**Alliance comments on political parties’ manifestos**

**Conservatives**

**Commenting on the news that, under a Conservative government, all new primary schools will be expected to include a nursery, with a capital fund set up to support this, Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-school Learning Alliance, said:**

"Private and voluntary childcare providers play an integral role in the delivery of childcare and early education in this country, and yet many have faced a persistent struggle for survival as the result of insufficient funding. As such, it beggars belief that the Conservative manifesto makes no attempt to address this issue, but instead, chooses to concentrate its funding efforts on increasing the number of school nurseries.

"If this is an attempt to avoid having to deal with the funding concerns raised by the private and voluntary sector, not only is it both short-sighted and cynical, but also nonsensical, given that many of those same concerns are shared by nursery providers in the maintained sector.

"If the 30-hour funded childcare offer is to have any chance of succeeding and actually providing the places promised to parents, then the Conservative Party simply must ensure that adequate funding is available to all providers, not just a select few. Ignoring the needs of the private and voluntary sector, which for years has been the backbone of the childcare sector in this country, is thoughtless, offensive and rash.

**Labour**

**Responding to Labour’s pledge to extend the 30-hour ‘free childcare’ offer to all two-year-olds, Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-school Learning Alliance, said:**

“We know that the first five years of a child's life are vital to long-term learning and development and that investing in the early years not only benefits families, but society as a whole. As such, it is positive to see the importance of quality early years care and education recognised in Labour's manifesto.

“That said, experience has taught us to be sceptical of claims of fully-costed, fully-funded 'free childcare’ schemes. As we've seen with the existing 30-hour offer for working families, if such policies aren't adequately funded, many providers simply won't engage with them – our recent survey revealed that less than half of nurseries, pre-schools and childminders in England plan to deliver the current offer for three- and four-year-olds.

“As such, as is always the case, the devil is in the detail. If Labour’s policy costings are based on existing early years funding rates, which have long been insufficient, then this pledge will inevitably will be underfunded.

"What’s more, it’s unclear from the manifesto whether Labour has factored inevitable future delivery cost rises into its costings. Given its promise to increase pay levels in the early years sector, and its pledge to increase the national minimum wage more generally, this is vital. Add to this the fact that staff wages make up 70-80% of overall provider costs, and the significant increase in staffing numbers needed to support the move to a universal offer for all two-year-olds, and it’s clear that the sector’s funding needs are likely to increase significantly over the duration of the next Parliament.

“Ultimately there is a lot to welcome in principle in this manifesto - but only with adequate funding, based on proper costings, can such promises be delivered in practice.”

**Lib Dems**

**Commenting on the Liberal Democrat manifesto, which pledges to extend existing 'free' childcare offers, Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-school Learning Alliance, said;**

“Once again, we are presented with a manifesto making big promises on childcare, but providing little detail on how these policies will work in practice.

“We know that navigating the gap between the end of parental leave and the start of existing free entitlement schemes has long been raised as an issue by parents, and so understandably many will welcome Liberal Democrat plans to extend the free entitlement to all two-year-olds, and under-twos from working families.

“However, it remains unclear how the party intends to ensure that this pledge is ‘fully funded at sustainable levels’, as claimed in the manifesto. Given the tighter staff-child ratio requirements for younger children, and the additional costs associated with this, such a move would require a significant increase in early years investment.

“And of course, in the longer term, plans to eventually extend the 30-hour offer to all two- to four-year-olds would require even further spending in this area.

“The sector has been on the receiving end of enough underfunded ‘free childcare’ policies. Without more detail on how these pledges will be funded, many providers will remain rightly sceptical about these latest promises.”

**Commenting on the news that the Liberal Democrats are pledging to more than triple the early years pupil premium to £1000 per child per year, Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-school Learning Alliance, said:**

“We have long argued that the disparity between the early years pupil premium and primary school pupil premium is unfair and unjustifiable. As such, the pledge to triple the value of the EYPP is very welcome. Supporting children from more disadvantaged backgrounds is a vital part of early years provision, but clearly providers are limited in what they can do with £300 per child per year.

“Of course, such an investment would need be part of a much larger move to increase early years funding, and further measures will be needed if the Liberal Democrats are serious about supporting providers to deliver quality care and education to all children. As such, we look forward to reading the full manifesto once published and seeing what else the party is proposing in this area.”

**Greens**

**Voicing concern over childcare pledges made in the Green Party's manifesto, Neil Leitch, chief executive of the Pre-school Learning Alliance, said:**

"The Green Party’s manifesto calls for free universal early years education and childcare, with formal education starting at age 7, yet contains no information explaining how many hours would be offered each week, or how this would be funded or implemented.

"Given that the sector is currently struggling to cover the costs and address the logistics of delivering 30-hours to 3- and 4-year-old children of working parents, we are sceptical about how the Greens would be able to work with the sector to achieve their ideas in practice.

"If politicians wish to win the support of the sector, they need to present us with pragmatic policies that will see neither providers, nor parents, left out of pocket."