



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

RESEARCH

Evaluation of the Childcare Offer for Wales: year 4 (emerging findings)

This paper sets out an overview of the evaluation methodology and analysis of survey and interview data carried out to date.

First published: 26 November 2021

Last updated: 26 November 2021

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://gov.wales/evaluation-childcare-offer-wales-year-4-emerging-findings-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

Contents

[Introduction and methodology](#)

[Implementing the Offer](#)

[Providers' experiences of the Offer](#)

[Parents' experiences of the Offer](#)

[Contact details](#)

Introduction and methodology

This paper presents initial findings of the year 4 evaluation of the Childcare Offer for Wales between September 2020 and August 2021. A full report of findings will be published at a later date.

The Childcare Offer provides up to 30 hours of government-funded early education and childcare to the working parents of 3 and 4 year olds for 48 weeks of the year. The Offer builds on the existing universal commitment to early education, which provides all 3 and 4 year olds with a minimum of 10 hours per week of provision under the Foundation Phase Nursery (FPN). Under the Childcare Offer working parents are entitled to a maximum of 20 hours of funded childcare as well as the minimum 10 hours FPN each week, making up a total of 30 hours of funded provision.

The evaluation set out to assess how effectively the Offer is being delivered to families; provide lessons to inform future delivery; explore the impact that the Offer is having on parental employability, wellbeing and disposable income and

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://gov.wales/evaluation-childcare-offer-wales-year-4-emerging-findings-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

how it may have helped to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and the impact of the Offer on the childcare sector. The evaluation evidence is based on:

- virtual interviews with Welsh Government officials
- consultations with local authorities (virtual discussion group with delivery authorities; virtual discussion group with engagement authorities and individual virtual interviews with all authorities)
- virtual and telephone interviews with key stakeholder organisations
- online survey of participating childcare providers (363 respondents)
- Telephone interviews with 50 participating childcare providers
- online survey of parents who have accessed the Offer (2108 respondents)
- telephone interviews with 30 parents who have accessed the Offer
- Review of monitoring data

Implementing the Offer

The findings presented in this section draw on evidence gathered from local authority representatives as well as representatives from the Childcare Offer and early years education teams within the Welsh Government.

Take-up of the Offer

During the period September 2020 to August 2021, the Offer was delivered to 17,626 children.^[1] This is relatively consistent with, if not slightly higher than the take-up recorded in previous years.^[2] However, local authority representatives noted that the take-up of the Offer started a little cautiously in September 2020 as many parents at this stage remained uncertain about accessing formal childcare amidst COVID-19 concerns. Most local authorities also noted that soon after this cautious start, take-up of the Offer from the end of September 2020 onwards was comparable with that of previous years.

The continued consistent level of take-up of the Offer during year 4 of its implementation indicates that awareness of the Offer among parents remained relatively high during this time, even though opportunities to promote it were

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://gov.wales/evaluation-childcare-offer-wales-year-4-emerging-findings-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

limited due to COVID-19 restrictions. Local authority representatives noted a few factors that are likely to have contributed to the continued level of awareness of the Offer, including social media and word of mouth. However, in the view of these local authorities, the availability of the Coronavirus-Childcare Assistance Scheme (C-CAS), which funded childcare for critical workers during the first lockdown, also played a role in raising awareness, as a number of key worker parents who had previously relied on informal childcare arrangements found themselves needing to rely on formal childcare arrangements during the lockdown. By accessing C-CAS, some of these parents became aware for the first time that they would also be eligible for the Offer, and this, in the view of these local authorities, supported greater take-up of the Offer during the period September 2020 to July 2021.

Local authority representatives noted that several parents had been concerned about the effect that lockdown and a lack of social interaction may have had on the development of their child(ren). As such these parents were keen to take up the Offer in order to increase opportunities for their children to meet and play with other children of the same age.

Some parents and providers noted changes in the type of childcare being accessed through the Offer since September 2020. These included examples of children of critical workers, already accessing formal childcare prior to the pandemic, who changed to attend a different setting during the spring / summer of 2020 in order to access C-CAS funded childcare. Some of these children who were then eligible for the Offer remained with the new provider either because the family preferred the new setting, they wanted fewer changes, or because the parents wanted to make sure that they could access provision from a provider that would be likely to remain open in the event of another lockdown. In some cases, this resulted in a movement away from informal childcare to formal provision.

On the other hand, examples were also offered of parents actively choosing to use more informal childcare alongside formal childcare arrangements in order to maintain a 'back up' option to limit any disruptions to their overall childcare arrangements that may result from the formal setting having to temporarily close because of COVID-19. Other examples included parents choosing to access provision from only one setting, whereas they may previously have accessed

childcare from two or more settings, in order to limit the risk of COVID-19 transmission. Other parents accessed childcare from only one provider as they did not have any other choice because some provision, such as after school clubs and some sessional provision, closed for periods due to COVID-19.

These shifts in provision did not necessarily lead to a reduction in the total number of hours of formal childcare taken up. However, in many cases, they resulted in an increase in the hours of provision used at day nurseries and a reduction in the hours used at sessional childcare settings. These shifts in the use of the Offer has potentially had consequences on the childcare sector as a whole.

Providers noted a mixed picture regarding the demand and take-up of childcare within their settings during year 4 compared to before COVID-19. The majority of surveyed providers (55%) had seen no change, with just over a quarter reporting that they had seen an increase in demand for places, the remainder (18%) saw less demand.

[1] This figure is taken from the termly monitoring data that all local authorities return to Welsh Government. However, the figure excludes missing data for one or two terms for two local authorities. Therefore, the actual number of children the Offer was delivered to during this period will have been slightly higher than this figure.

[2] In the second year, 15,929 children used the Offer (the Offer was fully rolled-out by the end of the year) and in year 3, 16,377 children used the Offer (between September 2019 and March 2020).

Processing parent applications for the Offer

Applications for the Offer were reopened in August 2020 after being suspended from March. Applications for children who had been eligible for the Offer from the Summer term of 2020 were processed during the last two weeks in August. Then applications relating to children eligible for the Offer from September 2020 needed to be processed during the first two weeks in September. As a result, delivery local authorities had to process applications from 2 cohorts of parents

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://gov.wales/evaluation-childcare-offer-wales-year-4-emerging-findings-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

within the same time frame that they had in previous years to process applications from just one cohort. Processing large volumes of applications within this time frame was challenging. Most local authorities noted that they successfully processed applications within a shorter timescale than they had initially anticipated, however, some delays were incurred and therefore some parents were not able to access funded childcare from the date they were entitled to. Some further delays were incurred by parents who had difficulties producing the required evidence documentation. However, these were in the minority of cases.

Temporary relaxation of income eligibility criteria

The Welsh Government decided, before applications for the Offer were reopened in August 2020, that if a parent had fallen out of eligibility (because, as a result of COVID-19, their income had fallen below 16 hours at the applicable minimum wage or gone above £100k gross temporarily because they were a critical worker and could evidence that their income had increased as a result of them responding to the pandemic), they could continue to receive the Offer until the UK Government employment support schemes for employed and self-employed people stopped. They did however need to evidence that their earnings met the income eligibility criteria for the Offer before the start of the pandemic and that they had seen a temporary reduction or increase in income as a result of COVID-19.

No major issues were raised by delivery local authorities or parents relating to the temporary relaxation of the income eligibility criteria. Some delivery local authorities did note that checking through the furlough status of some parents did add a few additional challenges to the eligibility checking process. These local authorities also noted that re-checking these at some point in the new year, now that the furlough scheme has come to an end, is likely to create additional resource challenges.

Delivery authorities continue to highlight some ongoing challenges relating to checking the eligibility of self-employed individuals, particularly new start-ups during lockdown and individuals on zero-hour contracts.

Communication with parents and providers

Delivery and engagement local authorities noted that opportunities to engage directly with parents and providers to raise awareness of, and provide information directly related to the Offer have been limited due to COVID-19. However, this has prompted some local authorities to increase or review and improve the information available online through their websites. Findings indicate that general awareness of the Offer amongst parents has remained high – hence the comparable take-up numbers. However, findings also indicate that although many parents appear to be aware of Offer, many do not fully understand it, and the level of understanding may even have fallen during 2020 and 2021 compared to previous years. The specific points about which parents continue to be unclear include the eligibility criteria, the split between childcare and FPN hours and the availability of funded provision during school holidays.

COVID-19 specific issues

COVID-19 created challenges for some parents and children in relation to their ability to access both the FPN and childcare elements of the Offer. In cases where children were accessing childcare from one provider and FPN from another provider located in a different setting, accessing both FPN and funded childcare was a particular challenge during the latter part of 2020 and early 2021. In cases where children were accessing FPN delivered in school settings this provision was simply not available during periods when schools were closed even though most childcare providers remained open. During these periods Childcare Offer funded children could only access up to 20 of the 30 hours they were eligible for each week. Even when school-based FPN was available, some providers suspended their provision of transport services to and from their settings or limited the settings they would pick up from and drop off to in order to maintain social distancing bubbles. As a result, many parents could only access Childcare Offer funded childcare or FPN, but not both. This placed a temporary limit on parental choice and access to all the funded provision available to them.

One local authority referred to a case where a group of childcare providers got

together during 2020 to announce that they would not allow children to access their setting if they also accessed FPN at the local school where they would be mixing with a lot of other children and perceived to be increasing the risk of catching and spreading COVID-19. As a result, many parents withdrew their children from the maintained FPN provision to ensure they could continue to access childcare from these providers. These children therefore missed out on the FPN provision they were entitled to during this time, even though the provision was available for them. In addition, many of the parents had to pay for the additional hours of childcare they required to cover the hours that their child would otherwise have spent within the FPN setting.

Additional learning needs (ALN) and child development during COVID-19

Many local authority representatives, parents and childcare providers noted concerns that isolation of families during COVID-19 lockdowns may have had a negative impact on the development of many children, including speech and language as well as general social skills and gross motor skills. Some local authorities noted that demand for additional support to help children with delayed development increased considerably during 2020 to 2021. Although much of this support was directed towards children under the age of 3 who are not yet eligible for the Offer, some local authority representatives and providers were of the view that the impact of COVID-19 on child development could take several years to address. As such, there is likely to be an increase in the support required for Childcare Offer eligible children in the next year or so, even if it has not yet been the case.

Most local authority representatives noted that more of the Additional Support Grant available through the Offer is now being allocated to providers to enable them to support children with additional support needs. Some local authority representatives also noted that they hoped that the introduction of the new ALN Code would improve the process of identifying and directing support towards preschool-aged children who have ALN and that this will ensure effective use of the additional funding available.

Preparing for the new digital system

Generally, local authorities reported that they felt informed and fully involved in the process of moving towards a digital system and welcomed this. However, some also expressed views that they would appreciate receiving more information about the exact details of the full rollout sooner rather than later. Some local authorities expressed concerns that staff members within their team were starting to suspect that their role within the childcare team would become redundant once the digital system was fully operational, prompting some to consider looking for work elsewhere.

Most local authorities and providers hoped that the digital system would bring more consistency and increase transparency especially in parents' ability to track and monitor aspects of the Offer including how much school holiday provision they had left.

Links with early years provision and parent support programmes

As part of the evaluation fieldwork, we reviewed the way and the extent to which the Childcare Offer aligns with other early years provision including Foundation Phase Nursery (FPN) and childcare provision delivered through Flying Start; as well as parent support programmes that offer childcare funding to enable parents to access sustainable employment including Parents Childcare and Employment (PaCE).

Foundation Phase Nursery (FPN)

FPN is an integral part of the Childcare Offer making up at least 10 of the 30 hours of funded provision available to eligible children. When the Offer was first piloted in 2017, some stakeholders voiced concerns that the funding rate offered to providers to deliver FPN by local authorities was, in many cases, lower than the standard £4.50 an hour rate offered to providers for delivering the childcare

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://gov.wales/evaluation-childcare-offer-wales-year-4-emerging-findings-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

hours included within the Offer. As a result, many were concerned that some non-maintained providers would reduce or stop delivering FPN in order to focus more of their resources towards delivering childcare. However, from January 2021 the Welsh Government made additional funds available to local authorities to enable them to increase funding to the non-maintained sector to support the alignment of FPN and childcare funding rates under the Childcare Offer.

This development has been largely met with the approval of providers. Most were of the view that the harmonisation of funding rates would help ensure that FPN provision in non-maintained settings continued in the future. However, a minority voiced concerns that the process could displace some provision away from smaller providers towards larger ones.

Flying Start

Flying Start helps families with children under 4 years old in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Wales. Part of the Flying Start help available includes funded part-time childcare (12.5 hours) a week for 2 to 3 year olds. Flying Start childcare is for a younger group of children than the Childcare Offer and only some parents will access both schemes, however, there are some connections and interdependencies between Flying Start and the Offer.

For example, stakeholders consulted noted that some potential tensions exist within non maintained settings delivering childcare funded through Flying Start as well as the Childcare Offer. The staffing ratios required for younger children (funded through Flying Start) are higher than those required for older children through the Childcare Offer. As a result, the cost per child of delivering Flying Start funded childcare is higher than that of delivering the Offer. This, in the view of some stakeholders, could encourage some of these providers to favour the delivery of Offer-funded childcare over Flying Start funded childcare. These concerns are very similar to those previously noted in relation to FPN provision in non-maintained settings.

Parents Childcare and Employment (PaCE)

PaCE assists out of work parents into training or employment where childcare is their main barrier to doing so. Through PaCE, out of work parents can access support with childcare up to the point where they gain a job and for their first month in employment. For some of these parents moving from accessing support through PaCE to gaining funded childcare support through the Childcare Offer would appear a natural progression route.

PaCE advisers noted that they were aware of the Offer but did not always feel that they were kept sufficiently informed about the Offer and therefore did not always feel confident that they are providing parents with up-to-date information relating to it. Advisers also noted that in their view, knowledge of the Offer amongst the parents they support was also quite low. PaCE advisers also noted that the parents they support don't always consider options beyond the point of getting into work and therefore the Childcare Offer is not always an immediate priority for them.

Providers' experiences of the Offer

This section presents the evidence gathered primarily through 50 depth interviews held with childcare providers, an online survey of providers (363 respondents); depth interviews with Cwlwm^[3] organisations and the local authority childcare teams. Responses to the survey were received from providers in every local authority; half were childminders (50%), just over a third (34%) were full day-care settings, 14% were sessional day-care and two% were out of school childcare.

^[3] Cwlwm is made up of five organisations that support the childcare sector: Early Years Wales, Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs, Mudiad Meithrin, National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA Cymru) and PACEY Cymru.

Administering the Offer

Over half of the surveyed providers reported spending no extra time or less than an hour per month on administration tasks linked to the Childcare Offer. They reported in interviews that taking part in the Offer was mostly straightforward. A small number of providers surveyed and interviewed found the processes of providing monthly returns to be difficult, due to struggling with using the online systems. Local authority interviewees also reported that a very small number of childcare providers still struggled with providing correct returns electronically.

As noted in the evaluations of previous years the amount, the nature and timetable of administration tasks required by providers continues to vary depending on which delivery local authority they report to / submit claims to, including some paper-based submissions for some local authorities. This is a particular frustration for providers dealing with two or more delivery authorities. These difficulties were made worse during this past year of the Offer according to some providers who explained that they had difficulties getting hold of local authority staff who were working from home. Whereas before COVID-19 they would usually receive an almost instant reply to a phone or email query, it could now take days.

Dealing with parents' various queries could also be time-consuming for providers. In interviews and in the survey replies, providers explained that parents do not seem to understand the detail of the Offer and that they have to spend time setting out the detail of the Offer: informing parents of what hours they are entitled to (and that some parents contacted them expecting that they could be able to receive 30 hours of childcare), the distinction between FPN and childcare, the different hours in term time and school holidays and that there are only 9 weeks of funded childcare in the holidays.

The Offer is available for 9 of the 13 weeks of the school holidays. As in previous years, providers and local authorities reported that there is still confusion among parents as to the use of childcare during school holidays, especially regarding the 4 weeks a year which is not covered by the Offer. In the survey comments and interviews providers report that they take care to explain

and remind but that some parents still forget, and the August fees come as a shock.

Engaging with parents

Almost all providers promoted the Offer to parents. A quarter of the providers surveyed were aware of parents who were potentially eligible for the Offer but who had not taken up the Offer. Providers set out a range of reasons:

- difficulties (or perceived difficulties) with gathering self-employment evidence, particularly for those newly employed or in family businesses
- confusion with the fit with tax credits
- having difficulty getting through to local authorities to find out more information
- being better off (or perceived to be better off) with childcare funded through universal credit
- application process seeming too daunting

Some providers had changed working practices and the way they liaised with parents for a period, for example instigating a 'one setting' policy for parents, reducing the number of schools they provided wrap around for, or asking parents to collect their children off the premises. However, most settings reported that they had returned to near 'normal' by the end of the evaluation period (August 2021).

Effect on profitability and sustainability

Some 66% of providers reported that the Offer had a strong or some positive effect on their setting's profitability and 71% reported that the Offer had a strong or some positive effect on their sustainability (a similar proportion to previous years for both).

Just over two-thirds of providers surveyed (68%) answered that the £4.50 per hour was a viable payment rate for them. This was true of providers across all setting types, and almost all local authority areas, except for two local authority

areas (Vale of Glamorgan and Cardiff) where there was a 50/50 split with half reporting the rate as viable, and half that it was not. However, there were calls to increase the rate soon, even among those providers reporting the rate as viable in both the survey responses and interviews, and by the local authority and stakeholder representatives. They pointed to increasing costs on providers: COVID-19 related costs, inflation, increases in National Minimum Wage, heating bills and not being in a position to carry out any fundraising due to COVID-19.

Providers explained that other factors contributed to the viability of their business, namely the fact that the fees were guaranteed to be paid, and that delivering the Childcare Offer meant that they could access grants which supplemented what they received as fees. Without access to these grants then the £4.50 wouldn't be viable for some providers.

Concerns on the state of the childcare sector

Local authorities, stakeholders and some providers themselves expressed concerns about the state of the childcare sector. It was explained in the qualitative interviews that most of the sector has come through the pandemic quite well but that the impact of COVID-19 has been uneven: some day nurseries have been open throughout the past eighteen months and are in a relatively strong financial position; some after-school provision were unable to open for a period due to sharing school buildings and were more likely to have seen a drop in demand from parents not wishing use several settings; and some childminders have made the decision to move to other jobs within and outside of the childcare sector.

There are serious concerns about staffing issues across all types of settings, which may affect the Offer in the short and medium-term. Settings reported not being able to fill vacancies; not being able to backfill positions when staff were absent due to shielding, or sick with COVID-19 or other illnesses and not being able to recruit 1:1 support for children. A small number of examples were shared where settings had had to close part of their provision due to staff shortages or had reduced the number of places for younger children. However, no parents reported being unable to source childcare in this period.

While challenges in recruiting and retaining staff have been raised in previous years of the Childcare Offer, they have been exacerbated by the pandemic, and 19% of surveyed providers reported that COVID-19 had had a negative effect on their ability to recruit staff. Furthermore, there are concerns that staff are tired and feeling unappreciated, especially staff in those settings which stayed open throughout the pandemic. Stakeholders and local authorities pointed to examples of settings that had closed temporarily or permanently due to staff shortages leading to localised gaps in childcare availability. There are concerns that more staff may look to leave the sector over the coming months and years.

Stakeholders and local authorities believed that the raft of financial support for the sector (continuing payments for Childcare Offer childcare for a period of 3 months back in spring 2020 (during Year 3); the furlough scheme, childcare providers' grants etc) had helped the situation and kept settings open, but not necessarily sustainable for the future. Many of the providers interviewed and surveyed referred to the financial support as having made a significant positive difference to their viability as a business.

Parents' experiences of the Offer

This section presents the evidence gathered primarily through an online survey of parents who have accessed the Offer (2,108 respondents) and follow-up depth interviews with 30 of these parents. Of the 2,108 parents who responded to the survey, most (88%) were previously using formal childcare before accessing the Offer. As part of the Offer, most respondents (56%) used full day care, 28% sessional day care, 14% out of school and 12% childminders.

Salary profile of parents accessing the Offer

Data on the salary bands of parents accessing the Offer is collected from the termly monitoring data that all local authorities return to Welsh Government. Analysis of this data reveals that the median annual gross salary band of individuals accessing the Offer between September 2020 and August 2021 was £20,800 to £25,999. This is lower than the national average full-time salary of

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://gov.wales/evaluation-childcare-offer-wales-year-4-emerging-findings-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

£28,158 per annum in 2020, recorded by the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (Office of National Statistics) ([Average \(median\) gross weekly earnings by UK country - English region and year \(£\) \(StatsWales\)](#))

Parents' general awareness of the Offer

There was a consensus among providers and local authorities that parents' awareness of the Offer has improved in the last few years. Despite local authorities being unable to carry out face to face events to promote the Offer over the past year or so due to COVID-19 restrictions, it was noted there is generally good awareness of the Offer. The majority of parents surveyed (75%) were already aware of the Offer before they heard they were eligible. This could be attributed to the fact that the Offer has been available for a few years now and that some parents would have used the Offer previously for an older child. However, as the previous evaluations found, often parents were already using formal childcare prior to accessing the Offer (88% of those surveyed) and they were told about the Offer by their childcare provider (53% of those surveyed). However, interviews with Parent Childcare and Employment (PaCE) advisors suggested that awareness of the Offer amongst those not in work, and to whom childcare is a barrier to entering work, is low. This suggests that, although awareness might be high amongst parents already in work and already using formal childcare prior to accessing the Offer, awareness amongst unemployed parents is low.

Application process

The large majority of parents surveyed (80%) were of the opinion that it was easy to apply for the Offer. Of those who said they found the process difficult, just under half reported that it was either time consuming to complete the application or they found it difficult to provide the required accompanying documentation as proof of eligibility. Almost all (99%) were able to complete the whole application process in their language of choice.

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://gov.wales/evaluation-childcare-offer-wales-year-4-emerging-findings-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

Eligibility and entitlement (including school holidays)

Survey responses and interviews showed that many parents remain confused about what the Offer covers in terms of childcare hours and FPN. Interviewed parents described spending a lot of time trying to research and work out what they were entitled to, where and when. They requested simpler information, that is easier to find, and with exact FPN and Childcare Offer application and start dates set out clearly. A particular issue of confusion was the balance of hours between childcare and FPN (and a mistaken belief when planning childcare that they would have 30 hours childcare); when exactly their child would be eligible for both childcare and FPN; and when to apply for both schemes.

Around one third of parents surveyed noted that, when applying for the Offer, it was not clear what childcare provision was covered by the Offer during school holidays. As in previous years, there were cases mentioned during both the provider and parent interviews where parents had not understood that the Offer did not cover a full year and were caught by surprise when they had to pay fees in the August summer holidays.

Move from informal to formal childcare

The vast majority of parents surveyed were using formal childcare before they began accessing the Offer (88%). This is slightly lower than the previous years' evaluation of the Offer (year 3: 93%; year 2: 89%; and year 1: 94%). This suggests that awareness of the Offer may have started to improve among parents who were not using formal childcare previously. However, it is still the case that most parents who access the Offer were already using childcare prior to accessing the Offer and as noted above, found out about the Offer through their childcare provider.

Of the parents who were using formal childcare before accessing the Offer, 45% increased the number of hours they were using once they started accessing the Offer. On average, these parents increased their childcare hours by 12 hours. Therefore, although most parents were using formal childcare before accessing

the Offer, many were able to increase the hours they used because of the Offer. This also meant that parents were able to reduce the number of hours of informal care (often provided by grandparents or other family members). For those who responded to the survey, the average number of informal care hours used decreased from 11 hours prior to accessing the Offer, to 7 and a half hours while accessing the Offer.

Welsh-medium provision funded by the Offer

Overall, parents' survey responses suggest that most of those parents who wanted to access Welsh-medium childcare provision were able to do so (93%). Of the minority who wanted to access Welsh-medium provision but were not able to do so (7%), reasons for this were either there was no local Welsh-medium provision; the local provision was full; or that their local Welsh-medium setting (often Cylch Meithrin) did not offer the full hours parents required and so their child would have had to attend another setting as well, the logistics of which meant this was not an option for these parents. However, these were the small minority of cases and overall access to Welsh-medium provision for the vast majority of those who wanted to use it was sufficient.

Impact of the Offer on parents' employment

The evaluation aims to understand the extent to which the Offer made a difference to parents' employment opportunities through reducing childcare costs as a barrier to employment. Just over half of parents surveyed (58%) were of the opinion that had the Offer not been available to them, their employment situation would be the same or very similar. However, for other survey respondents, their employment situation may have been different had the Offer not been available to them. These parents tended to be those who were on a lower income. For example, nearly a third of all respondents (30%) believed that they would be working fewer hours had the Offer not been available to them; of these respondents, the highest proportion (44%) earned a low income salary (up to £20,799) relative to the national average in 2020 (£28,158 per annum); just over a third (34%) of those who said they would be working more hours earned

either just under or just over the national average (between £20,800 and £36,399); and less than a fifth (17%) earned a higher income (£36,400 and above). This suggests that the Offer has made the most difference to the working hours of those on a lower income by enabling them to increase the hours they work.

In addition to work hours, responses to the survey suggest the Offer has had the most impact on enabling parents to increase their income for those who earn a lower income relative to the national average. Overall, only a small percentage of respondents (6%) indicated that they would be working in a job with lower pay if the Offer had not been available to them. However, of these respondents, the highest proportion (44%) were those who earned a low income (up to £20,799), compared with a smaller proportion (22%) who earned a high income (£36,400 and above).

Despite only a small proportion of survey respondents indicating that they would be working in a job with lower pay if the Offer had not been available as noted above, nearly half of all respondents (46%) said accessing the Offer had given them the potential to increase their earnings. Again, the largest proportion of these parents (41%) were those who earned a lower income. This further supports the finding that the Offer has had the most impact on enabling parents to increase their income for those who earn a lower income relative to the national average.

Furthermore, although a relatively small proportion of survey respondents (9%) noted they would not be in work if it wasn't for accessing the Offer, the majority of these parents (73%) were those on a low income (up to £20,799). This provides further evidence that the Offer has had the most impact on the employment situation of those on a lower income compared with those on a higher income.

In addition to working hours and income, the evaluation also explored whether the Offer has had an impact on the flexibility in the way parents work and their opportunities for in-work training. For just over half of the parents (53% of those surveyed), the Offer has given them more flexibility in the way they work. This was more likely to be reported by parents on a lower income (44%) than parents on a higher income (22%). Although fewer parents felt the Offer had improved

their opportunities for in-work training (36%), again this was more likely to be reported by parents on a lower income (43%). This further illustrates how the Offer has had more of an impact on the work situation of parents who earn a lower income, relative to the national average, compared with those on a higher income.

Overall, these findings indicate that the Offer is providing the most support to lower income earning parents, enabling them to remain in employment; increase their working hours and/or earnings; giving them more flexibility in the way they work; and improving their opportunities for in-work training.

Impact of the Offer on family wellbeing

Almost all surveyed parents agreed, or agreed to an extent, that accessing childcare had had a positive effect on their own and/or their partner's wellbeing (88%) and reduced the financial burden of childcare (74%). In interviews, parents explained that the savings had meant that childcare costs were manageable, and that there was less worry associated with managing household finances, including being less likely to go into debt. Furthermore, many parents that responded to the survey noted that they either have much more money (34%) or slightly more money (51%) to spend on things other than childcare each month as a result of accessing the Offer. Examples include spending more money on groceries, extra-curricular clubs for the children, family days out, home improvements, debt payments and savings.

Several parents interviewed explained that the Offer provided a welcomed opportunity to give grandparents more free time. Prior to accessing the Offer, these parents were relying on grandparents to care for their child as they were unable to afford full childcare costs. Having access to the Offer has meant that they were able to use more formal childcare and relieve grandparents of these caring responsibilities.

Parents reported positive effects from their child accessing childcare, especially positive effects on their social development through having the opportunity to interact and play with other children at the childcare setting (94% of parents surveyed); as well as a positive effect on their child's cognitive, including

language, development (88%); and behaviour development (87%).

Contact details

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

For further information please contact:

Faye Gracey

Email: talkchildcare@gov.wales

Media: 0300 025 8099

Social research number: 77/2021

Digital ISBN: 978-1-80391-275-2



This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://gov.wales/evaluation-childcare-offer-wales-year-4-emerging-findings-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).

About this document

This document is a copy of the web page [Evaluation of the Childcare Offer for Wales: year 4 \(emerging findings\)](#) downloaded.

Go to <https://gov.wales/evaluation-childcare-offer-wales-year-4-emerging-findings-html> for the latest version.

This document may not be fully accessible, for more information refer to our [accessibility statement](#).

Get [information on copyright](#).

This document was downloaded from GOV.WALES and may not be the latest version.

Go to <https://gov.wales/evaluation-childcare-offer-wales-year-4-emerging-findings-html> for the latest version.

Get [information on copyright](#).