

Dear Competition and Markets Authority,

I am writing as an independent childminder to comment on the proposed scope of the Early Years Education and Childcare Market Study.

Firstly, I would like to thank the CMA for including funding adequacy and the role of local authorities within the proposed scope. I believe these are fundamental issues that have a significant impact on the sustainability of the sector and, ultimately, on children and families.

However, I have concerns about how evidence is being gathered and whether it will accurately represent the childcare market as a whole.

The early years sector is incredibly diverse. It includes childminders, maintained nursery schools, voluntary and committee-run settings, independent nurseries and large nursery groups, all operating under very different business models and financial circumstances.

While I understand that the CMA has made a questionnaire available to all providers, I do not believe this alone is sufficient to ensure the evidence collected is truly representative.

There is a significant difference between making a public questionnaire available and actively gathering evidence through detailed statutory requests for information. If the most comprehensive evidence is being collected from large nursery groups, while smaller providers contribute only if they happen to discover the online consultation, there is a risk that the study will become disproportionately influenced by one section of the market.

Large nursery groups undoubtedly have an important perspective, but they cannot represent the experiences of the sector as a whole. Many benefit from economies of scale, centralised administration, greater purchasing power and access to investment that smaller providers simply do not. Independent providers and childminders often operate with far smaller financial margins and experience funding pressures in very different ways.

I am also concerned that awareness of the consultation has not reached the majority of providers. The reported attendance of around 80 people at the CMA's provider webinar suggests that many providers may simply be unaware that this consultation exists rather than choosing not to participate.

For a study of this significance, relying primarily on online promotion is unlikely to achieve

the breadth of engagement required. Social media algorithms do not guarantee that important consultations reach those they are intended for.

I would therefore encourage the CMA to consider working with local authorities to distribute information about the consultation directly to every registered provider in their area. Local authorities already hold contact details for providers and routinely communicate important information via email. This would be a simple and effective way to ensure childminders, nurseries and pre-schools across England are aware of the opportunity to contribute.

Given that local authorities already communicate routinely with registered providers, I believe they are uniquely placed to ensure that every provider is made aware of this consultation. A study of national importance deserves direct engagement with the whole sector rather than relying primarily on providers discovering the consultation through websites, webinars or social media.

The early years market is predominantly made up of small independent businesses and childminders. These providers educate and care for thousands of children every day, and their experiences are essential if the CMA is to understand how the market is truly functioning.

A market study can only be as representative as the evidence upon which it is based. If the evidence is weighted towards the largest providers, there is a risk that the findings will not fully reflect the realities faced by the wider sector. Ensuring broad engagement across providers of all sizes is therefore essential to producing recommendations that genuinely improve outcomes for children, families and providers alike.

I also encourage the CMA to keep the scope of the study broad, including consideration of funding adequacy, local authority practices and, where appropriate, whether the evidence gathered indicates the need for a full Market Investigation Reference under Section 131 of the Enterprise Act 2002.

I have also completed the CMA's provider consultation in full, providing detailed evidence and practical examples from my own setting. If it would assist the case team, I would be pleased to provide my full submission or any additional evidence that may support the points raised in this representation. I would also be happy to participate in any future provider discussions, roundtables or evidence-gathering activities should that be helpful.

I appreciate the CMA's willingness to seek views from across the sector and hope this representation contributes positively to ensuring the study captures the full diversity of England's early years market. Independent childminders, voluntary settings, maintained nurseries, small private providers and large nursery groups all play vital but distinct roles.

The stronger and more representative the evidence base, the more robust and meaningful the CMA's conclusions will be.

Thank you for considering my representation. I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this important study and hope the final evidence base reflects the diversity of providers that make up England's early years sector.

Yours faithfully,

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Strong Standard Ofsted Registered Childminder
Chelcie's Childminding