will continue? Is that an essential item to high-quality childcare?

Professor Nutbrown: I remain of the view that we need a high-quality workforce. I am not convinced at the moment that we entirely have that.

The Chairman: Would you like to expand on that? Is it lack of qualifications, lack of experience or lack of adequate pay?

Professor Nutbrown: It is a mixture of all of those things. We still have an underqualified workforce. We do not pay the people qualified at a low level or who are unqualified very much at all. You have just heard the difference in the allocation for nursery schools and the PVI sector. Where people are well qualified they have reasonable remuneration, but there are people who have a very poor level of pay, and with that goes low levels of qualifications, poor status, low conditions of work and so on. I have not made much of a difference in terms of the qualifications of the workforce. I made 19 recommendations. Five were

accepted, and of those five some have been further tweaked and adjusted. I have not made a lot of difference but I remain of the view that a high-quality workforce is important.

The Chairman: I think that you underestimate it, but on the other hand, in terms of recommendations accepted, join the club.

Professor Nutbrown: I can but try.

The Chairman: I will just ask you one very specific point. Do you think a relevant qualified teacher status in this area would help or just be slight gloss on the top?

Professor Nutbrown: I do think it would help. I thought long and hard before I recommended that we should have teachers qualified with QTS and with a newly qualified teacher year. I made the recommendation because people need to know a great deal about young children, young brains, young minds and young bodies to be able to make a difference from birth and to be able to work with their parents to share that information. That was why I felt that we should extend what we had in state-funded nursery schools and have qualified teachers—not all but some, qualified teachers—in provision from birth onwards because we know so much now about what makes a difference. So that felt to me like the appropriate thing to do.

‘Disappointing’ is not the right word, but it is the best one I can use for the moment. What was fundamentally disappointing was the idea that we should have teachers who are called ‘teachers’ but qualified at a level that is quite different from what we understand teachers to be in nursery schools, primary schools and secondary schools—that disjuncture, by creating early years teachers and school teachers, is a big problem.

Q67 Baroness Walmsley: Can improvements in the qualifications status of the childcare workforce be achieved under current funding levels and, if so, should the funding be spent any differently to achieve this?

Professor Nutbrown: There are some things we could do with current funding levels but I do not think we can have the kind of qualified workforce that I was hoping we could move to within about a decade without further investment. I think that is the—

Baroness Walmsley: Would you like to expand on that? You said there are maybe some different ways in which the money could be spent.

Professor Nutbrown: I would put some funding into helping early years practitioners work with parents and share their knowledge with parents. You can make a difference if you start sharing professional knowledge about children's development and the way that they learn with parents with a fairly small amount of involvement. A project that I have been involved in that has had several different versions shows that just a few home visits over a term for about half an hour or an hour can make a difference to parents' confidence, particularly mothers' confidence—particularly if mothers have no formal qualifications of their own—and to the child's progress. But we have to be in a position where people in the workforce are sufficiently confident themselves to do that.

Baroness Walmsley: Would that be in the way of improving the home-learning environment by sharing that professional information?

Professor Nutbrown: Yes, it would be supporting parents to learn more about what their children need and, therefore, be in a better position to give them different things, yes.

Baroness Walmsley: Would Government funding be most effective in raising the qualifications of the existing workforce or in rewarding providers who already employ high-quality staff to encourage them to—

Professor Nutbrown: I think both. We know that nursery schools do such a good job and that there is this imbalance between different kinds of providers, but at the same time the Early Years Foundation Stage goes across, so parents are told, "Wherever your child goes

they receive the Early Years Foundation Stage and it is the same”—there is a mismatch. Of course there are levels of interpretation. You can see that some settings are providing the Early Years Foundation Stage, but what you get in nursery schools is something much more and much deeper, and at quite a different level of thinking. The adults who are working there are drawing on a much wider range of knowledge to create something that goes far beyond the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Q68 Baroness Walmsley: I suspect I know the answer, but do you think current levels of funding for the free offer are sufficient to deliver high-quality places? Does that vary from type of setting to type of setting or from different age groups? We heard from Ivana earlier, quite clearly, that she thinks the two year-old offer is underfunded. Do you agree with that?

Professor Nutbrown: The important thing about the two year-olds is that for provision to really work and make a difference we have to have really good people working with the two year-olds. One of the things that worries me is that in many cases it is the most underqualified or unqualified people—not everywhere but in many cases—who are working with the very youngest and most vulnerable children. The two year-old funding could be one of the best early intervention programmes that we have ever had in this country if the people who are working with those two year-olds are well positioned to do so.

Baroness Walmsley: In the rest of the settings, do you think that funding is sufficient for the early offer or does it vary between the PVI and the maintained sectors?

Professor Nutbrown: It does vary. Can I say something about two year-olds in schools? For me it does not much matter what you call the name of the building that children are in. What matters is the practice. I think people who are seeking to provide something good for two year-olds could benefit from the structures and the systems that schools have and the kind of leadership that schools have so that they would not be struggling to deal with all of

those things that do cost money. I do not mind if they are in a school as long as the space that the two year-olds are in is fit for two year-olds.

Q69 Baroness Shephard of Northwold: I am going to add to my question because I think you have already answered it anyway. Would your priority be good intervention with two year-olds if you wanted to make a difference? Is that what you just said?

Professor Nutbrown: My priority would be well qualified people who are positioned to know how best to work with two year-olds. It is not so much intervention programmes that we need, it is people who are attuned enough to children so that they can decide what this child might need, what might work for that little group, how they might work with this particular parent and so on: people who have sufficient knowledge, and can draw on that knowledge, of how things can be changed and how things can be different. That would be the way to maximise the impact of working with the most vulnerable children at that young age.

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: I agree, but I will précis my question. If you were the Government and you were asked to identify a priority, or even the most meaningful priority, would that be it?

Professor Nutbrown: If I were to design something to support two year-olds to give them more advantages as they go into school and so on, I would be looking at how to work with parents to do that. I do not think it is necessarily the 15 hours while they are not with the parent, that are important. I think it could be something more creative than that, and thinking about how some of that time might be spent supporting parents to support their children, because those parents are there all the time: they get them up, they put them to bed and so on. The 15 hours cannot make up for all the other hours in the week, and if the child and the family have something that they share with a supportive, knowledgeable adult, those parents are in a better position to carry on doing that. It is not just about having

stories in the 15 hours that you are in the setting; it is about having a story every night when you go to bed.

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: Thank you. My real question was: would a more highly qualified workforce require higher salary levels? Everything we have heard this morning tells us it would.

Professor Nutbrown: I cannot see how it would not, really.

Baroness Shephard of Northwold: I think we all think that, so thank you very much.

Q70 Lord Patel: My question relates to the issue about the decision not to pursue a policy of lower staff to child ratios. Do you think that is a good idea?

Professor Nutbrown: Do I think it is a good idea not to pursue the policy?

Lord Patel: Yes.

Professor Nutbrown: Absolutely. That policy was constructed on the basis of people being better qualified, but no matter how many PhDs you have you can only hold so many babies. I did say in my review that if we had properly qualified teachers we could look at whether the ratios of three to four year-olds across the board could be changed, as they are in nursery schools. But I also made it very clear that for the under-threes that should not be tampered with. The way that people in the sector and parents reacted to that policy demonstrated that was not a way to save money.

Lord Patel: Do we have some kind of research background to say what ratio might be appropriate?

Professor Nutbrown: The ratios as they are set work for people. I do think that if we had fully qualified teachers with QTS and a supported newly qualified year we could look at whether the ratios for three to four year-olds could change in settings other than nursery

schools. I do not think that the provision for under-threes can be changed in terms of ratios, no matter what the qualification is. There are some things that qualifications cannot do.

Q71 Baroness Massey of Darwen: In your report, which I will quote back at you, you warned passionately, “A later generation of politicians will count with regret the social and economic costs of insufficient investment in early years knowledge-based provision”. Do you still remain of the view that the government response has been disappointing?

Professor Nutbrown: Yes, I do. I have seen very little change really. I have seen a lot of toing and froing. The whole question about GCSE English and so forth has gone backwards and forwards, so I do remain disappointed about that. I take the point about the growth of the workforce and how we recruit people into the workforce. If we think about what people working with children from birth to five have to do, they have to read to children, they have to read professional literature, they have to understand the EYFS guidance, they have to write reports, they have to do the two year-old check—there are a lot of things that require a level of ability in the written word that means that a GSCE is not an unreasonable requirement.

We heard earlier that it is not so easy to get into the profession, but then it becomes a higher-status profession and with that goes better pay as well. I do think also that if we got this right we would be saving money on a lot of other things. Many of you here know far more about this than I do, but we would be saving money on health, on social services, and on many quite expensive early intervention programmes. Lots of vulnerable children do not have special educational needs. They have not had a very good start because of all sorts of other things that have been difficult for their families. I know that times are difficult in terms of funding, but I do think we have to think about where our priorities are.

The children who were born the week that I published my report are two and a half now, so how long can they wait? I see children's centres closing. There is one near where I live that looks abandoned: play equipment left outside, weeds growing through the safety surface, just left. I do think that future generations—not just politicians but children and families—will think, “What did they do?” because there is a way to invest soundly that would ultimately save us money.

Q72 Baroness Massey of Darwen: My following question is really linked to what you have just said. What additional actions do you think government should take to improve the quality of childcare?

Professor Nutbrown: To improve the quality?

Baroness Massey of Darwen: Yes.

Professor Nutbrown: We cannot afford to see the closure of any more nursery schools. They are centres of excellence; we know that they enhance practice. I think we should be using nursery schools as hubs for quality. In many cases this happens sort of naturally, but we should support nursery schools to be hubs for quality so that they can have links that offer continuing professional development with people in settings in their region and in their communities. That might be a way to support people who have lower qualifications who tend to be in the communities that struggle, where people have lower qualifications. Nursery schools could be the places where some people in those other settings do their placements and do practices to see good practice.

One of the difficulties with training on the job is that you get your job in your setting and you do your qualification in your setting and if you do not do a placement somewhere else where somebody says, “That is an absolutely outstanding place to go” you do not know that you are just replicating practice that could be much better.

The Chairman: Can I ask you about a point that came up in the earlier session that follows from this, which has to do with the co-location of nursery schools and PVI provision with maintained schools. Do you have a view on that—whether it is good, bad, moderately good or a high priority?

Professor Nutbrown: That they should share premises?

The Chairman: That they should share premises or certainly locations.

Professor Nutbrown: There are examples where that happens to good effect and to the good of all. It takes me back to my point about two year-olds being located in schools. There could be a sharing of resources, a sharing of outside provision, a sharing of some aspects of leadership and some administrative processes—caretaking, that sort of thing. I think it could be to a common good. It would make transition easier for children, and make it easier for parents who have a six month-old, a two year-old and a five year-old. As long as the provision is fit for the people who are using it.

The greatest single important resource is the people. You can do things in a building that is not so good but you cannot do things in a great building with people who do not know what to do. I am not advocating buildings that are not so good; I am saying that the investment in staff is the important thing and, therefore, they can work together. It is not unusual for centres to have a room for the health visitor to be available or a social worker and so on. That kind of thing goes on and there are good models for that, so I think that co-location is healthy.

Q73 The Chairman: Clearly a recurring theme in this, and indeed in most educational discussions, is the quality of the staff. That seems to be the critical factor that most people agree is fundamental. We discussed earlier the issue of qualified teacher status and certainly qualifications for staff, and I think you suggested that having qualified staff is a good thing. If

you could not do it to 100% immediately, do you have a view on a minimal ratio? One qualified person per 10 or 20 staff, or per institution?

Professor Nutbrown: I did set out in my original review the suggestion that we should have 50% of staff in a setting qualified by September 2013. The Government has not managed that. I suggested 70% by 2017 and 100% by 2022. That is to level 3. There is a worry about 50% of staff being unqualified. I know that some of those unqualified staff are apprentices who will eventually become level 3 qualified but I do not think that unqualified staff should be part of the ratio.

The Chairman: How would you formalise this? Clearly somebody can come in and get a job in a nursery or in crèche or whatever. Do you insist on seeing a GCSE certificate or what?

Professor Nutbrown: When people are appointing staff they need to think about what evidence they want to check that people are appropriately qualified. One of the things that I discovered was that there are so many different kinds of level 2 and level 3 qualifications that it is very confusing for people. I talked to head teachers and centre managers who said that they have to really work hard to find out whether the kind of level 3 they have has included the kind of curriculum that they want people to have in order to be able to start on day one. I also spoke to people who had just finished level 3 who were distressed that they were having to do more training immediately because they did not feel equipped to do their job on day one.

Some providers have professional development packages for newly appointed staff. They know that they have to put in professional development immediately so that they can be up to speed with the kind of quality that they want to provide.

The Chairman: So more specification on what the qualification is and the evidence that it is there?

Professor Nutbrown: Yes. I suggested that there should be more on play, that there should be more on inclusion, on different aspects of diversity, on work with parents and on safeguarding. That is being worked towards, the early years educator qualification is intended to encompass this, if you are only required to have the manager in the setting qualified to that level (level 3), how do the children all benefit from that? To be a manager of a setting, at level 3, you need two or three years of experience. For the rest of the staff, perhaps half are at level 2 and the rest can have nothing. That is a very minimal level of qualification to care for the children who might be two now but might be architects or builders or bus drivers or any number of possible professions in 20 years' time. We are talking about young minds, and to make poor investment in what is the most significant part of our future as a country is something we need to take really seriously.

The Chairman: I understand the general point, but it is just whether or not it is worth moving incrementally.

Professor Nutbrown: I would rather move incrementally than not move at all.

The Chairman: You have laid that out, yes. Can I say thank you very much for your initial work, which you will gather that we have looked at very carefully, and for your further thoughts on this. If you have any elaborations you want to send in, please do.