

The LSESU Nursery Survey Report – November 2015

Executive Summary

The LSESU nursery survey was commissioned as a result of concern over the long term future of the LSE nursery. The School had undertaken two pieces of research – both with low response rates – and as a result of these seemed to conclude that there was no demand for a nursery. The SU felt that the research was insufficient to draw these conclusions and set up a survey to specifically try to fill the gap in the LSE research.

The survey ran from 19 October until 5 November 2015 and received a total of 193 responses. The survey was specifically targeted at student and staff parents of children who are of nursery age at LSE. To ensure eligibility, there were two control questions at the beginning of the survey, which left the total number of valid respondents at 97. Of these valid respondents 32 identified as either a Postgraduate Taught or Research student and 65 identified as a staff member. The results of the survey showed that 97% of student and staff parents of children of nursery age believe that LSE should have a nursery; however 86% of this demographic do not currently use the LSE nursery.

The next stage of the survey sought to contextualise why such a high proportion of student and staff parents do not use the nursery. When parents were asked why they do not use the nursery the three most highly ranked issues were 'location', 'lack of outside space' and 'quality of facilities'. This suggests that whilst there will be some parents who choose a nursery precisely because it is close to their home, the quality of and the basement location of the nursery is a strong deterrent for those and other parents from choosing the LSE nursery.

Nursery-non users were asked to rank four different improvements that could be made to the nursery which may result in them considering the nursery as a childcare option. The improvement that received the most number of 'Yes' responses was to relocate the nursery with an outside space (54 respondents), the second most popular was to improve the current facilities (47 respondents). Again this shows that the facilities in their current state, (in its location in a basement with no outside space) are a major deterrent for student and staff parents.

The survey asked current nursery users as to what they thought about the nursery as it stands and what one thing the nursery could improve. For the former question parents seemed generally satisfied with most aspects of the nursery except for the building within which it is located. Further to this nearly every single comment about what the nursery could improve related to either renovating or relocating it. It seems that parents tend to use the nursery despite its current facilities.

The evidence from the nursery users corroborates the comments of the non-nursery users. This gives clear evidence that to conclude that low usage of the nursery is due to a lack of demand is too simplistic. LSESU concludes that were the nursery to be renovated, reinvested and relocated then more student and staff parents would use this vital service.

Introduction and Methodology

The LSESU Nursery Survey was commissioned as a result as of the investigation by the LSE as to the future provision of childcare for student and staff parents. The School undertook two pieces of research, which have since been used to demonstrate a lack of demand for a nursery. It was felt by the SU that these surveys were insufficient as to draw conclusions in relation to the demand for a nursery. This was due to a low response rate and because the research instruments were not specifically designed to ascertain the level of demand for a nursery.

The LSESU survey was constructed to specifically fill this gap in research; it was aimed at LSE student and staff parents of children of nursery age, who would or do use the nursery. However, after a staff member who was pregnant contacted the SU it was agreed to allow respondents who are pregnant to fill in the survey as well. It should be noted that the original question was not changed to reflect this. The reasoning behind the decision to include expectant parents was that it would be wrong to exclude expectant parents as they would be service users in the near future, however the survey was primarily aimed at those who are or would be using the nursery services at present.

Methodology

In order to ensure the data collected was as robust as possible two controls were placed on the respondents. The first was that respondents were required to have a child aged 5 and under and the second was that they were required to provide a valid LSE email address. If a respondent indicated that they did not in fact meet the criteria then the response was removed. However, respondents who stated that they had a child either too young for the nursery or that they were an expectant parent then these responses were included. As well as this the responses were thoroughly checked for any duplicates.

The survey ran from 19 October until 5 November 2015, it was online only and it was promoted by Aysha Al-Fekaiki – Community and Welfare Officer – through contacting various stakeholders who were asked to disseminate the survey; these included:

- LSESU's Women's Officer
- LSESU's PhD Officer
- LSESU's Feminist Society
- Social Policy Department
- Sociology Department
- Gender Institute

Responses

The survey received a total of 193 responses, 120 were parents of children of nursery age and 73 were not and were then disqualified. Of the remaining respondents a further 23 were disqualified at the LSE email control question and this left the total number of valid respondents as 97.

In order to ensure that it was clear as to the numbers of staff members and students filling in the survey, respondents were asked to choose a demographic. Of the 97 valid responses the demographics of respondents were:

- 0 – Undergraduate
- 7 – Postgraduate Taught
- 25– Postgraduate Research
- 65 – Staff Members

Findings

The findings of this survey are presented in the following pages; these are categorised as 'Demand and Usage', 'Non-Nursery Users', 'Nursery Users' and 'Anecdotal Evidence'. The issues explored by the survey include:

- whether LSE should have a nursery
- why non-nursery users do not use the nursery
- in what way nursery users would like to see the nursery improved.

Please note that percentages have been rounded to the nearest percentage.

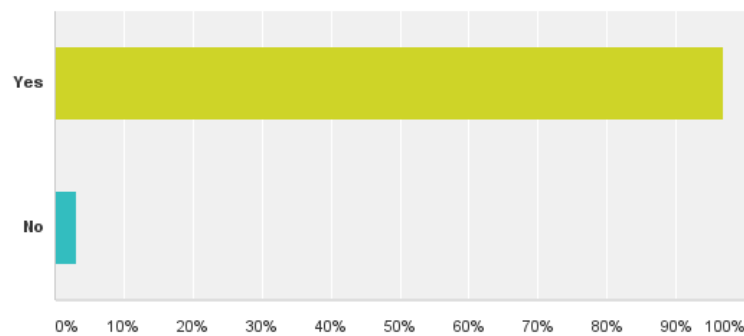
At the end of this report there are three recommendations as to how to improve the current nursery facilities, which are based on the information currently available to the Students' Union.

The intention of this survey and report is to add to the body of knowledge being gathered by LSE as to the general demand for a nursery and why staff and students choose not to use it. We look forward to working together with the LSE to securing the long term future of the nursery as the primary provider of childcare support for students and staff at LSE.

Demand and Usage

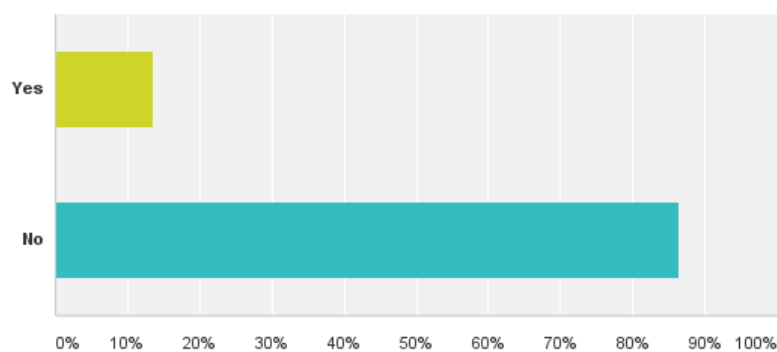
This section of the report will look at whether valid respondents think that LSE should have a nursery and how many student and staff parents use the nursery.

Do you think LSE should have a nursery?



The first stage of ascertaining whether there is a demand for a nursery is to first determine whether respondents think LSE should have a nursery at all. Therefore this was the first question posed to participants. All 97 valid respondents answered this question and the response was overwhelmingly positive with 97% answering 'Yes'. This could suggest that there is a strong demand for a nursery.

Do you currently use the LSE Nursery?



However, the survey also found that it is the minority of student and staff parents who actually use the LSE nursery with 86% of respondents stating that they did not currently use the nursery. Given that the vast majority of respondents think LSE should have a nursery but only 13 respondents use it, this is highly disappointing. This clear disparity demonstrates a need to contextualise why student and staff parents choose not to use the LSE nursery.

Non-Nursery Users

This section of the report will look into the questions posed to non-nursery user respondents. The purpose of this section is to find out why so many student and staff parents do not use the nursery and what LSE could do to encourage greater usage of it.

Contextualising Nursery Non-Use

The first questions respondents were asked was quite simply, 'Why do you not use the nursery?'. However whilst writing the research instrument it was felt that a Yes/No answer would not contextualise the responses enough, and that an open text response may not gather robust enough data. Therefore a matrix was used giving respondents various options including 'location', 'quality of facilities' and 'lack of outside space' and respondents were asked to rank each of these from most Important to least important.

Why do you not use the Nursery?						
Answer Options	Most Important	Important	Neutral	Not Important	Least Important	Responses
Location	47.95%	20.55%	24.66%	4.11%	2.74%	73
Cost	18.57%	20.00%	38.57%	10.00%	12.86%	70
Quality of Facilities	39.86%	26.98%	26.98%	3.17%	3.17%	63
Lack of Outside Space	41.43%	31.43%	20.00%	4.29%	2.86%	70
Child Staff Ratio	3.28%	27.87%	45.90%	18.03%	4.29%	61
Opening Hours	6.35%	27.87%	36.51%	19.05%	9.52%	63
Management and staff	9.38%	17.19%	48.44%	15.63%	9.38%	64
Activities for the Children	17.46%	19.05%	39.66%	15.87%	7.94%	63
Comments						31
					Total	74

A total of 74 respondents answered this question, however respondents were not forced to rank each option and some respondents missed options. The responses were generally neutral when it came to options relating to 'staff/child ratio' and 'activities for children'. The top three cited options were 'location', 'lack of outside space' and 'quality of facilities'.

Firstly for 'location' this gathered 73 responses in total, with 61% of respondents stating that it was either 'Most Important' or 'Important'. The option of 'lack of outside space' received 70 responses and of these 73% of respondents stated that this was either 'Most Important' or

'Important'. Lastly the option in relation to 'quality of facilities' received 63 responses and of these 67% of respondents stated that this was either 'Most Important' or 'Important'.

Nursery Improvements

The next section of the survey presented a number of potential changes to the nursery and asked non-nursery user respondents if those changes would encourage them to begin using the nursery. The potential changes were: for the current facilities to be improved, the nursery to be moved to central campus, the nursery to be moved, with outside space and the opening hours to be extended.

	Yes		No		Maybe		Total
Current nursery facilities were to be improved	47	58.02%	9	11.11%	25	30.86%	81
Nursery relocated to central campus	44	54.32%	10	12.35%	27	33.33%	81
Nursery relocated with outside space	54	67.50%	6	7.50%	20	25.00%	80
Opening times were to be more flexible	43	52.44%	8	9.76%	31	37.80%	82

The purpose of these questions was to probe non-nursery user respondents as to the actions that LSE could take to improve the nursery and to encourage student and staff parents to use it. On average 81 parents answered these four questions with 68% stating that they would consider using the nursery if it was relocated with outside space, 58% stating they would consider using the nursery if the current facilities were to be improved, 52% stating they would consider using the nursery if the opening hours were to be extended and 54% stating they would consider using the nursery if it was relocated on central campus.

Analysis

The matrix asking respondents why they do not use the nursery showed that the top three reasons for parents not using the nursery were 'location', 'lack of outside space' and 'quality of facilities'. However it should be noted that the researcher accepts that the definition of 'location' may lack specificity; in the researchers mind this meant the central London location where the nursery currently stands, however this may not have been in the respondents mind when answering the question. Nevertheless there were some respondents who stated in their comments that a central London location would mean they would not use the nursery, although it is difficult to quantify how many respondents this amounts to.

The matrix gives important insight into the deterrents for parents using the LSE nursery, however on its own it does not determine what LSE could do to encourage higher usage. Therefore the survey sought to contextualise this further by asking respondents as to if improvements were made to the nursery then would the respondent consider using the nursery

On average across all four questions, 8 respondents said that they would not consider using the nursery regardless of the changes made, and an average of 26 respondents stated 'Maybe'. Therefore if it is assumed that these respondents would be unlikely to use the nursery even if improvements were made, then this leaves an average of 47 respondents (58%) who stated that they would consider using the nursery if changes were to be made. In particular, were the nursery to be relocated to have an outside space 54 non-nursery users (68%) stated that they would consider using the nursery. On top of this, were the current nursery facilities to be improved then 47 non-nursery users (58%) stated they would consider using it. If even half of these were to act upon this, then this would more than double the current number of children attending the nursery.

LSESU understands from these results that the largest barrier to student and staff parents using the LSE nursery is its current location in a basement with little light and no outside space. Whilst there will always be some parents who chose to use a nursery outside of central London, this survey showed that there is still a potential pool of student and staff parents that would consider using the LSE nursery if it were to be improved.

Nursery Users

This section of the report looks at the views of current nursery users to ascertain how they feel the nursery could be improved. Respondents were asked 'How satisfied are you with the nursery as it stands?'. They were then asked to pick different options including building, location, opening hours, staff/child ratio and cost and rank these from 'Extremely Satisfied' to 'Extremely Unsatisfied'.

How satisfied are you with nursery as it stands?						
	Extremely Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Extremely Unsatisfied	Responses
Building	0.00%	18.18%	0.00%	27.27%	54.55%	11
Cost	27.27%	63.64%	0.00%	9.09%	0.00%	11
Location	54.55%	36.36%	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	11
Activities for the Children	45.45%	54.55%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	11
Staff Child Ratio	81.82%	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	11
Opening Hours	63.64%	27.27%	0.00%	9.09%	0.00%	11
Equipment	18.18%	45.45%	27.27%	9.09%	0.00%	11
Comments						2
					Total	11

A total of 11 respondents answered this question and all respondents ranked every option. The general feedback on most aspects of the nursery was positive; in particular parents were most happy with Staff/Child Ratio, with 100% of respondents stating they were either 'Extremely Satisfied' or 'Satisfied'. The only aspect of the nursery that users were unsatisfied with was the building itself, with 82% of users stating they were either 'Unsatisfied' or 'Extremely Unsatisfied'.

Nursery users were then asked to comment on 'What one thing do you think the LSE Nursery could do to encourage more parents to use it?' again all 11 nursery users answered this question. Almost every single comment referred to the quality of the facilities and the fact that the nursery was located in a basement. Below are a selection of comments.

"Move to a more suitable building"

"If there is a chance of changing the location of the nursery to another place around LSE that will have a yard, I think it will make a big impact. Most of the people I talk

with and make them consider the nursery were unsatisfied from the fact the nursery is in a basement with no sun light, lack of fresh air and without a reasonable outdoor option...”

“The Nursery is wonderful in every way except for the fact that it is in a tiny underground basement with no outside play area or climbing/running space. This essentially cost it its 'Good' OFSTED status last inspection. Without doubt, this is the obvious key reason why the nursery is under-utilised by parents, even though its staff quality is absolutely excellent. It makes me sick to my stomach every time I see a giant new building go up at LSE with vast amounts of space and natural light (giant empty waste of space in the middle of the NAB anyone, with just a giant red plastic ball floating in the middle?), and then think of my little toddler stuck in that sad dark corridor that they cruelly call a 'garden' in the nursery.”

“Move the LSE nursery to a sunny location with outdoor space. Given the amazing staff at the nursery, proper accommodation would mean the nursery would have a wait list immediately.”

The data collected clearly shows that nursery users are generally satisfied with the nursery; in particular they state that they are most satisfied with the Staff/Child Ratio. Ultimately the users recognise that the nursery location in a basement and the quality of the facilities are a detriment to the nursery, which corroborates the comments made by non-nursery users.

Anecdotal Evidence

The final question to all valid respondents was to ask them if they had any other comments; a total of 59 comments were received. The issue of there being a lack of outside space and the nursery being located in a basement was brought up in the majority of comments. Some parents stated that although they preferred to use a nursery not in central London, they believed that the nursery should exist, in particular for emergency childcare. Overall there was strong support for a nursery with some respondents stating that if the current facilities were to be improved they would consider using an LSE nursery. Below are a selection of comments:

"...I based my decision to come to LSE and to live in Covent Garden precisely because of the nursery..."

Nursery User

"Knowing my child is well looked after in a safe and suitable environment, in a nursery close to work so its easy to pick and drop him is essential for me, and it would no doubt help increase my satisfaction at work as well as my productivity as an employee."

Nursery User

"Excellent staff who are great with children. This is why I have my daughter there despite the nursery being in a basement. The building is not appropriate and LSE can and should provide proper space for the nursery."

Nursery User

"I visited the nursery and put my child's name down for it. I found the staff to be really lovely and I would have totally trusted my child with them (they were extremely patient with me when I had to take my child off the waiting list), however the lack of outside space put me off. I would have loved to have been able to put my child in the LSE nursery."

Non-Nursery User

"We toured it when my daughter was six months old. They were having ongoing leaks in the bathroom and the whole facility was dark and run down. It felt like a prison. It was the cheapest option available to us and there are days when it would be very convenient to have her there, but I simply couldn't see sending her to that space every day."

Non-Nursery User

“...If opening hours have changed, location moved to a nicer place and cost remained the same then I would seriously consider bringing my 18 month of old daughter to LSE.”

Non-Nursery User

“My child is not yet born, but the major obstacle to using the LSE nursery instead of a nursery in my neighbourhood is that the latter have outdoor space (or at least an abundance of natural light) while the LSE nursery does not. I would strongly consider using an LSE nursery in a better facility”

Non- Nursery User

“...The cost seems quite reasonable, and it is important to have back up care close to work, so I may well wish to use the LSE Nursery for those purposes in future. However, without an outdoor facility it is unlikely that the Nursery would be my primary childcare option.”

Non-Nursery User

“It is very important for the School to provide on site childcare that is of good quality and accessible for students and staff. It has been very important for us that the nursery has also been able to provide emergency childcare when necessary”

Non-Nursery User

“To be honest, for me it's better for my son to use a nursery near to my home for lots of different reasons but I did consider using the LSE nursery. I am sure I would have considered it more seriously if it had more natural light and outdoor space.”

Non-Nursery User

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The purpose of this survey was to ascertain why student and staff parents do not use the LSE nursery and to determine whether there is a demand for it. Overall the SU was overwhelmed by the level of response that we received to this survey; the nursery seems to be an issue that student and staff parents feel strongly about. The vast majority of respondents stated that they thought LSE should have a nursery but even with this support, most student and staff parents chose not to use it.

LSESU accepts that it is one thing to support LSE having a nursery and another to use it or to want to use it, therefore the survey aimed to contextualise why there was such a high disparity between support and use. The more detailed probing of non-nursery users was illuminating and it seemed that it was the quality of the facilities; the fact the nursery is in a basement and the lack of outside space that seemed to be the major deterrent. Although some parents did state that they prefer to use a nursery closer to home, some respondents did use the LSE nursery for emergency childcare.

The theme of the facilities being a deterrent was corroborated by the current nursery users; they generally stated that they were happy with the service that the LSE nursery provides but overwhelmingly were unhappy with the quality of the facilities. In their comments many also stated that they tended to use the nursery *despite* its location in a basement.

From this LSESU concludes that there is a demand for a nursery from LSE student and staff parents, however in order to encourage its use the School needs to commit to relocating, renovating and reinvesting.

Recommendations

1. The LSE should **Relocate** the Nursery to a new location by 2020.
2. The LSE should take action to **Renovate** the Nursery within the next year regardless of location.
3. The LSE should **Reinvest** in the Nursery; create a sustainable business plan going forward to ensure that it is the most cost effective means of providing childcare to students and staff.