

Spring Funding Impact Survey Summary



In January 2018 PATA conducted a survey to assess the impact of delays in the Spring Funding payments in Gloucestershire.

The survey had 97 complete responses, of which 53 were PATA members and 44 non-members. Of the respondents 50% were Charity or Community Led Preschools/playgroups, 34% Childminders, 10% Private Nurseries and 6% other (e.g. Out of School Clubs).

- 89% of those responding had received their payment late.
- 32% of those who received their payment late incurred some difficulties (e.g. bank charges or had to pay staff or bills late).
- For 68% of respondents the funding represents more than 50% of their income for the term and for 45% of respondents the funding represents 75-100% of their income for the term.
- 66% received the full amount that they were expecting with another 27% expecting the full amount in due course.
- GCC attributed the delays to “a significant number of errors in the data provided” but 96% of respondents have had no contact from GCC regarding specific issues with their data.
- 62% of those responding would prefer to have payments monthly in advance as is already the case in many counties.

Overall it is clear that the delay in payments has had a real impact on many childcare providers in Gloucestershire. This is particularly true for childminders and community settings who are less likely to have reserves available. It was particularly unfortunate that the timing of this payment was in a month when budgets were already stretched and tax bills were due.

Many of those who responded were frustrated by the lack of communication from GCC and a system which doesn't seem to be fit for purpose. It is clear that if the number of errors are to be reduced, settings need to know what is wrong and how it can be resolved.

With the funding payments making up such a large part of many settings' income it is increasingly difficult for them to cover any late or missing payments. This is particularly the case for small providers. It's clear from the survey that the majority of providers would prefer monthly payments in advance. Many of those who were not in favour were concerned that it would come with an even greater administrative burden and further complications to an already over complicated system.

There was a strong preference for more time to complete the forms, particularly from term time only settings. Of the general comments received 50% related to increasing the timescales. This highlights the need for an initial payment based on estimates and subsequent balancing payments.

We also asked if settings were in favour of spreading the Pupil Premium payments across the full 30 hours rather than attributing it only to the 15 Universal hours. 36% were in favour with 48% responding 'Don't know'. There is a larger issue about how the hours are split for children using more than one provider and we know that this is often only resolved by providers directly contacting each other, and even then errors can occur.

All of this adds up to a level of uncertainty and stress for providers which is unacceptable. We will be sharing these results with GCC and hope also to meet with local Councillors and MPs to highlight the issues and help them to understand the frustrations of those working in the sector.

See overleaf for the full survey results.

Survey results in full

- Q1. Are you a PATA Member?
58% Yes 40% No 2% Don't know
- Q2. What type of setting/business are you?
50% Charity/Community led Preschool/Playgroup 10% Private Nursery 34% Childminder
6% Other (including Out of School Club, Private Preschool)
- Q3. How much funding were you expecting in the January round?
40% Less than £5000 40% £5000 - £25,000 15% £25,000 - £50,000 5% More than £50,000
- Q4. Roughly what percentage of your income for the term does the funding represent?
20% 0-24% 12% 25 - 49% 23% 50 - 74% 45% 75 - 100%
- Q5. Did your spring funding payment arrive on time?
11% Yes 89% No
- Q6. Did you receive the full amount that you were expecting?
66% Yes, we received the full amount 27% No, but we are expecting the full amount in due course
2% No and we are not expecting any further adjustments 5% Don't know
- Q7. GCC have attributed delays to "a significant number of errors in the data provided". Has GCC contacted you to raise any specific issues about your data?
3% Yes 96% No 1% Don't know
- Q8. NEF payments are currently made termly. Would it help your setting/business if these were made monthly in advance?
62% Yes 20% No 19% Don't know
- Q9. Pupil Premium funding is only attributable to the 15 Universal hours. Would you be in favour of splitting the Pupil premium funding across the full 30 hours instead?
36% Yes 16% No 52% Don't know

Below are some of the comments made in the survey.

"Lukily we heard that payment was late via the grapevine... an e mail from GCC didn't arrive till Tues pm which would have been too late to action a bank transfer."

"We do not believe we made any errors (especially as we have not heard from the funding office). Therefore we don't understand why we have to wait for our funding to come through because some settings did make errors. It should be those settings that are penalised and not the ones that provide the correct information."

"GCC initially indicated a payment of £4.08 per hour, reduced this to £3.90 and then don't pay on time - unacceptable!"

"More communication from GCC would help me to plan for late payments, advice on inputting data correctly. A simpler system for inputting the data. I am really keen to move to monthly payments rather than termly."

"The online system still feels a little clumsy - could it be more user friendly?"

"We have previously input to the portal on many occasions without error and don't believe we were at fault on this occasion either, so will be interested to receive GCC's email response. It is likely that they will expect us to wait until the 2nd payment run late in March for the missing amount, which I firmly believe is wrong, bearing in mind the wording of the Government's "Model Agreement" which states that LAs "should" pay monthly by September 2018."

"Errors in paperwork completion should be fed back otherwise no improvements will be seen."

"Known delays in payments should be communicated immediately so deposit funds can be accessed to pay wages."

"An initial estimated monthly payment should be paid in advance to help cash flow as 30 hours has increased reliance on NEF payments."

Thank you to everyone who took part in the survey. We will keep you up-to-date with any outcomes and will continue to work to make your voices heard.

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