

Early Years Parent Survey – key findings and summary of results

June 2016



Background

The aim of the survey was to find out more about how parents of pre-school age children felt about food provision in early years settings. In particular, we were keen to understand more about their views on the importance of food quality and food-based education and how it ranked as a choice factor when they selected an early years setting for their child. We also wished to explore how confident parents felt about the food served to their children and whether independent verification of both food provision and wider food education would be of value.

Soil Association Food for Life commissioned independent market research company ResearchBods to run the survey through their consumer panel. The online survey was unprompted and ran between 20th – 28th April 2016.

A total of 500 respondents (361 Female / 139 Male) completed the survey. Respondents were from regions throughout England and Wales and from a cross-section of demographics.

All respondents were asked initial qualifying questions to establish that they were parents / carers of a child / children age 0-5 who either:

- Currently attend an early years setting (70%)
- Has / have attended an early years care setting in the last year (24%)
- Are likely to attend an early years setting in the next year (21%)



Key findings

- **Quality of food provision:** More than half (57%) of respondents said that the quality of food provision was very important in their choice of early years setting. Only 7% said it was of no importance.
- **Encouragement of healthy behaviours ranked above Ofsted rating** in terms of factors that were important in the choice of early years setting for their children and was second only to 'children seeming happy there'.
- **Provision of healthy food ranked equal to Ofsted rating** in terms of factors that were important in the choice of early years setting for their children.
- **Confidence in the quality of food provision:** Half of respondents said that they were very confident in the food provided by their child's early years setting. However, 47% were only 'quite confident', some of the reasons cited for the lack for total confidence were parents not witnessing meals, menus varying from those published and snacks not being as healthy as main meals.
- **Independent accreditation:** 83% of respondents said they would value an independent accreditation of the **food quality** and **provision of food education**.
- More than half (55%) of respondents said an **independent endorsement of food quality & food education** would be **likely or very likely to influence them** to select one provider over another if all other factors were equal. Only 2% said it would have no influence at all.
- Responses were notably consistent across respondents (i.e. regionally and demographically)

Summary of responses

Breakdown of types of settings attended (average of responses from have attended / are attending / are likely to attend)

Setting type	
Private nursery	30%
Local authority nursery / children's centre	17%
Childminder	7%
Sessional day care (including pre-school)	18%
Nursery attached to a school	25%

On average food was / is / is likely to be provided by 75% of settings

		Which factors are important in the choice of nursery or childminder for your child/children?								
		Clearly planned curriculum	Good pastoral care	Provision of healthy food	Encourages healthy behaviours (i.e. good dining skills, physical activity)	Good Ofsted rating	Strong staff / child relationships	Good access to outdoor space	Children seem happy there	Has good reputation
Very important	n	211	247	267	307	258	330	262	404	308
	%	42%	49%	53%	61%	52%	66%	52%	81%	62%
Important	n	202	171	173	165	184	142	200	79	157
	%	40%	34%	35%	33%	37%	28%	40%	16%	31%
Quite important	n	69	54	49	27	47	22	37	16	34
	%	14%	11%	10%	5%	9%	4%	7%	3%	7%
Not important	n	16	18	9	-	7	3	-	-	1
	%	3%	4%	2%	-	1%	1%	-	-	0%
Unsure	n	2	10	2	1	4	3	1	1	-
	%	0%	2%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	-
NET: Very important / important	n	413	418	440	472	442	472	462	483	465
	%	83%	84%	88%	94%	88%	94%	92%	97%	93%

How important is/was the quality of food provision in your choice of nursery or childminder?		
	n	%
Very important	283	57%
Some importance	181	36%
Not important	36	7%

How confident do you feel in the food provided by your nursery or childminder?		
	n	%
Very important	252	50%
Some importance	235	47%
Not important	13	3%

Would you value an independent accreditation of food quality and provision of food education when you were choosing a nursery or childminder for your child?		
	n	%
Yes	416	83%
No	84	17%

If all other factors were equal, would an independent endorsement of food quality and provision of food education influence you to select one provider over another?		
	n	%
Very much	64	13%
Quite a bit	208	42%
Not sure	176	35%
Not much	40	8%
Not at all	12	2%

		What is important to you in terms of food provision?							
		Food is prepared from scratch	Menu is healthy and nutritious	Menu is varied with a range of foods on offer	Good social skills are encouraged	Children are encouraged to try new foods	Children have the opportunity to learn about healthy choices	Children have the opportunity to cook and grow	Children have the opportunity to learn where their food comes from
Very important	n	170	294	249	284	255	256	177	190
	%	34%	59%	50%	57%	51%	51%	35%	38%
Important	n	214	175	191	165	187	206	209	203
	%	43%	35%	38%	33%	37%	41%	42%	41%
Quite important	n	93	30	57	49	51	35	88	89
	%	19%	6%	11%	10%	10%	7%	18%	18%
Not important	n	22	-	1	2	6	2	22	15
	%	4%	-	0%	0%	1%	0%	4%	3%
Unsure	n	1	1	2	-	1	1	4	3
	%	0%	0%	0%	-	0%	0%	1%	1%
NET: Very important / important	n	384	469	440	449	442	462	386	393
	%	77%	94%	88%	90%	88%	92%	77%	79%