

Written evidence submitted by Coram (GRC0005)

Covid 19 and childcare

This submission is a combined document from different entities in the Coram Group of charities with specific expertise in childcare, including Coram Family and Childcare (CFC) and CoramBAAF, which specifically focuses on the placement of children in care. Our joint experience includes direct contact with parents.

1. Even before the Covid 19 pandemic, there were persistent shortages in the availability of childcare. In Coram Family and Childcare's Childcare Survey 2020¹, it was reported that only just over half of local areas had enough childcare for parents working full time and the shortages were more acute for disabled children and parents working outside of the typical 9 to 5 day, where only a quarter of local areas had enough childcare to meet demand. There were fewer childcare places available in deprived areas, particularly settings providing full daycare that enabled parents to work. This issue was replicated for children placed for adoption or those placed with extended family members under a court order.
2. Many families use informal, rather than formal, paid-for childcare, to enable them to work or take on other responsibilities. Grandparents or other members of the extended family are most likely to provide childcare, but some families also have reciprocal arrangements with other families. These issues become even more challenging when children have been abused and neglected and have a wide range of physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioral difficulties as a consequence. Where family members have taken on the long term care of the child/ren, other family relationships may have become tense because of the issues of abuse and neglect and the blame and conflict that results. For those carers, turning to other family members for support can be particularly difficult if not impossible.
3. As part of the Government's response to the Covid pandemic, all childcare settings have been asked to close apart from those providing care for key workers and children identifies as 'vulnerable'. The Government's public health guidelines on social distancing have stopped informally arranged childcare arrangements. Many childcare providers are small businesses operating on narrow financial margins and may struggle to survive without income from the fees they charge. Childcare settings are likely to start opening from 1 June, but staff shortages and concerns about children's safety are likely to result in childcare settings operating below full capacity for some time to come. It is currently unclear how many childcare settings will reopen in June, meaning many parents are likely to continue to struggle to find childcare.
4. We expect to see significant changes in the childcare market as settings gradually reopen and more families start using childcare, with some (potentially a large number of) providers closing down, and over a longer period of time, we may see new settings opening to fill gaps. Even during normal times, we see significant churn in childcare settings with a high number opening and closing each month - in the current situation, it is not possible for new providers to open but we expect the number of closing to increase. Even once it is possible for settings to begin the process to open, the regulatory process for opening a new service can take some time, so it is likely that we will see gaps in provision for at least the short to medium term. Central and local governments should work closely together to make sure there

¹ [Childcare Survey 2020](#) is our nineteenth annual survey, based on returns from 94 per cent of local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales

is enough childcare for every family who needs it, including making grants available to help new childcare setting set up or existing settings to stay open.

5. There is evidence that low paid workers have been hardest hit by the lockdown as they are less likely to be able to work from home and face higher levels of job insecurity. This means that demand for childcare is likely to decrease in these areas (once settings are reopened) resulting in further closures even after lockdown has ended.
6. For many families, the closure of childcare has caused immediate pressure on their ability to balance work and care. This not only increases the stress on the parents or parent but also on the child. There is strong evidence that attending high quality early education improves children's outcomes at school and throughout life. It also makes the biggest difference for the most deprived children and helps to narrow the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers. These issues are amplified for those children who have experienced abuse and neglect where service offers need to be informed by individual child needs.
7. Young children are eligible for free early education from the term after their third birthday (or second birthday for deprived children) until they start school in England, Scotland and Wales. For some children this can be as little as four terms of early education, so the closure of nurseries could mean children missing out on a significant proportion of their entitlement, particularly as it is likely to take some time for families to rebuild trust in nurseries once lockdown is lifted. It is very concerning that children are going to miss out on the boost to their outcomes that early education provides.
8. While adults understandably are the prime focus of the Covid-19 pandemic, we cannot ignore the direct and long-term impact on children of all ages. And young children must have their rightful place in the urgent development of a response from government to these critical issues.

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