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# Childcare and Early Years Survey Wales 2009 Executive Summary



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Wales 2009  
Executive Summary**

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Assembly Government

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## **Introduction**

This report provides the main findings of the Welsh Childcare and Early Years Survey which was conducted in 2009. It was funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). The study aims to provide salient, up-to-date information on parents' use of childcare and early years education, and their views and experiences of childcare.

Childcare has been a key feature of the Welsh Assembly Government's vision for a better Wales. Since devolution there have been a number of childcare plans and strategies in place which have recognised the benefits that childcare can bring to parents, children and to the economy. The Childcare Strategy for Wales (Welsh Assembly Government 2005) is the latest document that sets out in detail how the Assembly Government will help ensure: that childcare supports the development needs of children in Wales; that childcare is widely available and affordable so that parents can train or work; and that the childcare provided gives parents flexibility and choice in how they balance family, work and other commitments.

Since the Childcare Strategy was published, there have been some significant developments in the childcare field, including the 2006 Childcare Act and the Children and Families (Wales) Measure which was passed by the National Assembly for Wales in 2009. The 2006 Childcare Act underpins the Assembly Government's childcare strategy and enshrines in law: parents' legitimate expectation of accessible high quality childcare; and Local Authorities' responsibilities for providing information to parents and supporting them in their parenting role. It also places duties on Local Authorities in Wales to: secure sufficient childcare to meet the requirements of parents in their area; and ensure people have access to the full range of information they need as a parent.

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure builds on the foundations of Cymorth and Flying Start to tackle child poverty and strengthen the existing childminding and day care legislation. This is reinforced by the Welsh Assembly Government's draft Child Poverty Strategy for Wales (Welsh Assembly Government 2010) which includes a priority to promote accessible, affordable and high quality childcare.

This summary describes what childcare is used by different types of families, changes in take-up between 2004 and 2009, parents' reasons for using or not using childcare, and parents' views on the providers they used.

## **Methodology**

The survey was carried out between September and December 2009 with just under 600 parents taking part. The sample of parents was randomly selected from Child Benefit records. All the parents had children aged 14 and under in order to focus on the age group most often included within Government policy

on childcare. The main respondent needed to have main or shared responsibility for making decisions about any childcare that the child(ren) in the household may have received; they were usually the child(ren)'s mother with 95% of respondents being female. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in people's homes and lasted for an average of three-quarters of an hour. The overall response rate amongst those eligible for the survey was 67%.

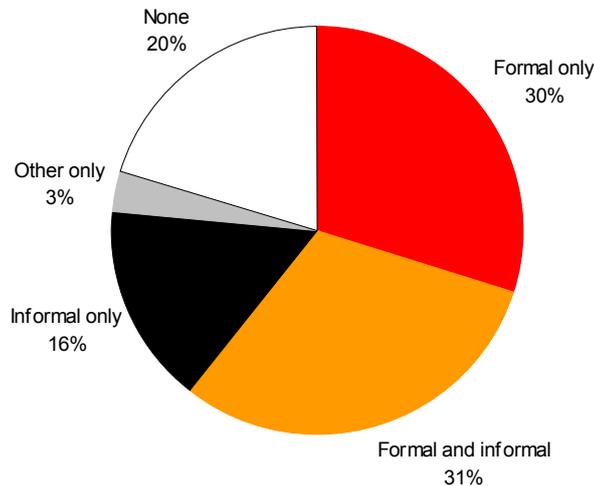
The study used a very inclusive definition of childcare and early years provision. Parents were asked to include any time that their child was not with resident parents, or their current partner, or at school. Hence this covered informal childcare, such as grandparents, as well as formal childcare and early years education. For school-age children, the definition of childcare covered time they spent attending before- and after-school activities. The interviews consisted of questions on the family's use of childcare in the reference term-time week (which was the most recent term-time week) and during the school holidays

### Use of childcare and early years education

Eighty per cent of families in Wales used childcare in the term-time reference week. Thirty per cent just used formal childcare, 31% used both formal and informal childcare, and 16% only used informal carers (3% of families used types of childcare that could not be classified as either formal or informal).

### Use of formal and informal childcare

Base: All families



The use of formal childcare and early years education in term-time increased between 2004 and 2009. Most of this change was due to the increase in the take-up of out-of-school services (such as breakfast and after-school clubs – for instance take-up of out-of-school clubs and activities located on a school site increased from 8% in 2004 to 19% in 2009). This increase is to some extent accounted for by changes in the survey methodology, but probably also

reflects real change. The take-up of informal childcare (such as grandparents) has remained stable between 2004 and 2009.

The use of various forms of childcare varied according to the age of their child and their circumstances. Three and 4 year olds were most likely to be in childcare which is largely due to the entitlement to free hours of early years education. Indeed, 95% of 3-4 year olds who were eligible to receive the free entitlement were in early years education. Twelve to 14 year olds were the least likely to receive childcare (56%).

Children from working and higher-income families were more likely to be in formal childcare than those from non-working and lower-income families. For example, 53% of children in dual-earning couple families received formal childcare compared with 24% of non-working couple families. Whilst 41% of children in households with an income of less than £10,000 used formal childcare compared with 63% of children in households with an income of £45,000 or more. Regression analysis illustrated that working families were more likely to use formal childcare than non working families even once other factors such as income had been taken into account, and income was independently associated with take-up by school-age children. Children in larger families (i.e. those with three or more children) were less likely to use childcare than those in smaller families (56% compared with 67-76%). Furthermore, children living in the most deprived areas were less likely to receive formal childcare (40%) than those living in the least deprived areas (46%) (although the relationship was not linear – with children in the 2<sup>nd</sup> least deprived quintile being the most likely to use formal childcare – 55%).

### **Packages of childcare and their purpose**

Among pre-school children, the three most common packages of childcare they received were centre-based only (e.g. a nursery class, day nursery, playgroup, 27%); a combination of centre-based and informal care (23%); and informal care only (13%). Among school-age children, the three most common packages were informal care only (17%); formal out-of-school care only (i.e. a breakfast or after school club, 15%); and a combination of the two (13%). Only small percentages of children were in any other package of care.

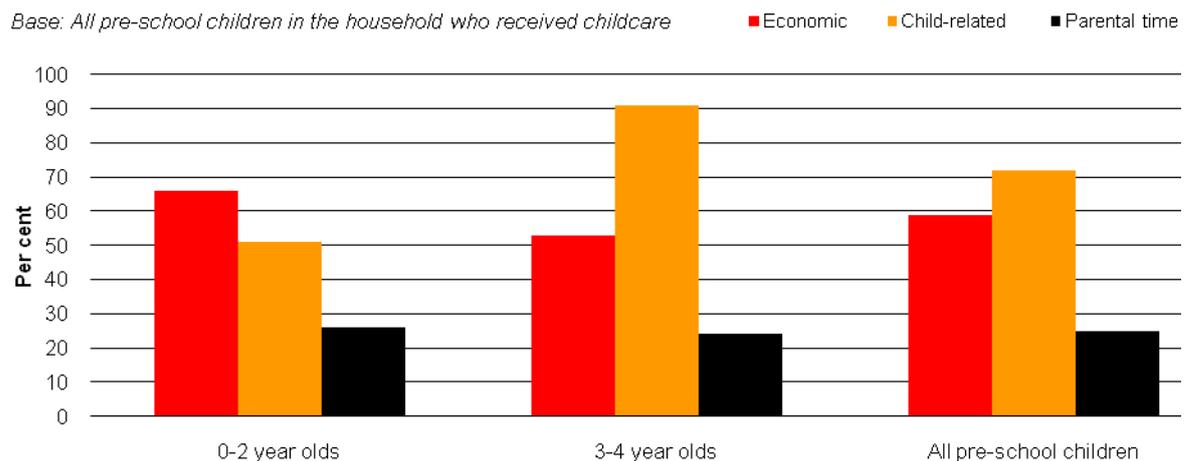
Just under half of both pre-school and school-age children in childcare attended a single provider (49% and 47% respectively). Pre-school children aged 3-4 were more likely to attend two or more providers than 0-2 year olds (65% compared to 36%), whereas there were no differences between the age groups among school-age children. Twenty-six per cent of pre-school children in a combination of centre-based and informal care and 44% of school-age children in a combination of out-of-school and informal care attended three or more providers. For these families, constructing and maintaining a package of childcare may be complex, and it is likely that these children experience a range of different care environments.

Pre-school children attending childcare spent an average of 27.9 hours per week there. Those aged 3-4 spent more hours per week in childcare than

those aged 0-2 (31.3 hours on average, compared to 20.8). They also tended to be in childcare on a greater number of days per week, probably reflecting the fact that free part-time early years education is typically delivered across several days per week. School-age children spent an average of 2.0 hours per day and 5.3 hours per week in childcare outside school hours.

Fifty-nine per cent of pre-school children who went to childcare were doing so for economic reasons (e.g. to enable parents to work, look for work or study); 72% for child-related reasons (e.g. for educational or social development, or because the child liked going there); and 25% for reasons relating to parental time (e.g. so that parents could do domestic activities, socialise or look after other children). Older pre-school children were more likely than their younger counterparts to be attending a childcare provider for child-related reasons (91% compared to 51%). This is probably because many of these children were receiving free part-time early years education, and some 4 year olds were in reception class.

### Reasons for using childcare providers for pre-school children, by age of child



Fifty per cent of school-age children were attending childcare for economic reasons; 70% for child-related reasons; and 16% for parental time reasons. Those aged 5-7 were more likely than their older counterparts to be attending for reasons relating to parental time (23% compared to 12% of 8-11 year olds and 15% of 12-14 year olds).

Across both pre-school and school-age children, those in a combination of care were most likely to be attending a provider for economic reasons, illustrating how a package of care can be required to cover parents' working hours. Some findings also indicated that children attending for economic reasons were heavier users of childcare. In addition, across all age groups, informal childcare was used for children's development and enjoyment less often than centre-based and out-of-school childcare.

## Paying for childcare

Overall, 53% of families who used childcare in the reference week reported they had paid for some or all of that care. More parents paid formal providers than informal providers, although a small proportion of families who used relatives and friends did make some payment for it (4%), and payment in kind (e.g. doing return favours, buying gifts) was quite common: 38% of parents using informal providers had made some form of payment in-kind in the last week.

The overall median weekly amount paid by families 'out of their own pockets' was £16.<sup>1</sup> However, this hides wide variability in costs between families in different circumstances and using different providers. Families paid the most for centre-based and individual providers who are commonly used by pre-school children (particularly 0-2 year olds) and offering care for a full day (e.g. day nurseries). Families with income below 60% of the median were less likely to pay for childcare and those that did pay typically paid less for their care.

Twelve per cent of families using formal childcare reported they had received financial help from others, including the Local Authority, their employer or ex-partners. This is likely to be an underestimate of the scale of the contributions from other sources, as many parents seem not to consider their early years education place to be 'paid for'. Parents most commonly reported getting financial assistance from Local Authorities, followed by employers. Families with pre-school age children were substantially more likely than families with older children to receive help, from LEA and from employers.

Seventy-three per cent of families reported receiving Child Tax Credit, 42% on its own and 31% with Working Tax Credit. Average (median) tax credit receipts were £114 for Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit and £51 for Child Tax Credit.

Some, but not all, families receiving WTC are eligible for additional tax credits to help with childcare costs: 11 per cent of families receiving WTC said they received the childcare element of the tax credit. Sixty-six per cent of families receiving WTC but not the childcare element said they were aware of the extra money available for childcare. The most common reason for not claiming the childcare elements were either because families were not (or did not think they) qualified, either because they did not use appropriate childcare or their earnings were too high.

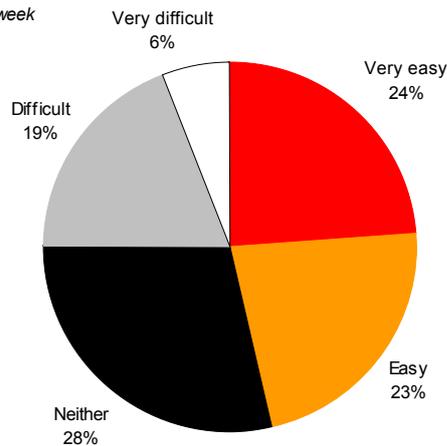
Overall, 25% of families paying for childcare said they found it 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to meet their childcare costs.

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<sup>1</sup> This only includes money paid by the families themselves; respondents were instructed that money paid by other people or organisations should be excluded. Therefore this median figure is the estimated cost to families and not the overall cost of childcare and so may be lower than the total charged by the provider.

## Difficulty paying for childcare

Base: Families who paid for childcare in last week



## Factors affecting decisions about childcare

If parents are to make informed choices about childcare, they need to be able to access to up-to-date and accurate information about all of the childcare available in the local area. However evidence suggests that not all parents feel they have access to good information, and that parents from the most disadvantaged groups in society in particular may struggle to find the information they need.

Sixty-eight per cent of parents said they had used one or more sources of information about childcare in the last year. Among those who had accessed information, most had relied on information from people/ organisations they regularly encountered in daily life, particularly word-of-mouth from friends/ relatives and, for those with school-age children, information provided by their children's school. Local Authorities and Health Visitors were each mentioned as a source of information by 10% of parents, and 6% mentioned their local Sure Start/ Flying Start/ Integrated Children's Centre. The Families Information Service (FIS) was familiar to around a fifth (21%) of parents with just under than half of these (9% of all parents) having ever used it.

Accessing information was strongly linked to existing childcare use – those families who did not use formal provision were much less likely to have accessed information. This in turn meant that those groups known to have lower rates of formal care use, in particular low-income families were less likely to access information about childcare.

Just under half of parents (47%) were not sure whether there were enough Welsh-medium and bilingual providers in their area, 30% thought there were not enough Welsh-medium providers and 28% not enough bilingual providers.

Take-up of out-of-school care was relatively high (29% of families used out-of-school activities on a school site and 4% used these activities off a school site). Among those families who had not used an out-of-school club, 21% said their school did not offer out-of-school clubs. There was some evidence

of unmet demand – 83% who said their school did not currently offer out-of-school provision said they would use such provision if it were available. Where parents had these services available but were not using them, this was mostly through personal choice, often because children did not want to go or because family circumstances meant they did not need to use such care at the moment. A minority of families were not using such provision because of problems with cost, timing or accessibility.

Very few parents had not accessed any childcare at all in the last year (8% of all families). Where they had not used childcare, this was often because families had older school-age children or because they preferred to look after their children themselves. Of these, around a fifth (19%) said they were not using childcare because they could not afford it. As a result, for the majority of families not using any formal childcare in the last year, it appeared that there were no potential changes to childcare provision which might change their mind. In terms of informal care, most (92%) of these families said they had informal care available to them if they needed it for one-off occasions but fewer (65%) said they had informal care available to help on a regular basis.

Parents of younger children (0-2 years) who had not used nursery education (61%) largely attributed their decision to personal preference, with the majority expressing a direct preference for keeping their child with them at home. Only a minority mentioned problems with affordability (10%) or availability of childcare (5%).

### **Parents' views of their childcare and early years education**

Parents using formal childcare were most likely to choose a childcare provider because of the provider's reputation (46%), so children could mix (44%) and concern with the care being given (42%) e.g. someone who was affectionate or well trained. This applied whether the childcare was for pre-school or school-age children. For both pre-school and school-age groups, only a very small proportion of parents said they had no choice over which provider to use.

Virtually all parents of pre-school children stated that their provider helped their child develop skills e.g. recognising letters, words, numbers or shapes. When looking at social skills encouraged by providers e.g. playing with other children or behaving well, the providers of pre-school children were more likely to encourage these than the providers of school-age children.

Parents of both pre-school and school-age children said that talking to staff was the most common way of getting feedback from their provider. However this was mentioned more often by parents with pre-school children than those with school-age children. This is likely due to the fact that pre-school children mainly attend early years settings that have an educational remit and are thereby expected to offer some formal progress reporting (like schools). Parents of pre-school children said that they spoke to providers more often about how their child was getting on and the activities that their child had been

involved in, than parents of school-aged children. This could be because older children will be attending compulsory schooling, thus will be in childcare less often and consequently parents will require less feedback from childcare providers.

In terms of whether parents felt they had enough time to engage in learning activities with their children at home – the majority of parents of children aged 2-5 stated that they felt they had enough time to engage in these activities.

<b>Parental view on the frequency with which they engage in home learning activities with their children</b>						
<i>Base: All children aged 2-5</i>						
	Frequency				Weighted base	Unweighted base
	Definitely enough	Probably enough	Probably not enough	Definitely not enough		
	%	%	%	%		
Look at books or read stories	57	27	13	3	157	162
Recite nursery rhymes or sing songs	59	26	12	3	156	161
Play at recognising letters, words, numbers or shapes	51	31	14	3	157	162
Paint or draw together	48	27	20	5	157	162
Play indoor or outdoor games	49	36	13	2	156	161

NB. Row percentages

The availability of additional services at formal group-based pre-school providers was generally low, with 78% of parents of pre-school children saying that no additional services were available at their provider. In addition, take-up of services at providers where other services were available was low. However, when asked about which additional services they would use if available, parents mentioned a number of services, most frequently health services, courses or training and advice and support for parents. This demand for services was higher than availability or take-up of services and may suggest that parents overestimate the likelihood that they would use these services if they were available.

### **Use of childcare during the school holidays**

Just over half of families with school-age children used childcare in the school holidays (51%), and they were much more likely to use only informal providers (31%) than only formal providers (10%) or a mix of formal and informal provision (9%).

There were some notable differences between families' use of childcare in term-time and the school holidays. Where families used childcare during term-time, 44% used no childcare during the school holidays; and where families used no childcare during term-time, 37% used some holiday care. The major difference between the term and holiday period was that children were

considerably more likely to be cared for by formal providers during term-time (42%) than during the holidays (15%). Holiday clubs and schemes were the most common form of formal childcare in the holidays (10%). In terms of informal carers, grandparents played an important role in providing childcare during school holidays (28% of children received grandparental care in the holidays).

Use of formal childcare during school holidays varied by children's characteristics and their families' circumstances. Those less likely to receive formal holiday care included: older school-age children (i.e. those aged 12-14), children from non-working families, children in lower income households, and children living in disadvantaged areas.

Over two-thirds (71%) of parents used holiday childcare for economic reasons, 59% of parents gave reasons relating to child development or enjoyment reasons, and 17% of parents gave reasons relating to how the holiday provision gave them time to do other things (e.g. shop, attend appointments). Parents' reasons for using holiday care varied depending on the types of childcare used, i.e. child development and enjoyment reasons tended to be more important when using formal providers, while economic reasons played a more important role where parents used informal provision.

The majority (62%) of parents of school-age children who worked in school holidays thought that it was "easy" or "very easy" to arrange. However, 23% thought that it was "difficult" or "very difficult". When parents who had used formal provision were asked how easy they thought it would be to find alternative providers if theirs were not available the majority (64%) thought this would not be easy.

Parents' views on the quality, flexibility and affordability of holiday care indicated that many parents feel that available provision is less than adequate in these aspects. Just over half (52%) of parents said that they were happy with the quality of childcare available, but one-fifth said that they were not (21%). A third (34%) reported difficulties finding childcare that they can afford during the school holidays, and a quarter (25%) reported having problems finding holiday care that was flexible enough to meet their needs.

Lastly, focusing on families who did not use holiday childcare, 40% said they were likely to use childcare in the holidays if it was available. Where parents used only formal providers during term-time but not in the holidays, just under half (48%) said that their providers were not available during the holidays. These figures suggest that there is a considerable level of unmet demand for holiday provision amongst those families who used formal childcare during term-time but not in the holidays, which might be met through term-time formal providers remaining open for business during the holiday periods.

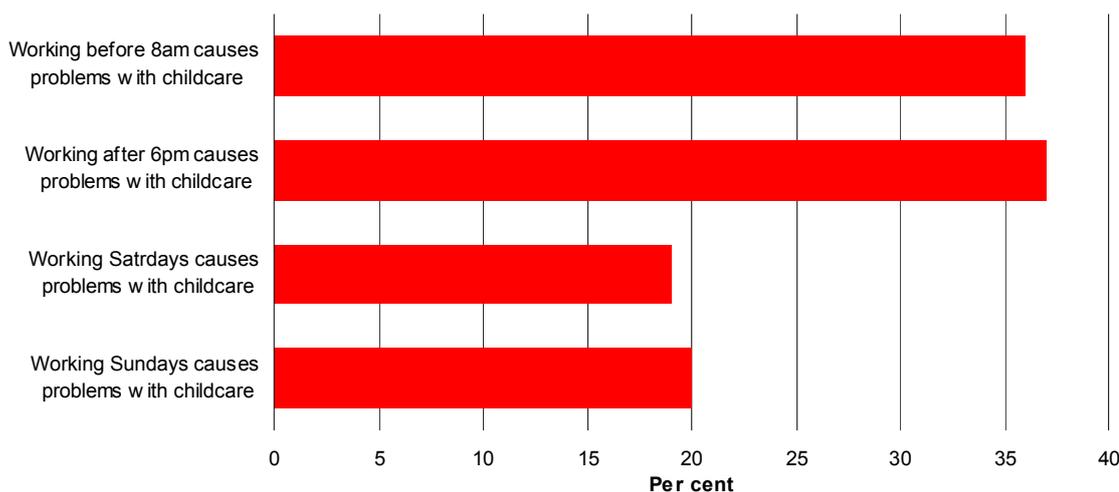
### **Mothers, childcare and work**

The survey identified that maternal employment has increased from 59% in 2004 to 66% in 2009. The majority of mothers reported that they worked

atypical hours at some point during the week (67%), though this was focussed around working on Saturdays and during the evenings. A significant minority of mothers reported that working at atypical hours has caused problems with childcare.

### Whether atypical working hours caused problems with childcare

Base: All mothers who worked different atypical hours



With regard to mothers who had entered employment in the past 2 years or who had increased their hours from part- to full-time, the most commonly reported reason for doing so was that they had secured a job that enabled them to combine work with caring.

The findings on childcare arrangements show that the availability of informal care, children's life stages and having reliable childcare were all factors which enabled mothers to be in employment. As expected, children's fathers played a role in supporting maternal employment, in addition to the role of other relatives and friends.

Financial considerations were frequently reported amongst the other influences on maternal employment: a substantial proportion of mothers mentioned financial necessity as a factor related to their employment (70%), with lone mothers more commonly reporting this (82% compared with 66% of partnered mothers). Work orientation was also an important influence with a substantial number of mothers saying they enjoyed working. Compared with other factors, family friendly employment seems to have played a smaller role in enabling mothers to work. This is particularly true of lone mothers and may reflect difficulties in securing these arrangements rather than a lack of demand for these arrangements.

A small proportion of mothers were studying (16%) and, as with those who were working, the child's life cycle, the availability of reliable childcare and childcare provision from relatives were all key factors that enabled mothers to study.

The findings on ideal working arrangements show that a substantial minority of mothers would like to give up work to become full-time carers, while a slim majority would like to reduce their working hours.

The analysis of mothers who were not in employment shows that a substantial proportion reported childcare as a barrier to work. Financial considerations were seen to influence a substantial minority of mothers' decisions to remain out of work, with just over a quarter of mothers stating that they would not earn enough money to make going to work worthwhile.

## **Conclusions**

### **Early years education for three and four year olds**

The free entitlement to early years education was introduced as part of the strategy to improve child outcomes. In terms of take up, this programme has been largely successful, and the survey shows how important early years education is to parents regarding their children's educational and social development. However, many parents of three and four year olds seem to reconcile their childcare needs by using different providers, and a high proportion of parents seem to need more hours of early years education and childcare than is available through the free entitlement.

### **Out-of-school childcare for school-age children**

The Childcare Strategy for Wales (Welsh Assembly Government 2005) recognises the importance of out-of-school provision for both children and parents and states the commitment to supporting the development of a much closer relationship between schools and the communities they serve. The increase in take-up of out-of-school services between 2004 and 2009 is encouraging, as is the wide availability of out-of-school care. However, many parents who did not have out-of-school services available say that they would use them if they could which suggests some level of unmet demand.

Among school-age children, these clubs were the most common form of childcare. However, whilst they do appear to cater for school children across the age range covered by the survey (i.e. up to age 14), more primary than secondary school children went to out-of-school clubs – perhaps because secondary school children are able to spend some time in the day on their own, or because of difficulties getting teenagers involved in out-of-school activities.

### **Holiday childcare for school-age children**

Evidence from the Welsh Childcare and Early Years Survey illustrates the varying needs families with school-age children have for holiday care. For instance, some families seem to have a need for childcare during the holidays that they do not have during term-time (when their children are at school most of the day). However in contrast, some families who do use childcare during

term-time either do not need or do not want to use childcare in the holidays. Furthermore, different types of holiday care seem to fulfil different functions, with formal care primarily being used for children's benefit and enjoyment and informal childcare primarily being used so that parents could work. Holiday clubs are clearly fulfilling more than a childcare role for many children. However, as childcare for working parents, current availability does not always meet demand. That said, for those who had arranged holiday care, it was fulfilling a role that parents did not think could be filled otherwise being difficult to replace. It seems that the main challenge for policy is to support holiday provision that matches the variety of needs of children and their families.

### **Maternal employment**

Reducing child poverty through increasing maternal employment has been an important aspect of recent government policy. The survey illustrates a clear link between the availability of appropriate childcare and maternal employment. This need for childcare can be filled by formal childcare and continued government support towards making good quality childcare available and affordable is key to the ability of many mothers to participate in the labour market. It should be noted though that informal childcare is also extremely valuable to parents, which underlines the importance of supporting informal carers (particularly grandparents) so that they can continue to play a role in this regard. Finally, whilst childcare provision is crucial to supporting maternal employment, employers can also contribute to supporting mothers in the workplace since particular aspects of women's jobs can facilitate employment e.g. being able to work flexi-time or having opportunities to work at home.

### **Families experiencing disadvantage**

Ensuring equality of access to affordable childcare is important with regard to supporting the outcomes of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and with regard to facilitating maternal employment. This report illustrates that children experiencing disadvantage are notably less likely to receive childcare than their more affluent counterparts. To some extent this reflects those families' need for childcare; however, it is also clear that unemployment and a lower use of childcare are not a positive choice for many families but instead reflect barriers to childcare use and to entering the labour market.

The high take-up of free part-time early years education for 3 and 4 year olds (95%) demonstrates the success of this universal policy. However, it is important to ensure continued and appropriate dissemination of information about the entitlement. In addition, differences in the sources of information used by disadvantaged families - such as greater use of Jobcentre Plus - need to be recognised and supported, particularly since parents reported lower satisfaction with the information provided by Jobcentre Plus.