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# Research into the Childcare Offer for Wales Additional Support Grant: final report

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Research into the Childcare Offer for Wales – Additional  
Support Grant: final report

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not  
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## **Executive Summary**

The Childcare Offer for Wales provides up to 30 hours of government funded early education and childcare (for eligible parents) for three and four-year-old children for up to 48 weeks per year. The Additional Support Grant (ASG) provides funding to help ensure that eligible children with additional support needs can access the childcare element of the Childcare Offer in the same way as other eligible children.

In May 2023, Welsh Government commissioned IFF Research to conduct research into the ASG, to:

- Gather evidence on factors that contribute to demand for the ASG.
- Increase understanding of what the ASG is used for (i.e., what support is being funded)
- Map out the ASG application processes developed and used by local authorities and childcare providers.
- Collect feedback from local authorities, early years providers and families on the effectiveness of the grant and its effect on them.

The research was conducted between May 2023 and February 2024. It used a mixed-methods approach, including a review of management information, an online survey with childcare providers, and in depth interviews with stakeholders, childcare providers, local authorities and parents.

### **Awareness of Additional Learning Needs**

Providers felt confident caring for children with ALN: four-in-five (82%) providers were confident identifying children with a potential ALN, just over two-thirds (70%) knew the steps to obtain a formal ALN assessment for a child, and four-in-five were confident working with children who have an ALN (81%).

Around seven-in-ten providers (71%) reported facing barriers to identifying children with ALN. The most common barriers they faced included the child's age making identification less certain (42%), a lack of information passed on from other agencies and services (40%), a lack of parental engagement (36%), and the severity of the condition (20%),

Childminders were more likely to have no children with ALN at their setting compared to all other setting types

## **Awareness of the Additional Support Grant**

Awareness of the ASG among providers was relatively low. Around two-thirds (67%) of providers had never heard of the ASG, around one-in-five (19%) had heard of the ASG but never applied to it, and just under one-in-five (15%) had heard of it and were in the process of applying for it or had already applied. Childminders were the least likely to have heard of the ASG, and larger settings more likely to apply.

Local authorities reported limiting widespread advertisement of the ASG to avoid raising parental expectations and reaching funding capacity. As a result, awareness of the ASG among families in receipt of the grant was very low, which suggests awareness among families not in receipt of the grant would be much lower. Parents felt that the ASG application pathway needed to be much clearer and more widely advertised, and that there should be more support for parents throughout the process.

Some providers and families may be unaware of the option of additional support through the ASG and, as a result, children who could be supported to access childcare through the Childcare Offer may be missing out.

## **ASG demand and spending**

In 2021-22<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government spent around £1.1m through the ASG across all 22 local authority areas in Wales. Spend by local authority ranged from around £7,000 to around £180,000, with an average (mean) spend per local authority of around £49,000. ASG spend tended to correlate with the number of children the local authority supported through the grant, with higher spend being associated with a higher number of children being supported.

In the last academic year (September 2022-August 2023), a total of 358 children were directly supported through the ASG across Wales. On average each local authority supported around 16 children. This ranged from 0 to 47 children depending on the area.

Local authorities were clear on the purpose of the ASG. However, there was a mixed picture in terms of levels of understanding about whether further funding could be applied for where demand required it. This led to some areas strictly

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<sup>1</sup> 2021-22 is the last financial year we have full and complete ASG spend data for.

controlling access to the grant to avoid overspend and indicates that some eligible children may be missing out on receiving support via the ASG.

The research identified a common model of processing applications to the grant. ASG funding was most commonly used to increase the number of staff in early years settings, to increase child-staff ratios where needed and ensure the safety of all children in the setting. The grant funds were also used for training, to upskill early years setting staff in working with children with various ALN, for equipment, and in a small number of local authorities, to fund an ALN coordinator role, either partly or in full.

Local authorities thought that demand for the ASG was generally increasing. There is some evidence to suggest that these trends in demand and use of the ASG have meant some settings have become known for supporting children with ALN leading to children with ALN concentrating in these settings. However, some providers reported issues with recruiting qualified staff, and additional recruitment and employment costs which were not covered by the ASG.

Local authorities took two different strategic approaches to spending their ASG allocation: allocating the entire budget to support individual children or allocating some of the budget to also fund an ALN Coordinator. Local authorities were able to use the ASG flexibly to fit with their local needs and context, and this appeared to have been effective. However, in some cases LAs used multi-agency panels established to consider ALN as a mechanism to distribute the ASG, meaning that some children with additional support needs but without an identified ALN could miss out.

## **Outcomes**

The ASG has been welcomed by local authorities as a much-needed resource to help with their response to growing demand for additional support for children with ALN. Local authorities have invested a great deal of thinking into developing processes to make effective use of the grant and integrate it in the overall budget that was allocated for ALN support in their respective areas.

Overall, both providers and families expressed that ASG funding has had a positive impact on the children it supported, and to a slightly lesser extent on their families. In all cases, children were reported as progressing significantly in their development following the introduction of additional support, in many cases allowing them to

reach key milestones. The impact on providers was more mixed, with many providers claiming they would have tried to provide support for the children regardless. However, this support risked being of lower quality without additional funding.

The evidence in relation to spend and levels of satisfaction suggest that overall, the implementation of the ASG has been effective to some extent. Where ALN were identified, local authorities and early years providers appeared to have worked effectively together, reaching an understanding of what evidence was required for the application and how best to obtain it, agreeing what support to put in place and allocating the funding to put the support in place. The vast majority of ASG applications were reported to be successful. Families and providers were overall satisfied and reported positive changes for the child, the family and the setting. However, the use of ALN processes and panels to consider ASG use may mean that some children with additional support needs (but no identified ALN) are missing out on ASG funding.

A small number of providers were unsatisfied with the length and the complexity of the application process to their local authority while some local authorities felt that removing the roles of 'delivery' and 'engagement' authorities could help to simplify and streamline the process.

## **Challenges and issues**

Local authorities reported having to navigate a complex system of funding streams, of which the ASG was one. This added complexity to the funding process, and poses a risk of funding options being overlooked, which can mean eligible families might miss out.

Levels of understanding of the ASG allocation structures varied between and within local authorities. Some local authorities were aware that they could make a business case to increase their funding, should they need to, but others were not. This means that local authorities did not always use the ASG funding stream fully to meet their needs.

There were varied levels of awareness of the ASG amongst providers and families. Feedback from local authorities suggested that some of this was intentional. However, awareness also appeared to vary by setting type, with small, private, and childminder settings tending to be the least aware of the grant. This means that



potentially there are children and families who are missing out because they are not aware of the option for funding of support through ASG. In addition, some providers may struggle to support children with additional support needs appropriately in the absence of ASG funding.

The majority of applications made to the ASG were for children who were already accessing childcare, but who needed additional support. In some cases, the children were known to have ALN before they started attending the setting (or before they have become eligible for the Childcare Offer; that is, before they turned three), but the discussions on what support needed to be arranged and the application for funding did not start until they were eligible for the Childcare Offer.

These challenges and issues suggest that while the implementation of the ASG appeared to have been by and large effective, where the ASG was implemented successfully, it tended to rely on high levels of awareness amongst providers and knowledgeable and confident staff to lead the process, leaving substantive gaps elsewhere.

## **Recommendations**

Welsh Government may wish to consider a number of steps and actions to improve the design and implementation of the ASG going forward. The (summarised) recommendations are:

**Recommendation 1:** Welsh Government may wish to review the current guidance and consider amendments to make it clearer what the ASG can be used to fund. In particular, there should be greater clarity about the option for local authorities to request additional funding, and information should be shared about how to make a business case to request an increase in allocation of the funds.

**Recommendation 2:** Welsh Government might consider working with local authorities to jointly develop communications and information campaigns to providers and families to ensure that all those who are eligible and need ASG support have access to it.

**Recommendation 3:** Particular attention should be given to raising awareness amongst small, non-maintained settings and childminders.

**Recommendation 4:** Local authorities could work with providers in all sectors (early years and schools) and families to identify additional support needs at an earlier stage. Welsh Government may wish to consider ways in which they can work

with local authorities to promote joint working across sectors and implement better forward planning, including better information sharing and improved referral processes.

**Recommendation 5:** There is limited data on the number of children and settings that are receiving ASG funding. This makes management of the grant challenging at the national level and means it is not possible to accurately assess grant outcomes and impacts on the children, the families and the sector. Welsh Government may wish to consider developing and implementing a process and templates for a consistent and systematic procedure to capture and report more granular grant management information from local authorities to Welsh Government.

# 1. Introduction and background

1.1 Welsh Government has an ambition to ensure that childcare is widely available and affordable. Since 2017, Welsh Government has committed to providing up to 30 hours of government funded early education and childcare (for eligible parents) for three and four-year-old children for up to 48 weeks per year through the Childcare Offer for Wales. Alongside this offer, the Additional Support Grant (ASG) was set up as a separate funding stream, which local authorities can draw on to help ensure that eligible children with additional support needs can access the childcare element of the Childcare Offer in the same way as other eligible children.

1.2 The ASG is administrated using the same footprint as the wider Childcare Offer for Wales, where 10 local authorities have taken the role of Delivery Authorities (responsible for processing application and payments) and 12 local authorities have taken the role of Engagement Authorities (responsible for promoting the Childcare Offer to eligible parents and providers). In the administration of the ASG, the 'delivery authorities' are responsible for monitoring ASG spend and for processing funding claims with Welsh Government for themselves and on behalf of the 'engagement authorities' they support.

1.3 Welsh Government ASG guidance<sup>2</sup> for local authorities states that the funding should be used for:

- Training for providers on the specific needs of and provision of care for a specific child with additional needs
- Additional staff to provide specialised support for children with more severe needs
- Helping-hands to increase the staff-child ratios in a setting that has an individual child or a group of children that require additional support
- Equipment including additional learning materials or specialist play equipment
- Physical adjustments to settings including adjustments for children with particular access needs and/ or the creation of specific spaces for children with additional support needs.

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<sup>2</sup> [Childcare offer for Wales: guidance for local authorities \(gov.wales\)](#)

- 1.4 The guidance also states that local authorities can submit a business case for permission to use the funding for administrative costs, such as hiring specialist additional staff to undertake assessment or diagnoses.
- 1.5 In May 2023, Welsh Government commissioned IFF Research to conduct research into the ASG. The research has four primary aims:
- Gather evidence on factors that contribute to demand for the ASG.
  - Increase Welsh Government understanding of what the ASG is used for (that is, what support is being funded through the grant).
  - Map out the processes that local authorities and childcare providers have developed and implement when making applications for the ASG.
  - Collect feedback from local authorities, early years providers and families on the effectiveness of the grant and its effect on them.
- 1.6 The research used a mixed-methods approach and was conducted between May 2023 and February 2024. This report brings together the findings from the research and consists of nine chapters:

**Chapter one** - Introduction.

**Chapter two** - Methodology – provides details of the research approach and profile of participants.

**Chapter three** - Level of awareness of ALN – sets out the evidence on the levels of awareness and clarity around ALN and ALN processes amongst early years providers.

**Chapter four** - Level of awareness of the ASG – sets out the evidence on the levels of awareness and clarity around the ASG amongst local authorities, early years providers and families.

**Chapter five** - ASG spend – covers how funding was allocated to local authorities.

**Chapter six** - Uses of ASG – discusses what ASG funds were used for and discussing patterns of use.

**Chapter seven** - Application process for the ASG – provides an outline of the application process and discusses reflections of stakeholders of the effectiveness of the process.

**Chapter eight** - Outcomes of the ASG – covers the outcomes of the ASG for: children with ALN; the wider group of children in the early years settings; families of children with ALN; and early years providers.

**Chapter nine** - Conclusions and considerations – sets out conclusions of the research and offering recommendations for improvement to consider in the future implementation of the ASG.

## **2. Methodology**

2.1 The research used a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. Further detail on methodology is set out in this chapter. Research materials used are provided in the appendices at the back of this report.

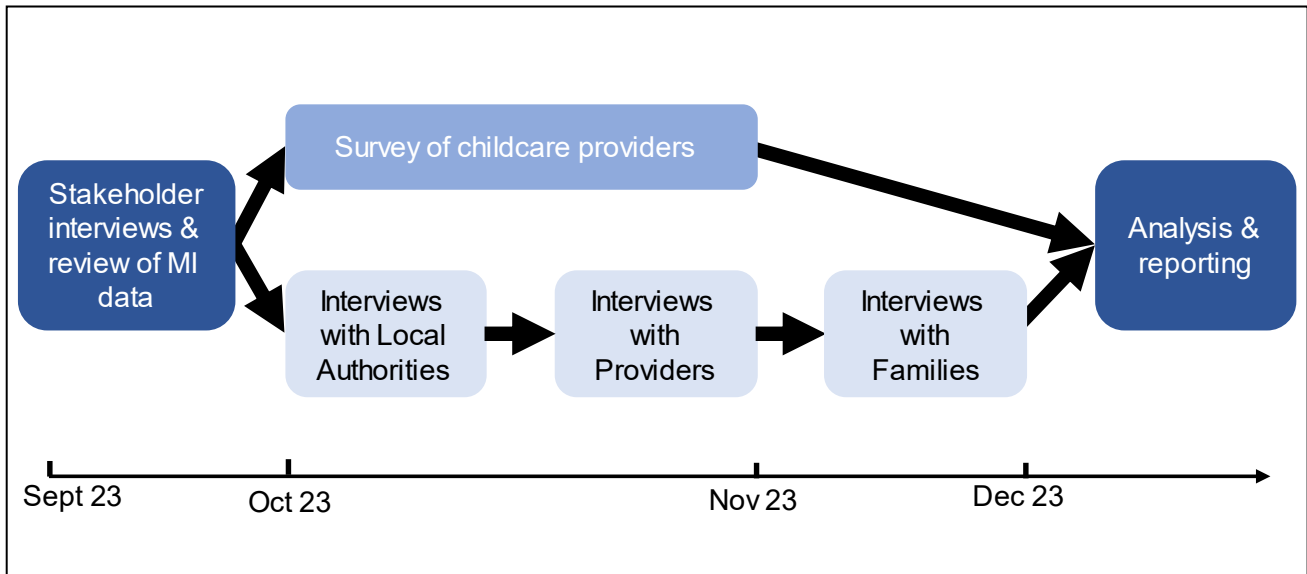
### **Overview of research design**

2.2 The research took a three-stage approach: scoping; fieldwork; and analysis and reporting. The scoping phase took place in September 2023 and consisted of a desk-based review of documentation and data related to the Childcare Offer for Wales and the Additional Support Grant (ASG) alongside interviews with key stakeholders in Welsh Government. The findings from this phase fed into the design of the research materials used during the fieldwork phase.

2.3 Fieldwork included a survey of childcare providers (n=259), interviews with Childcare Leads and ALN Coordinators in every Welsh local authority (n=44) and interviews with childcare providers (n=8) and families (n=10) who had received the grant. As shown in figure 2.1, fieldwork took place between September 2023 and December 2023 with the survey running in parallel with in-depth interviews. Providers who completed the survey and agreed to be recontacted for further research were included in the sample for the in-depth interviews with providers. Analysis and reporting took place in January and February 2024.

2.4 Fieldwork materials for all stages were available in Welsh and English and respondents were offered the option of completing the survey and interviews in either language. All interviews were conducted online on MS Teams in English or Welsh (depending on the preference of the respondent) and, if respondents consented, were recorded for note taking purposes. Topic guides were designed ahead of the interviews to ensure all key topic areas and questions were covered systematically and consistently across all interviews.

**Figure 2.1 Overview of research timeline**



## **Stage one: Scoping**

### *Stakeholder Interviews*

- 2.5 Two paired interviews were conducted with four stakeholders from Welsh Government. Each interview took place with Welsh Government colleagues responsible for a different aspect of the Childcare Offer for Wales and Additional Support Grant policy area or delivery. Interviews lasted approximately one hour and focussed on the aims of the ASG, levels and patterns of demand, the types of support provided and how the grant is administered and managed.
- 2.6 These stakeholder interviews helped build knowledge of the ASG and fed into the development of the provider survey and research tools for the interviews with local authorities, providers, and families.

### *Monitoring Data*

- 2.7 Data held by Welsh Government was reviewed as part of the scoping phase to identify demand for and use of the ASG. The data provided by Welsh Government included:
- Data from the Childcare Offer for Wales Monthly Monitoring Return (including local authority level data relating to the number of providers registered to deliver and the number of children accessing the Childcare Offer since 2017).
  - A breakdown of ASG spend for the academic years 2020/21 and 2021/22 for each local authority.

- 2.8 Information about ASG spend was provided monthly at the local authority level so it was not possible to identify any patterns in the amount allocated to individual children or providers. It was also not possible to determine what types of support the ASG had been spent on each month.
- 2.9 To provide additional information on patterns of spend, Childcare Leads at each Local Authority were contacted via email and asked to provide information on the number of children that had received ASG funding in December 2023 (as a sample month) and the number of children and settings that had received ASG funding in the last academic year (September 2022 to August 2023). This information was received for 21 of the 22 Local Authorities.

## **Stage two: Fieldwork**

### *Survey of Childcare Providers*

- 2.10 A survey of childcare providers was conducted to measure provider confidence in identifying and supporting ALN, knowledge and awareness of the ASG, and experience of the application process (for those who applied). The survey also asked questions relating to the use of the ASG and the impact of receiving the funding.
- 2.11 The survey was administered online and was available in Welsh and English. A link to the online survey was sent to c. 1,660 childcare providers in Wales who were registered with Welsh Government to deliver the Childcare Offer for Wales. Initial invitations to take part in the survey were sent via email by Welsh Government on 15 September 2023. Two reminder emails were sent in October and November before the survey closed on 8 December 2023. Local authorities were also invited to share the survey link among providers who had accessed the grant.
- 2.12 At the end of the survey, providers who had received ASG funding were asked if they would be happy to be recontacted to take part in a qualitative interview. Those respondents who consented were recontacted and invited to interview via email.
- 2.13 In total, 259 childcare providers responded to the survey. When asked what types of childcare service their setting was registered as 126 indicated they were registered as a full day care provider, 91 as a childminder, 47 as a sessional day care provider, 31 as out of school childcare providers and 3 as creches.<sup>3</sup> Of these

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<sup>3</sup> Please note these numbers do not total 259. This is because the survey allowed providers to give multiple answers from any of the options stated.



respondents, 38 had previously made an application to the ASG and went on to answer the survey questions related to the application process and impact of the support they received. No weighting was applied to the survey results, so results should be seen as indicative and not necessarily representative of the wider population of providers.

### *Interviews with local authorities*

- 2.14 In-depth interviews were conducted with Childcare Leads and ALN Coordinators at all 22 local authorities in Wales. Contact details of the relevant post holders at each local authority were provided by Welsh Government. Local authorities were emailed an invitation to take part in the research by IFF Research in early September 2023 and interviews were conducted in September and October 2023. Childcare Leads and ALN Coordinators at each local authority were interviewed at the same time as their knowledge and experiences of the ASG varied, and they could bring different perspectives on how it was working. For example, Childcare Leads tended to have strategic oversight of the grant whilst ALN Coordinators had a better understanding of how the ASG benefitted children in practice.
- 2.15 In one case, the local authority had indicated that the ASG was used in a way that was markedly different to other local areas. In this case, other members of staff were invited to a second interview to learn more about their model of funding use.
- 2.16 Interviews focussed on local demand for the ASG, processes for determining who can access the grant and how the grant is used. Respondents were also asked for any feedback on the management of the grant and for any suggested improvements. The local authority topic guide is provided in Appendix B.

### *Interviews with childcare providers*

- 2.17 In-depth interviews were conducted with eight childcare providers across Wales. Respondents were offered £25 (via Amazon voucher, PayPal, or Wise Pay) as a thank you for their time. Interviews focussed on how providers had identified the need to apply for the ASG, their experiences of the application process and any outcomes of receiving the grant. Respondents were also asked for any feedback on the management of the grant and for any suggested improvements. The childcare provider topic guide is provided in Appendix C.
- 2.18 The initial aim was to conduct interviews with ten providers who received ASG funding, recruiting the sample of providers from the survey respondents. However,

due to the relatively low number of survey respondents who had received ASG funding, local authorities were also asked to contact providers that had recently received ASG funding to invite them to take part in an interview. However, this did not result in any additional interviews. Eight providers in total participated in the qualitative interviews. Seven were recruited through the survey and one was recruited via the Childcare Lead at their local authority.

- 2.19 Of the eight providers interviewed, four were full day care settings, two offered full day care and out of school care, one was a sessional day care setting, and one was a childminder. The achieved sample was spread geographically with four in north Wales, two in west Wales and one two in south Wales.

### *Interviews with families*

- 2.20 In-depth interviews were conducted with ten families across Wales who had a child who had been supported by ASG funding. Families were offered £40 via Amazon voucher, PayPal, or Wise Pay as a thank you for their time.
- 2.21 Interviews focussed on parents' experiences of accessing childcare for their child with ALN, the process of seeking a formal recognition of ALN and accessing the necessary support, and reflections on funding at the setting. Information received in scoping interviews and interviews with local authorities and providers highlighted that knowledge of the ASG was likely to vary substantially among families. For this reason, the topic guide was designed to allow for an open discussion led by the parent's level of knowledge and understanding of ASG processes. Where parents had a good understanding of the funding stream and process for accessing it, they were also asked whether they had any suggestions to improve the process. The family topic guide is provided in Appendix D.
- 2.22 Families were recruited for interview via childcare providers and the local authority. Providers and local authorities who agreed to help recruit families were sent information about the research and suggested text to email families to invite them to take part in the research.
- 2.23 Of the ten families interviewed six were in south east Wales, three were in north Wales and one was in south west

### **Stage three: Analysis and reporting**

- 2.24 Interviews with each group were written up into a separate analysis framework under relevant headings before being coded to identify messages coming out of the

interviews. An analysis session took place in December 2023 to discuss themes identified for each group alongside the survey findings, and to start to triangulate the data to capture key themes emerging across the different strands of fieldwork.

## **Reflections on research limitations**

- 2.25 It should be noted that the Guidance to local authorities on use of the ASG indicates that it should be used to address "additional support needs". These may include ALN but are not limited to ALN, and formal identification of ALN is not a requirement for use of the ASG. However, the term 'ALN' was used widely by various research participants (sometimes when referring to additional support needs) and is therefore used throughout this report. In addition, the term ALN was used in interviews with providers, to assess their general awareness of the ALN Code of Practice. Where findings might relate to wider support needs, this is highlighted.
- 2.26 As noted above, the survey achieved 259 responses. However, only 38 of the respondents had applied for the ASG and were able to answer questions about the application process and outcomes. Due to the relatively low base size for these questions, any findings identified through comparisons drawn between subgroups would not be statistically significant due to the heightened risk of sampling error. For this reason, where we report results from these questions throughout the report, we do so qualitatively and do not include any sub-group analysis. Where base sizes allow, survey results are presented in charts and the base size, including the base sizes of any sub-groups explored, are clearly reported with significant differences indicated with an asterisk.
- 2.27 Another limitation of the research was the lack of detailed data available on ASG spend. The ASG spend data held by Welsh Government was limited to the monthly claims from each local authority and it was therefore not possible to explore how many children were supported by the ASG, or what the average ASG claim amount was at an individual level. Information regarding the number of children supported by the ASG was requested from the Childcare Lead at each local authority, however, in discussion with Welsh Government it was decided to ask them to provide this information for the most recent academic year which meant the time period was different to the period of the most recently available spend data from Welsh Government. For this reason, analysis of ASG spend data is limited and caution must be taken when interpreting the results.

2.28 Finally, the relatively low levels of awareness of the ASG among families meant that they often were not able to comment on the ASG application process. Indeed, in a few cases families did not know they had received the ASG and were not clear on which part of their child's care and additional support had been funded through that grant. As these families had been recruited through their childcare provider or local authority, who had been asked specifically to recruit families in receipt of ASG, it was assumed that they had received support via the ASG. However, little information about the type of support the family had received was available prior to interview, which limited the depth of questioning possible. Any further research in this area should consider these methodological challenges.

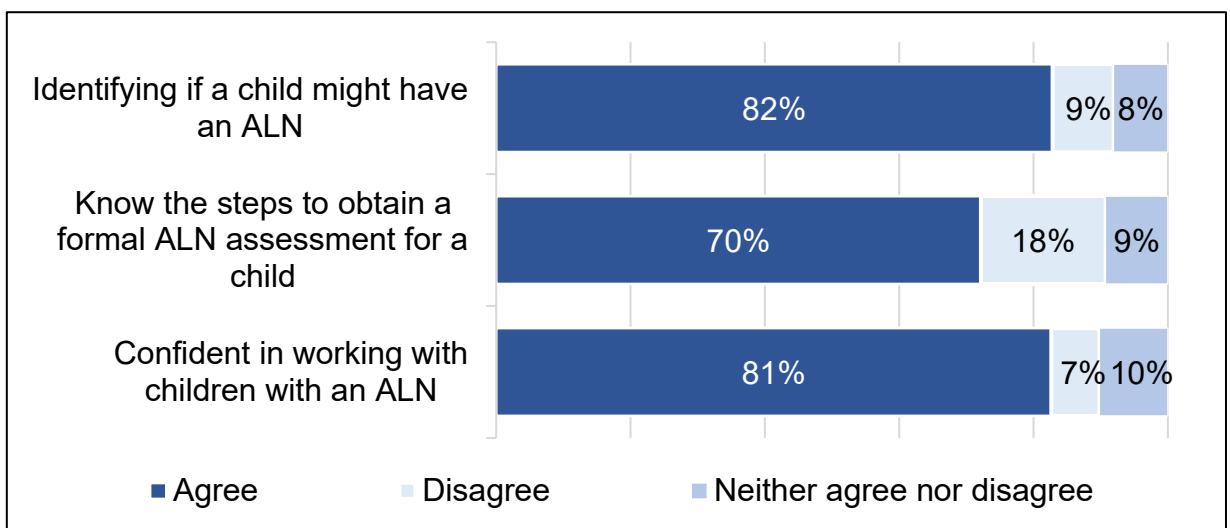
### 3. Awareness and prevalence of ALN

3.1 This chapter discusses findings in relation to the overall levels of demand for ALN support and general awareness and confidence of providers in identifying and supporting children with ALN. This serves to contextualise the findings in relation to the implementation of the ASG, as the demand for and uses of the ASG are likely to be driven by demand and awareness of ALN generally in the sector. However, whilst the findings discussed in this chapter make reference to ALN, it should be noted that use of the ASG is not limited to instances where a child has a recognised ALN. The findings in this chapter are drawn from the survey of childcare providers. The chapter outlines levels of awareness and prevalence of ALN, including levels of confidence in working with children with a potential ALN and barriers in identifying children with ALN.

#### Levels of awareness of ALN among childcare providers

3.2 By and large, the providers we surveyed noted that they felt confident caring for children with ALN. As shown in Figure 3.1, four-in-five (82%) providers were confident identifying children with a potential ALN, just over two-thirds (70%) knew the steps to obtain a formal ALN assessment for a child, and four-in-five were confident working with children who have an ALN (81%).

**Figure 3.1. Staff confidence in working with children with ALN, in identifying children with ALN and knowing what steps to take**



C2. To what extent do you agree with the following statements: I, and any other staff in my setting, are confident in... All (n=259).

- 3.3 There were some differences in confidence levels by setting type. Childminders were less likely to agree that they were confident identifying children with a potential ALN compared to all other setting types combined (75% vs. 86% respectively). They were also less likely to agree they were confident in knowing the steps to obtain a formal ALN assessment (58% vs. 77% of all setting types combined).
- 3.4 The majority (87%) of providers reported that they would know who to contact if they identified a child with a potential ALN. Full daycare settings were more likely to agree that they would be confident doing this compared to childminders (95% vs. 76%).
- 3.5 Just over two-thirds (68%) of providers reported that they had identified a child with a potential ALN in the past year. This was lower among childminders compared to all other setting types combined (43% vs. 81% respectively).

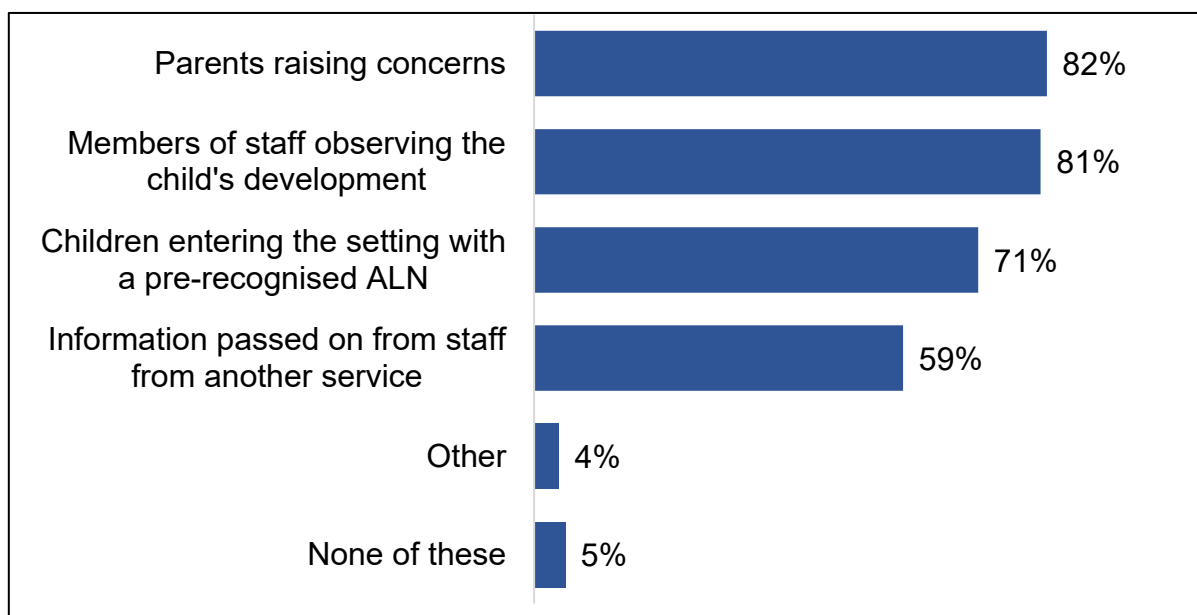
### **Prevalence of ALN in settings**

- 3.6 Around one third (33%) of childcare providers had no children with diagnosed or suspected ALN at their setting, just under two-thirds (59%) had between one and five children, and a much smaller proportion (2%) had between 11 to 20 children. Childminders were more likely to have no children with ALN at their setting compared to all other setting types combined (51% vs. 15% respectively). This may reflect childminders caring for smaller numbers of children than average, or a lack of confidence among some in being able to identify and care for children with ALN, but the survey did not cover the reasons for this disparity. Providers who cared for children with ALN in their settings reported caring for two children with ALN at their setting on average. This figure was lower among childminders, who cared for one child with ALN on average. These findings can partly be explained by the relative sizes of each settings, as childminders generally have fewer children at their setting. Therefore, although setting type may also be an influencing factor, the effects of setting size and type cannot be disentangled.

### **Barriers in identifying children with ALN**

- 3.7 The most common ways that staff identified children with a potential ALN were through parents raising concerns (82%) and through members of staff observing the child's development in the setting (81%). Other common methods are shown in figure 3.2 below.

**Figure 3.2. Most common ways that staff identified children with a potential ALN**

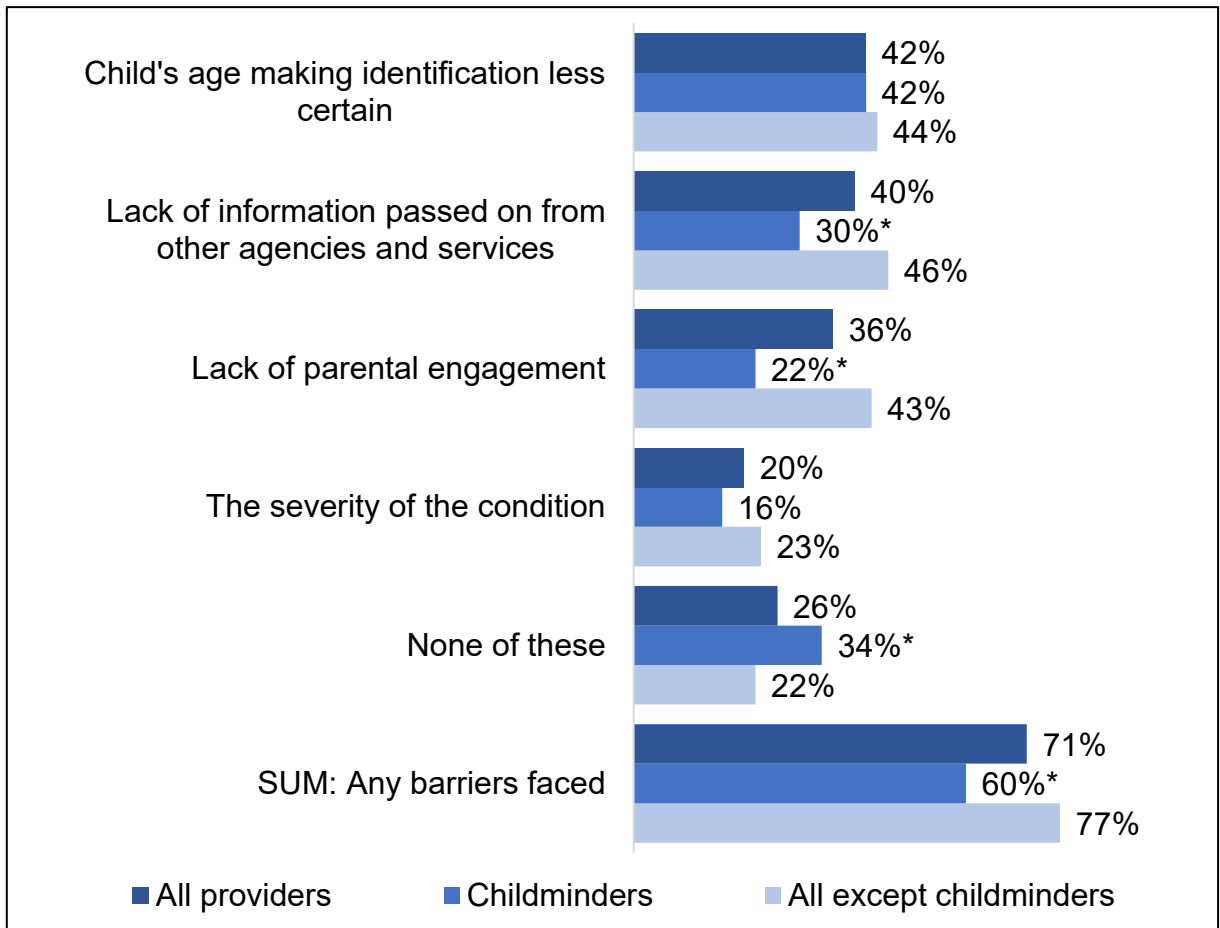


C2. How might you identify that a child in setting has a potential ALN? All (n=259).

3.8 In addition to being asked about their levels of confidence in their own and their staff's ability to recognise ALN, providers were asked if they faced barriers to doing so. Around seven-in-ten providers (71%) reported facing barriers to identifying children with ALN<sup>4</sup>. The most common barriers they faced included the child's age making identification less certain (42%), a lack of information passed on from other agencies and services (40%), a lack of parental engagement (36%), and the severity of the condition (20%), as shown by figure 3.3. Childminders were less likely to report barriers in identifying ALN among children (34% agreed compared to 22% of all other setting types combined). Childminders were also less likely to have children at their setting with an ALN (51% of childminders have no children at their setting with ALN, compared to 28% overall) or to have identified a child with a potential ALN in the past 12 months (55% reported that they had not compared to 30% overall).

<sup>4</sup> The high proportion of providers facing barriers to identifying children with ALN can be contrasted with the high proportion reporting confidence in identifying ALN (see para.3.2). This could suggest high levels of confidence in one's own abilities to identify needs in general sense, with recognition that barriers are likely to exist in certain circumstances, for instance, a child's age making identification less certain or a lack of information passed from other agencies.'

**Figure 3.3. Most common barriers faced in identifying children with ALN**



C3. Barriers faced in identifying children with ALN. All (n=259), Childminders (n=91), All providers except childminders (n=167). \* indicates significant difference compared to all.

**Conclusion**

3.9 Most providers were confident caring for children with ALN and knew who to contact if they had identified a child with suspected ALN. This indicates that awareness of ALN was unlikely to be a barrier to accessing the ASG for most providers. Childminders were less likely to identify children with ALN and know the steps for a formal recognition of ALN ,and also less likely to have any children at their setting with (prior) identified ALN.



## 4. Awareness of the ASG

4.1 This chapter outlines the levels of awareness of the ASG among providers and explores differences by setting type and size. It also explores awareness of the ASG among families and explores potential implications of this on its overall demand. Awareness of the ASG was measured by the survey of childcare providers and explored further in interviews with local authorities, providers, and families.

### Childcare providers

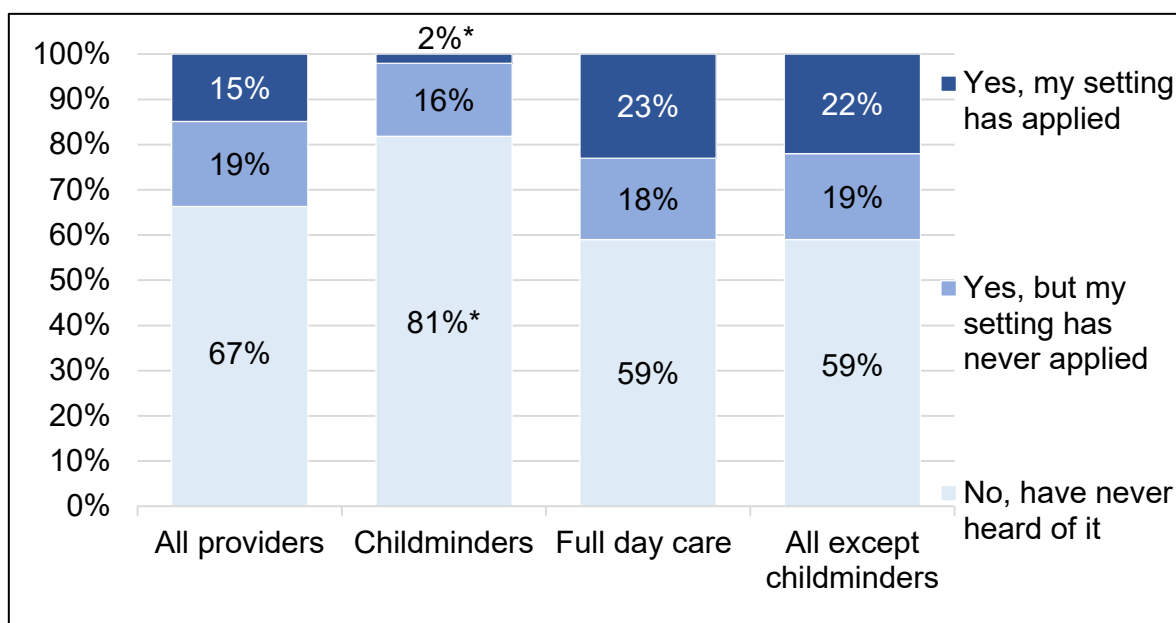
4.2 Awareness of the ASG was low among all setting types despite all the providers surveyed being registered to deliver the Childcare Offer for Wales. Around two-thirds (67%) of providers who filled in the survey had never heard of the ASG, around one-in-five (19%) had heard of the ASG but never applied to it, and just under one-in-five (15%) had heard of it and were in the process of applying for it or had already applied.

4.3 The findings of the survey contradict the feedback from local authorities who commented in interviews that they felt that most settings, except childminders, were aware of the ASG and knew who to contact for support with the application.

### Differences by setting type

4.4 Compared to all other setting types, childminders were the least likely to have heard of the ASG (81% vs. 59% respectively). Figure 4.1 below shows this in more detail.

**Figure 4.1. Awareness of the ASG by provider type**



D1. Heard of ASG before taking part in survey? All (n=259), Childminders (n=91), Full day care (n=126), All providers except childminders (n=167). \* indicates significant difference compared to all.

4.5 Local authorities were aware of the lower awareness levels of ASG amongst childminders. Several reasons were given for why childminders were a particularly hard-to-reach group for local authorities. Firstly, some explained that childminders tended to have fewer children accessing the Childcare Offer, and therefore the children they cared for might not be eligible for the ASG. Secondly, they felt that because childminders tended to work alone, they might be less likely to take on children with a high level of need. Thirdly, they felt that childminders might struggle to recruit additional members of staff in cases where this was required as part of the funded support, given that they often worked alone and in more isolated environments:

“Childminders would be less willing to apply for a grant that would mean they'd need to employ additional staff.” – Childcare Lead

#### *Differences by setting size*

4.6 Local authorities had also noticed variations in the level of understanding of the ASG and ability to engage with the application process based on setting size. They reported that larger settings were more likely to apply as they had the resource and administrative capacity to do so:

*“It tends to be the bigger organisations that have that admin structure behind them that can support them to fill in the forms and have the time to submit these applications and gather all the evidence they need.”* – ALN Lead

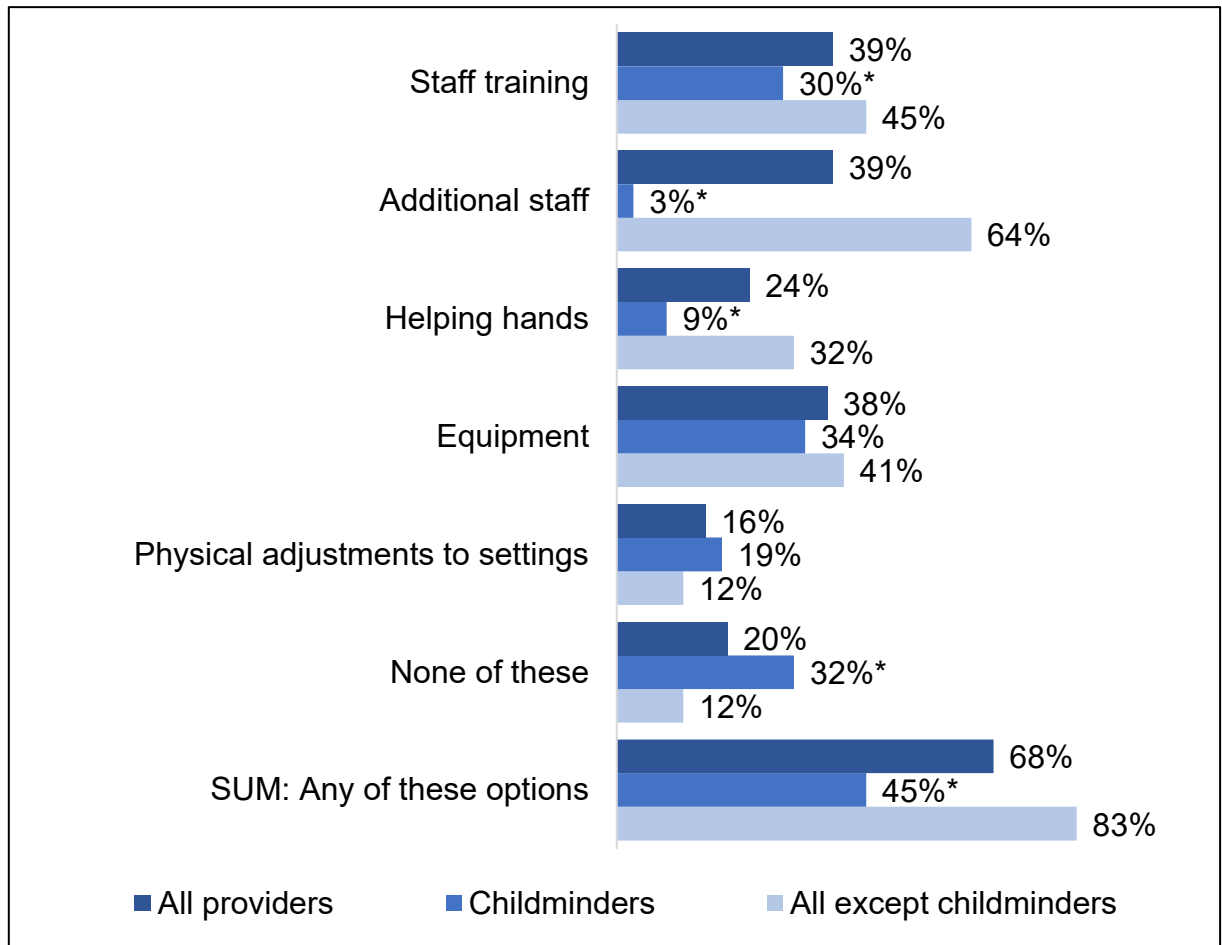
4.7 Local authorities felt that sometimes these larger providers could build a reputation for being able to provide good support to children with ALN, because they had the capacity to submit more applications, which were often successful, and therefore attracted more families with children who needed additional support:

“Some settings seem to have ... a reputation for being better with children with emerging need and seem to attract families with children who need that additional support.” – Childcare Lead

### *Gaps in provider awareness*

- 4.8 Although two-thirds (64%) of providers agreed that they were confident in determining whether a child was eligible for the ASG, some survey responses suggested that there is uncertainty around eligibility and confidence in applying for the ASG.
- 4.9 The providers who had heard of the ASG but had never applied for it were asked why. The main reasons they gave included not having any children at their setting who required additional support (15 out of 48 providers), and because they were unsure if any children at their setting were eligible (14 out of 48). A smaller number of providers stated that they had never applied because they did not know what the funding covered (7 out of 48) and because they did not know how to make an application (4 out of 48).
- 4.10 Furthermore, the survey shows that some providers who had no awareness of the ASG required support for children with ALN that could be met through the grant. As shown in figure 4.2 below, two-thirds (68%) of providers who had never heard of the ASG indicated that they had children in their setting who required support which could be covered by the ASG. Thus, these settings could potentially have benefited from the ASG if they had known of its existence. Childminders were less likely to agree that they had children who required support which could be covered by the ASG (45% compared to 83% for all providers except childminders). This supports the suggestion that childminders are less likely to identify children who may need additional support and/or that they have fewer children at their setting with ALN.

**Figure 4.2. Types of support settings require covered by ASG**



D2. Does your setting require any of the following to ensure that parents of children with ALN, disabilities, or other health needs, can access the childcare elements of the Childcare Offer for Wales? If never heard of the ASG (n=173), Childminders (n=74), All providers except childminders (n=99). \* indicates significant difference compared to all.

## Families

- 4.11 Almost all of the families we spoke to were aware that their child was receiving additional support that was linked to the Childcare Offer, but they had little awareness or understanding about what the ASG was, why their child was eligible or what types of support they could have received. It is important to note that the parents were referred to the research team by settings and were told what the research was about, so it is not surprising that they had some awareness of the ASG.
- 4.12 Most local authorities we spoke with commented that they were hesitant to raise awareness about the ASG among families to prevent ‘opening the floodgates’ and raising parental expectations of what support their child would receive:

*"In a way I wouldn't want them [parents] to [know about the ASG]! It sounds unfair but everybody would like their child to have an individual 1-1, whether they have ALN or not. It's just being aware that we will try and support their child, whatever their needs."* – Childcare Lead

- 4.13 At the same time, and perhaps not surprisingly, many parents mentioned that one of the things they would change about the ASG is the advertising of support. They felt that the pathway needed to be much clearer and more widely advertised, and that there should be more support for parents throughout the process:

"I think [Welsh Government] need [to] be 100% certain that every child that is entitled accessed and is actually getting it. There's a lot of parents that have got absolutely no idea of what they're entitled to, where to turn, who to speak to." – Parent

- 4.14 Many parents felt that they would not have known that the support was available if they had not had a proactive nursery who was informed about ALN:

"If it wasn't for the staff in the nursery, I don't know where I would turn to. I mean you can try and access things on the internet, but it's not always as clear as somebody explaining it to you." – Parent

## **Conclusion**

- 4.15 Despite most providers feeling confident in their awareness of ALN and ALN processes more generally, awareness of the ASG among providers was relatively low. Similar to the general awareness of ALN, awareness of the grant varied by setting type, with smaller settings and childminders being the least likely to be aware. Local authorities reported limiting widespread advertisement of the ASG to avoid raising parental expectations and reaching funding capacity. As a result, awareness of the ASG among families in receipt of the grant was very low, which suggests awareness among families not in receipt of the grant would be much lower. This indicates that some providers and families may be unaware of the option of additional support through the ASG and, as a result, children who could be supported to access childcare through the Childcare Offer may be missing out.

## 5. ASG Spend

5.1 This chapter outlines the amount of money spent through the ASG and the number of children supported through the grant. It explores local authorities' understanding of the grant and the factors that drove demand for it.

### ASG Spend

5.2 In 2021-22<sup>5</sup> Welsh Government spent around £1.1m through the ASG across all 22 local authority areas in Wales. Spend by local authority ranged from around £7,000 to around £180,000, with an average (mean) spend per local authority of around £49,000.

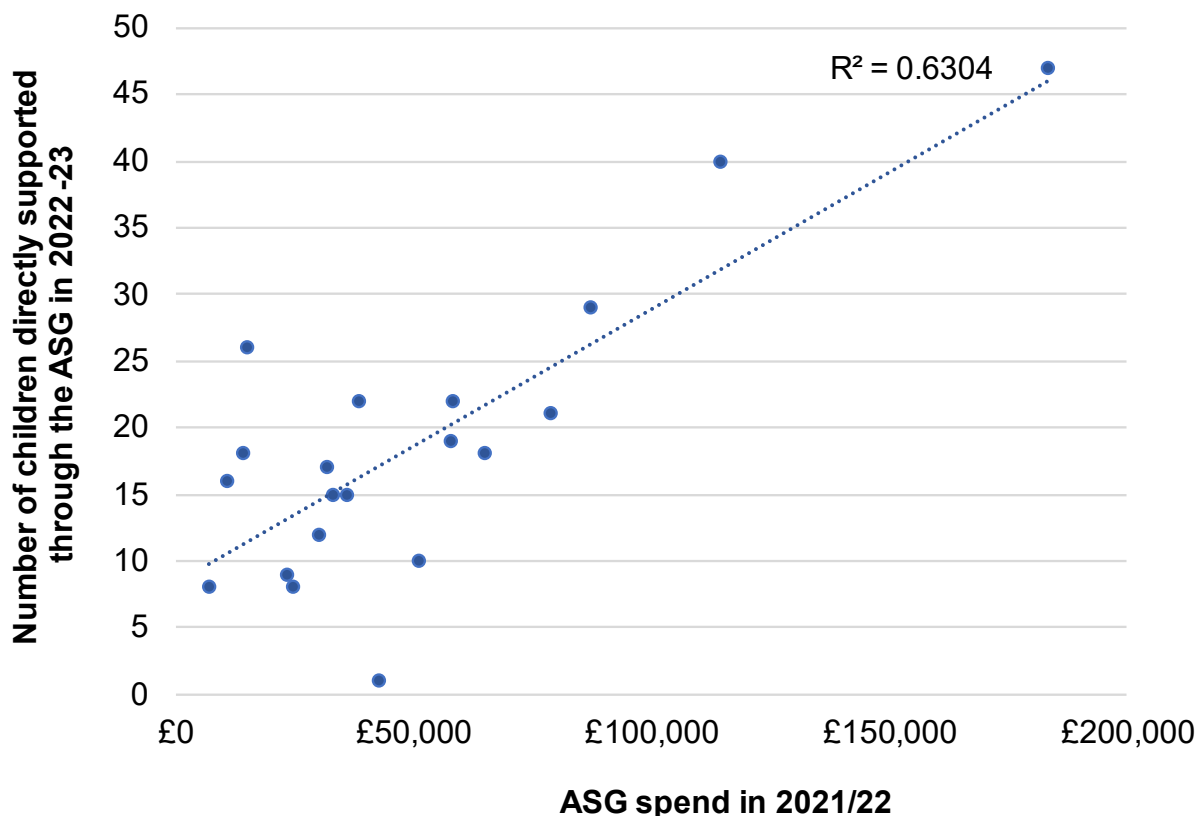
5.3 Figure 5.1 shows the annual spend on the ASG in 2021-22 for each local authority plotted against the number of children the local authority reported supporting through the grant in the 2022-23 academic year. These time periods do not align because, as noted in the previous chapter, data on ASG spend was not available for 2022-23. As shown below, the line of best fit had an  $R^2$  value<sup>6</sup> of 0.6 suggesting ASG spend tended to correlate with the number of children the local authority supported through the grant. However, as the time periods do not align these results should be treated with caution.

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<sup>5</sup> 2021-22 is the last financial year we have full and complete ASG spend data for.

<sup>6</sup> R-squared is a statistical measure of how close the data are to the line of best fit. R-squared measures the strength of the relationship between the two variables on a scale of 0 – 1.

**Figure 5.1 ASG spend in 2021/22 by number of children directly supported by the ASG in 2022/23<sup>7</sup>**

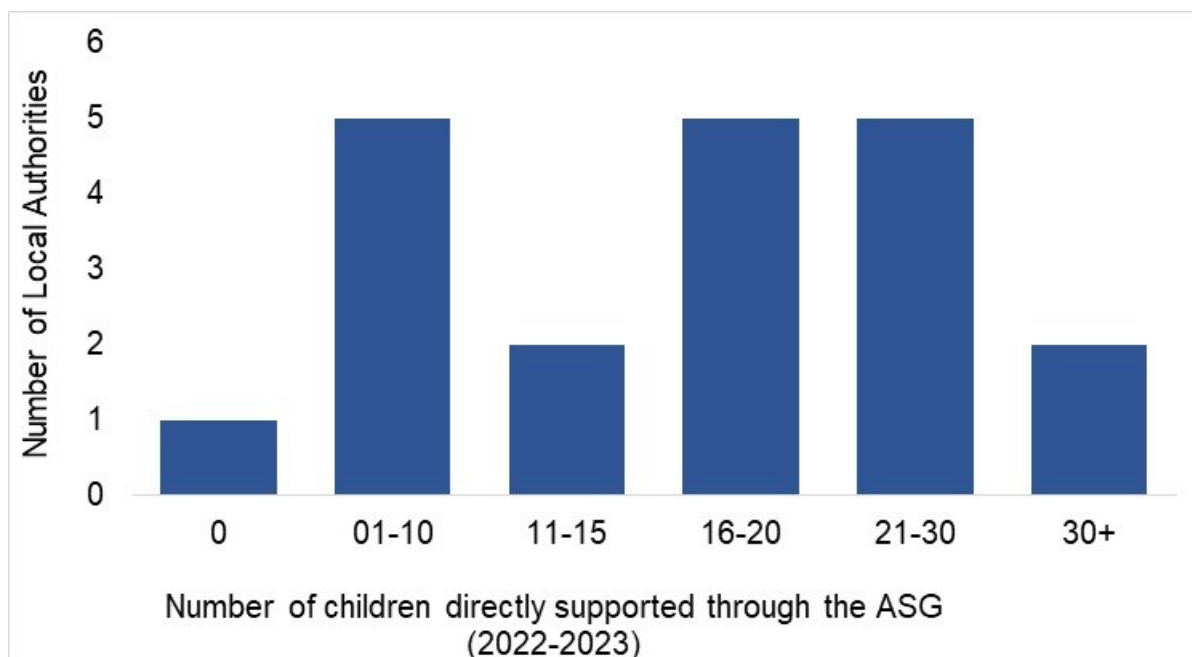


**Number of children directly supported through the ASG in 2022/23**

5.4 Local authorities were asked to provide a count of the number of children they had directly supported through the ASG over the last academic year (September 2022-August 2023). In the last academic year, a total of 358 children were directly supported through the ASG across Wales. On average each local authority supported around 16 children. This ranged from 0 to 47 children depending on the area. A breakdown of the total number of children local authorities were supporting is available in figure 5.2.

<sup>7</sup> The chart includes 20 of the 22 local authorities in Wales. One was excluded as they did not return data on the number of children they supported through the ASG and one was removed as an outlier as they did not support any children directly through the ASG.

**Figure 5.2 Number of children local authorities were directly supporting through the ASG in 2022-23**



### **Local authorities' understanding of the ASG**

5.5 All local authorities reported that the purpose of the ASG was to increase access to the Childcare Offer for Wales for families of children with additional support needs, including ALN. They all stated that the ASG was only used to support children who had an identified or suspected additional support needs and were accessing the Childcare Offer for Wales. Most local authorities also understood that the ASG was designed to be 'needs led' and that they could request additional funding from Welsh Government should the need arise. Indeed, around half reported that they had applied for, and received, additional funding over the last year or two and many found this reassuring.

"It was very reassuring when we last met with Welsh Government for them to say and to acknowledge, 'well if you need extra funding for those children because you haven't got it from other funds, do approach us'. So that was quite heartening to know that they understand that children's needs need to be met, but also that there is an increase."

Childcare Lead

5.6 A few local authorities, however, were not aware that they could request more ASG budget. Some noted that their budget was tightly costed and they were not aware



that they could apply to increase it (for example, following evidence that the demand for the grant in their area was higher than they were currently able to meet). These authorities tended to tightly monitor their use of the ASG to ensure that they did not overspend. One local authority commented that they had often underspent on their ASG budget, as they held back from awarding the grant at the beginning of the year in case they had an influx of children with additional needs later on.

- 5.7 Another local authority had previously requested an increase to their budget but reported that recent conversations with Welsh Government had given them the impression there was not much flexibility to increase it going forward. This means that they could not afford to support all children with ALN on the budget they had been allocated, so actively restricted access to the ASG for children with an Individual Development Plan (IDP) despite the ASG guidelines stating that children with a suspected, but undiagnosed ALN should have access to the grant.

"We couldn't afford for every child that ticks that box to receive additional support, there's just nowhere near enough money for that... At the moment, the only children receiving ASG funding are children who have an IDP... so that's only your highest level needs really."

- Childcare Lead

- 5.8 It was clear that all local authorities understood the purpose of the ASG and that it should be driven by the needs of children. The evidence suggests that confusion over the flexibility of ASG budgets, however, led to some strictly controlling access to the grant for those with the highest needs which led to underspending in some cases.

### **Demand for the ASG**

- 5.9 Most local authorities felt that demand for the ASG had increased over the last few years. Many felt this was due to an increasing number of children presenting with additional support needs owing to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as more children having delayed communication and social skills development.
- 5.10 Others felt the increase in demand was down to increased awareness of ALN and ALN processes within settings since the introduction of the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales in 2021. For example, some local authorities had streamlined their referral pathways for children with ALN since the introduction of the code. Where providers would have previously had to apply for individual pots of

funding, they could now refer a child into the ALN team using one general application form and be directed towards the support that was most appropriate to them. They felt that the simplification of these referral routes had made it easier for settings to follow referral procedures and make the local authority aware of children with suspected ALN.

- 5.11 Despite this, a few local authorities said that demand for the ASG was low and that they frequently underspent on their allocated budget. In one area, this was because all three-year-olds received all their funded childcare hours in school and therefore any resources required to meet ALNs were covered through the education budget. Two believed the low demand in their area was down to them having strong universal provision with a clear ALN pathway for settings to follow. They were confident that the needs of children were being met through other means. Finally, one local authority felt demand was low due to low awareness of the ASG among settings. They expressed concerns about promoting the ASG due to a fear of 'opening the floodgates', with settings requesting support that they wouldn't be able to accommodate.
- 5.12 Two local authorities flagged difficulties in meeting all of the demand for the ASG due to concerns around the requirement to use their Education budget to match-fund any support the child receives during their childcare funded hours. For example, one local authority did not provide support for additional needs during Education hours unless the child in question had a formal recognition of ALN or Individual Development Plan (IDP). As the ASG may only be used for the childcare element, it cannot be used to provide support during these Education funded hours. This meant that if they granted children funding through the ASG, the child would only have been able to receive support for some of their childcare.

'Although the [childcare] offer is education and childcare hours as one offer, this element of the grant can only be used for the childcare hours. It's the same child. They could be at the same setting for 30 hours, but they can't access it for those 10 [hours] that is education. They can only access it for the 20 that is childcare.' – Childcare Lead

### *Setting type*

- 5.13 Of the 259 provider survey respondents 38 said they had applied for ASG funding or were still in the process of applying for it. Of these, the majority (29) were full day care providers, while eight were sessional day care providers, six provided out of

school childcare and two were childminders. The majority (30) were non-maintained settings.

- 5.14 All local authorities said that the number of applications from childminders was particularly low compared to other setting types. They felt this was not surprising, and many expressed that awareness was likely to be lower among childminders as local authorities found it challenging to engage them on a range of issues, including ALN. They suggested this was due to childminders often working alone and having limited time and less capacity to engage with training and referral pathways.
- 5.15 Some local authorities also suggested childminders may be less likely to care for children with ALN due to the resource intensity it can require. This was also supported by our survey findings. Half (51%) of childminders reported that they did not care for any children with ALN (compared to 15% of all other providers). Of those who had not heard of the ASG, childminders were also less likely to say they required any of the support options offered by the ASG (45% required any type of support compared to 83% of all other providers).

### *Setting size*

- 5.16 The settings which had applied for the ASG or were in the process of applying for it tended to be larger than those which had not. For example, those which had applied had on average 82 children enrolled, whilst those which had never heard of the ASG had an average of 37 children enrolled. Of the 38 providers who had applied to the ASG, 14 had between 1 to 40 children enrolled, 12 had between 41-100 children enrolled and 12 had over 100 children enrolled (32%). The lowest number of children enrolled was 12 and the highest was 400.
- 5.17 This was supported by evidence from the local authorities, who reported that they were more likely to receive applications for the ASG from larger providers. They thought this was due to large settings being more likely to care for a child with ALN but also because larger settings were likely to be more aware of the grant and how to apply for it.

### *Awareness of ALN*

- 5.18 Those who had applied or were applying for the ASG were more likely to have identified a child with suspected ALN in the past 12 months compared to those who hadn't applied (87% vs. 11%). They were also more likely to have a higher number of children in their setting that required additional support for ALN. Those who had

applied to the ASG had on average 3.4 children with additional needs in their setting, while those who had not heard of the ASG had on average 2.1 children with additional needs.<sup>8</sup>

5.19 Of the 38 providers who had applied for the grant:

- The majority (29) were currently caring for between one to five children who required additional support for ALN.
- Three were caring for six to ten children who required additional support for ALN.
- Three were caring for more than ten children who required additional support for ALN.
- Three were caring for no children who required additional support for ALN.<sup>9</sup>

5.20 This suggests that settings with a greater understanding of ALN and those supporting more children with ALN were more likely to have applied for the grant. This mirrors findings from interviews with local authorities, where some reported that they received multiple applications from a relatively small number of providers who had built a reputation for being able to provide good support to children with ALN:

"Some settings seem to have ... a reputation for being better with children with emerging needs and seem to attract families with children who need that additional support." – Childcare Lead

### *Other factors*

5.21 Most local authorities felt that there was no discernible pattern in settings that applied for the ASG by location. They reported that the spread of ALN applications tended to mirror the spread of ALN, which was random across the authority.

5.22 However, a few authorities highlighted that rural providers were less likely to apply for the ASG. One thought this may be due to such providers having less experience supporting children with ALN, and a lack of understanding of the (potential) support available to them. Another highlighted that rural providers can struggle to recruit additional staff due to a lack of qualified candidates in their surrounding area, which may make them less likely to apply for funding for additional specialist staff members.

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<sup>8</sup> These findings should be treated with caution as provider size was not controlled for in survey results.

<sup>9</sup> This may be because the child they applied for the ASG for was no longer enrolled with them.

5.23 A few local authorities suggested that deprivation may also influence whether settings were likely to apply for the ASG. One local authority commented that areas with higher levels of deprivation were more likely to have a greater need for funding due to a lack of other funding sources e.g. being less able to pay for support or equipment themselves. Others highlighted that ASG eligibility being tied to eligibility for the Childcare Offer for Wales meant that families in deprived areas who were less likely to be in work would not be eligible to apply for the ASG.

## **Conclusion**

- 5.24 Local authorities were clear on the purpose of the ASG, however, there was a mixed picture in terms of levels of understanding about whether further funding could be applied for where demand required it. This led to some areas strictly controlling access to the grant to avoid overspend and indicates that some eligible children may be missing out on receiving support via the ASG.
- 5.25 Local authorities thought that demand for the ASG was generally increasing and felt this was because of COVID-19 and the recent introduction of the Additional Learning Needs Code for Wales in 2021. Larger settings were more likely to apply to the ASG along with providers who were more aware of ALN and supporting more children with ALN.
- 5.26 There is some evidence to suggest that these trends in demand and use of the ASG have meant some settings become known for supporting children with ALN leading to children with ALN concentrating in these settings. While this may lead to more specialist care for some children, if the trend continues it can add burden on those settings over time. In addition, other providers may lag behind in terms of knowledge and ability to care for children with ALN.

## **6. What the ASG was spent on**

6.1 This chapter provides an overview of the support provided through the ASG. It analyses results from the survey of providers and interviews with local authorities, providers and families to outline the strategic approaches taken by local Authorities to spending their ASG allocation. It explores the types of support applied for by providers; and barriers reported by providers in accessing and recruiting suitable staff.

### **Local authority approaches to ASG spend**

6.2 Welsh Government published guidance for local authorities about the potential uses of the ASG. The guidance states that the fund can be used to support an eligible child and their childcare provider with staff training, additional staff, helping hands, equipment, or physical adjustments to settings.

6.3 While guidance on what the ASG should be spent on was provided, Welsh Government did not wish to be overly prescriptive, so how local authorities chose to utilise and manage their ASG budget locally was largely left to them to decide. The majority of local authorities had adopted a similar model for allocating ASG spend to the children that needed it (as outlined in chapter seven). However, two distinct models for the way local authorities had planned their ASG spend at a strategic level were identified: 1) Allocating the entire budget to support individual children; and 2) Allocating some budget to support individual children and some to fund an Early Years ALN Lead Officer or similar post.

#### *Model one: Allocating the entire budget to support individual children.*

6.4 The majority (13) of local authorities used their entire ASG budget to support eligible children and their childcare providers directly. All of these local authorities reported that providers could refer children to a multi-agency panel who would review evidence of their potential ALN and support needs and decide whether the ASG was an appropriate way to fund this support (more details on this process can be found in chapter seven).

6.5 In all cases, local authorities relied on the evidence of the provider and health experts to help determine what type of support the ASG should be used for. All were open to funding any of the support options outlined in the ASG guidance as long the evidence suggested the support would help meet the child's identified ALN.

Where it was deemed that the ASG was not the most appropriate way to fund the support, local authorities looked to fund support through other means.

*Model two: Allocating some budget to support individual children and some to fund an Early Years ALN Lead Officer or similar post.*

- 6.6 As well as using some of the ASG budget to meet the needs of individual children, as described above, eight of the local authorities also used part of their budget to partly fund an ALN specialist role. In most cases this role was based within the Education Team at the local authority and was referred to as an ALN coordinator, ALN Lead, or ALN Support Officer. In one case, the ASG was used to fund an Early Years Advisory Teacher and in another case the funding went towards commissioning Placement Officers from Early Years Wales. In all cases, the purpose of the role was to advise providers on how to support children's needs and access any additional resources required. Post-holders often visited settings and observed children to inform their advice to the setting. Most held a caseload of children with ALN and acted as a single point of contact for providers seeking advice on the needs of children with ALN.
- 6.7 In almost all cases, the ALN coordinator role was only partly funded through the ASG, in combination with funding from another pot. For example, in one case the role was part-funded by the ASG and part-funded through Flying Start, and the post-holder split their time across the two cohorts of children. This meant there was a significant amount of money left to provide individual support to children and settings who required it. Another local authority, however, used almost all of their budget to fully fund a full-time ALN Support Officer for the Childcare Offer for Wales. This local authority reported that the small remainder of the grant was used to purchase general resources for their lending library which could then be provided to providers and families that required specialist equipment.

### *Decision making*

- 6.8 All the local authorities that used the ASG to fund an ALN Coordinator or similar role reported that they had done so to ensure the grant was used sustainably and would benefit as many children as possible. Furthermore, it was felt that providers needed extra support to navigate the new ALN Code of Conduct and ensure they meet their statutory duties under it.

“When we first had the ASG funding, we looked at the number of children that we could potentially fund for having additional support and it was quite a small number of children and we felt that that wasn't going to be fair because how would you determine which children you were actually going to be supporting? And because at the time the ALN Act had only just come into being, and it was thought that the childcare settings needed a lot of support to be able to actually understand what the implication of the new ALN Act was on them.” – Childcare Lead

- 6.9 In some cases where local authorities had not used the ASG to fund an ALN Coordinator or similar role, this was due to a lack of awareness that this was a possibility. For example, when asked whether they thought there were any gaps in the ASG's coverage, one local authority responded that they wished they could apply to cover the time they put into supporting settings to meet their ALN duties. The Childcare Lead in this area did not seem to be aware that other local authorities were using the fund for this purpose.
- 6.10 Whether or not areas were funding a coordinator did not seem to depend on their proximity to the strategic delivery of the grant. Of the nine areas that funded a Coordinator, four were delivery authorities while five were engagement authorities.

### **Types of applications for the ASG**

- 6.11 Where providers had been awarded the ASG for a specific child's needs, the most common use of the fund was to improve staff to child ratios. All local authorities reported that almost all the applications they received for the grant were for this use and all providers interviewed reported using the ASG for this purpose too. This was also supported by survey findings: of the 35 respondents to the survey who had received ASG funding, 32 had received it for additional staff or helping hands.
- 6.12 Where the ASG was used for other purposes, these appeared to mainly be used in conjunction with additional staffing too. For example, of the 35 respondents who received the ASG, ten had received funding for equipment, four for staff training, four for administration costs and three for physical adjustments to settings, and, all but two of these had also received funding for additional staff or helping hands.
- 6.13 Providers and families generally agreed that the type of support applied for through the ASG was driven by the needs of the child. All the providers interviewed had applied for additional staffing resource because they felt it was 'obvious' through observations of the child that this was the support they required. Providers also found other types of support easier to access through other means. For example,



one provider said that if they required specialist equipment for a child, they would be inclined to purchase it themselves as a business cost so they could use it for future children too, instead of having to return it to the local authority. Another commented that they had no need for funding for training as the local offer through the local authority was already comprehensive.

"I feel that the training goes above and beyond - last week we were offered autistic [sic] training. We have a lot of training within the local authority." – Full day care setting

- 6.14 Local authorities echoed this. One highlighted that many of the children were supported in the same setting prior to turning three, so may have already received training and equipment through other funding streams prior to them becoming eligible for the Childcare Offer. Furthermore, as well as offering training through other budgets, some local authorities kept a library of ALN resources and equipment that providers could borrow when a new ALN was identified.

"It's the additional support or helping hands as it was called previously. 99% want extra support. We've bought some equipment for one or two children with intensive needs where they needed special chairs and once they went to school they'd take the chair with them, so we bought that. Not much training, because we've got a training budget and we do quite a lot of training that the [ALN team] do through their budgets" – Childcare Lead

- 6.15 Some local authorities were confused about the difference between additional staff and helping hands. In interviews with providers and families, it was often difficult to distinguish whether funding had been used for helping hands or additional staff as they tended to refer to this more generally as 'one to one'. A few local authorities also highlighted that they were moving towards using other terminology to avoid providers and families expecting funding for traditional 'one to one' support. For example, one area used the term 'enhanced provision' and worked with settings to determine an appropriate 'enhancement rate' based on the complexity of a child's needs.

### **Barriers to sourcing support**

- 6.16 Once ASG funding was approved, providers were responsible for sourcing this support themselves. Of the 35 providers who responded to our survey and had received ASG funding, all had secured at least some of the support they had received funding for. Despite this, around half of the providers interviewed

expressed some difficulties in sourcing this support due to issues with costs and recruitment issues.

### *Costs*

- 6.17 A few providers highlighted that it was difficult to source additional staff due to the level of funding provided through the ASG. When funding for additional staff was granted, local authorities sent providers a letter detailing the hourly pay they can offer the staff member, the number of hours and weeks the support can be used for and the dates the support can be provided for. Each local authority is responsible for setting their own hourly pay. This caused some difficulties for providers who had to top up the hourly wage they offered staff through their own funds, especially where the hourly pay granted in the funding allowance was under the national living wage.

“It’s hard to hire suitable staff who are experienced, available and know the child for £11 per hour” – Full day care setting

- 6.18 Providers were also responsible for covering the costs associated with recruiting a new member of staff and the costs of employment e.g. pension contributions, national insurance, and annual leave costs. This meant recruiting additional staff through the ASG added a financial burden on providers.

### *Recruitment issues*

- 6.19 Providers also reported low numbers of available early years staff more generally, especially those with a specialism in ALN, which made it difficult to find potential candidates. This was echoed by one local authority who had changed their recommendation around the level of qualification staff had to have in order to combat the low number of available staff.

"The thing with the workforce is, we have come across it a few times where a child may need support, and there's the funding for it, but there's no staff to be able to deliver that support. So that's kind of a bit of a hurdle... Originally we would be recommending a Level 3 qualified person, but now they're like gold dust...so we have said we would accept a Level 2 qualified member of staff as long as they've done the inclusion training." – Childcare Lead

- 6.20 These market issues were exacerbated by the low pay, as outlined above, and the strict conditions of the ASG funding. One provider explained that the ASG funding they had been awarded could only be used for the weeks the child receives the

Childcare Offer. This meant that the funding was awarded for a set number of weeks and they struggled to recruit staff for such a short period of time.

'So, you know, especially with the Childcare Offer, we're saying you'll only be paid for X amount of weeks and also as well how the funding works is sometimes you'll receive an email to say all this child has been given funding from this date till this date. So you know, it might only be sort of like an 8 week period, you know. And so it's just the uncertainty for those staff members and is probably the biggest barrier I feel.' – Full day care setting

- 6.21 Many providers looked to overcome these barriers by increasing the hours of the staff they already employed. For example, a member of staff who worked three days a week may agree to work full-time to help support a child with ALN for the extra two days. Providers felt this worked well as it reduced recruitment and employment costs and reduced the time needed for recruitment. Recruiting this way also meant the child was already familiar with the staff member, which was beneficial as it caused them minimum distress and confusion. Local authorities all reported allowing providers to use the grant to increase hours for existing staff. However, some providers reported being challenged on this as their local authority wanted them to employ a new member of staff to ensure the grant was being used for additional hours, not just to supplement an existing member of staff's income.

## **Conclusion**

- 6.22 Local authorities took two different strategic approaches to spending their ASG allocation: allocating the entire budget to support individual children or allocating some of the budget to also fund an ALN Coordinator. Where some funding had been allocated to fund an ALN Coordinator or similar post, the aim of this was to ensure the fund could be used to support as many children and providers as possible. Local authorities were able to utilise the ASG flexibly to fit with their local needs and context, and this appeared to have been effective.
- 6.23 Where providers could apply for direct support for a particular child, this was mainly for additional staff or helping hands as any training, equipment and other support needs tended to be met through other funding streams, suggesting the ASG helped fill in a gap in the funding of the support that was needed. However, some providers reported still facing challenges with accessing additional staff due to issues with recruiting qualified staff and additional recruitment and employment costs which were not covered by the ASG.

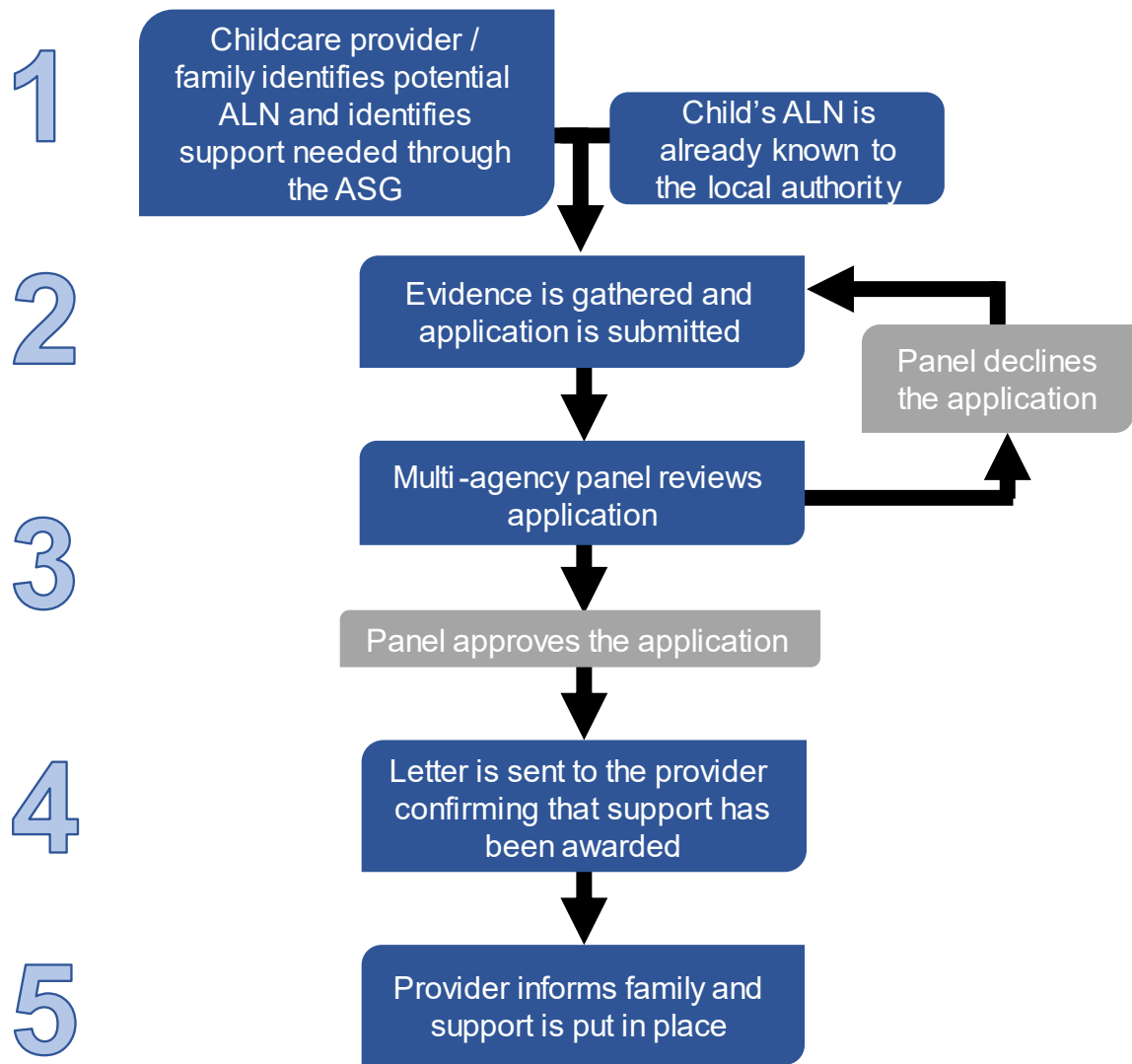
## **7. Application process for the ASG**

7.1 This chapter provides a description of the application process for families and providers who wanted to access the ASG, and reflections from local authorities, providers, and families on the process. It synthesises findings from the survey with providers as well as the interviews with local authorities, providers, and families. Results of some survey questions are reported qualitatively due to the low base size of the questions.

### **ASG application process**

7.2 Interviews with local authorities and providers highlighted that the application process for families and settings wanting to access the ASG was broadly very similar across local authority areas. Figure 7.1 shows the step-by-step process followed by most areas. Each step varied slightly across local authorities based on their internal processes and the needs of the children in each area.

**Figure 7.1: Step-by-step process for accessing the ASG**



*Step 1: Identifying a child with a potential ALN or potential need for ASG funding*

7.3 In most cases, the childcare provider and the family of the child identified the potential ALN and investigated what options they had for providing additional support. The potential ALN was usually identified from observations done at the setting or at home, or because the child joined the setting with a pre-recognised ALN. At this stage, providers would most commonly contact a member of staff at their local authority about their concerns and next steps. This member of staff was part of a team dedicated to providing support to children with ALN and/or who are accessing the Childcare Offer (e.g. the ALN Lead or Early Years Coordinator).

7.4 In a few cases, the provider had made the application without contacting anyone at the local authority – this was most common among larger providers who were

familiar with early years funding stream applications or who had applied to the ASG previously.

- 7.5 In some cases, local authorities were already aware of the child with a ‘potential’ ALN because they had a recognition of ALN or were receiving ALN support from another funding stream. In these cases, local authorities sometimes initiated communication with the childcare provider and family about their options for additional support. In some cases the local authority contacted childcare providers and families directly where they had indicated on their Childcare Offer for Wales application form that their child may require additional support.

*Step 2: Gathering evidence and submitting the application*

- 7.6 The next step in the process involved gathering evidence about the child and their needs to complete and submit an ASG application to the local authority. In all cases providers led on this evidence gathering process, although parents were often asked to provide any evidence they had to support the application. The information required often included:

- Developmental needs data
- Building blocks for communication<sup>10</sup>
- Early developmental journey plan
- A one-page profile of the child’s needs
- Relevant accompanying medical letters or reports
- Relevant reports or letters from previous settings
- What they wanted to use the ASG for and how much funding they required
- Evidence about how the ASG would support the child
- Information about the setting and the support they already provided.

- 7.7 In some cases, providers were advised by the ALN Coordinator to go through an additional observation period, which could range from a couple of weeks to a couple of months, although this depended on the extent and severity of the child’s needs. In addition to this, the local authority would sometimes arrange an observation of the child themselves. This was usually by an educational psychologist, the ALN

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<sup>10</sup> Building blocks for communication relates to how far along a child is in their speech and language development.

coordinator, an ASG worker at the local authority, or similar, and the observation report was used as evidence for the ASG application.

7.8 The application was then submitted to a multi-agency panel, consisting of professionals from a range of educational and healthcare backgrounds. Panels met regularly, fortnightly or monthly, depending on the local authority.

7.9 For some families this step occurred alongside referring the child to other professionals such as occupational therapists, health visitors, speech and language therapists and educational psychologists. However, the children who entered the setting with a pre-recognised ALN may have already gone through these referral processes.

*Step 3: Multi-agency panel decides whether to approve the application*

7.10 The application was then presented and discussed at the multi-agency panel, which decided whether to approve the application or whether they required more evidence from the provider. In most local authorities, the panel met to discuss all children with ALN, regardless of whether they were eligible for the Childcare Offer for Wales. The panel discussed the general needs of the child and which funding they were eligible to receive. If the child was eligible for the Childcare Offer for Wales, use of the ASG would be discussed. The panel would have conversations around whether to award the specific type of support requested, or whether they felt another form of support would be more appropriate based on the needs of the child.

7.11 Local authorities reported that applications to the ASG were very rarely rejected as by the time the application arrived at the panel, various conversations had been had with providers and the eligibility criteria for the ASG had been outlined. The findings from the survey also support this. Of the 38 respondents who applied to the ASG, the majority (35) had at least one successful application.

7.12 In rare cases, the panel decided that they required more evidence about the needs of the child, and the provider was asked to conduct more observations and resubmit their application. Of four providers who filled in the survey whose applications had been rejected, the main reasons given included a lack of evidence in their application and because the child was not eligible for the ASG.

7.13 It is important to note that, where local authorities are using their ALN assessment panels to determine eligibility for ASG funding, there is a risk that children with additional support needs which do not meet the threshold for a formal recognition of

ALN are excluded from consideration for ASG support. This contravenes the ASG guidance, which is that all children with additional support needs are in scope for ASG support.

*Steps 4 & 5: Confirmation letter is sent to childcare provider who informs the family and puts the support in place*

- 7.14 Once the application was approved the local authority would send a letter to the provider to confirm that the support has been awarded. The letter detailed the amount the provider had been awarded and for what time period. Providers were then responsible for informing the family that the support had been awarded and putting the support in place.
- 7.15 Settings were required to submit an invoice for the support they had put in place and send it to their local authority. Delivery authorities are responsible for making payments to providers, rather than engagement authorities. Engagement authorities were therefore required to submit their invoices to their delivery authority, who would make the payment to settings. If the support awarded was for additional staff, 'helping hands', or another form of ongoing support, an invoice was submitted monthly.

## **Reflections on the ASG application process**

### *Childcare providers*

- 7.16 Overall the majority of providers who took part in the research were satisfied with the ASG application process. Of the 38 providers who responded to our survey and had made an ASG application, 29 were satisfied with the ASG funding process, with 14 of these being 'very satisfied'. In addition, the survey indicated that the majority of providers always received payments on time and in an accurate manner (21 out of 38), while a smaller number (10 out of 38) usually received payments in this manner, but not always. Very few providers (4 out of 38) never received payments on time and in an accurate manner.
- 7.17 However, a small number of providers were unsatisfied with the funding process (3 out of 38 providers). In interviews, those who were not satisfied commented that they were unhappy about the speed at which their applications were processed and the time it took to receive funding. This was particularly true in cases where the child had very complex needs and was known to the local authority prior to turning three, or for those who had to re-apply for funding.



“It is a really long process and to be honest I expected it to be declined the first time.” – Provider

- 7.18 Most providers who filled in the survey felt that the application was equally as difficult as other early years applications (22 out of 38 providers), while a small number felt that it was easier (9 out of 38 providers) or more difficult (5 out of 38 providers). Those who thought the application was more difficult were asked why, and the most common reasons given were that it was a long process, that the eligibility requirements were too complex, and that liaising with service providers was difficult and caused delays.
- 7.19 The majority of providers who took part in the interviews felt positively about the guidance available for the application process and mentioned that their local authorities were helpful and answered any questions they had about the process. Similarly, of the 38 providers who responded to our survey and had made an ASG application, 23 felt it was easy to access information about the ASG to inform their application, while only six providers thought that it was difficult. All providers who made an application used at least one source of information or support, with the most common being a local authority contact, an ALN specialist, or a different early years practitioner.
- 7.20 However, a small number of providers felt that the guidance around accessing funding and support was not clear enough:
- “If somebody could just give us a little bit more guidance by saying if you did A and B, you'd get to C without us having to spend our evenings Googling and messaging each other asking: ‘Should we try this next week?’” – Provider
- 7.21 The majority of providers who filled in the survey reported that they were likely to recommend the ASG to another early years provider (35 out of 38 providers) and to apply for more ASG funding (35 out of 38 providers).

### *Families*

- 7.22 Feedback on the ASG application process from families was varied although overall, parents were satisfied with the process and its outcomes.
- 7.23 Most parents interviewed had identified that their child may have additional learning needs before they entered the setting. Many parents mentioned that they did not feel supported by healthcare professionals in identifying what additional needs their

child might have and shared that health visitors had been unhelpful and pushed their concerns aside.

“They just kept saying give it six more weeks, give it another couple of months. He [the child] failed his year 2 SOGs terribly, he didn't pass a single thing, and they were still delaying referring him. So in the end, I went private.”

– Parent

7.24 In most cases, once ALN needs had been identified, the childcare provider supported the family through the referral process and took the lead on the ASG application process updating the family regularly on progress. While most parents did not view this negatively, a small number of parents did mention that they wished they had been more involved in the process. Many parents shared that if they had not had such a proactive setting, they would have struggled to get any additional support as they did not know it was available and did not know to apply for it:

“They've [childcare provider] been my rock really, because I find I've had more help, more tips, more advice from them than anybody in the NHS... If it wasn't for the nursery, I think I'd be really lost.” – Parent

7.25 A common theme that arose in the interviews was that parents felt they had to ‘fight’ at every stage when they realised their child may have an ALN. However, regardless of this, the majority of parents interviewed felt that their experience with the ASG was mostly positive compared to other experiences of seeking support.

“I just feel like all the fighting is like it's been worth it because we've got somewhere now, but still everything is just a fight for services.” – Parent

### *Local authorities*

7.26 All local authorities had streamlined the ASG application into their general approach to ALN and as a result felt positively about the application process. Most felt positively about the guidance provided and the time it took to process applications.

7.27 When asked if there was anything they would do to improve the process, a small number of engagement authorities felt that the existence of delivery and engagement roles added unnecessary steps and could complicate certain elements as each local authority had different processes<sup>11</sup>:

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<sup>11</sup> Delivery authorities are responsible for making payments to providers, rather than engagement authorities. Engagement authorities were therefore required to submit their invoices to their delivery authority, who would make the payment to settings.

“The ASG isn't anything to do with them [their delivery authority], they don't make the decisions, they don't do the work, and they don't pay the settings - we do. And then we have to claim it back from them, and they have to claim it back from Welsh Government, and it just seems like a ridiculous extra loop that doesn't need to be in there.” – Childcare Lead

7.28 Furthermore, some engagement authorities highlighted that they were unable to have an overview of their ASG budget, as this information was only made available to delivery authorities, and it made it difficult for them to manage the grant and requires a lot of 'to-and-fro' with their delivery authority.

“If we can get one system in place where I can just upload everything instead of emailing everything over I think that would be easier. For data protection as well.” – Childcare Lead

## **Conclusion**

7.29 Overall, there was high levels of satisfaction with the ASG application process among local authorities, childcare providers, and families. While the process appeared to work well, some respondents pointed out areas for improvements that could be considered going forward. For example, a small number of providers were unsatisfied with the length and the complexity of the application process to their local authority while some local authorities felt that removing the roles of 'delivery' and 'engagement' authorities could help to simplify and streamline the process. In addition, the use of ALN processes and panels to consider ASG use may mean that some children with additional support needs are missing out on ASG funding.

## 8. Outcomes for providers, children, and their families

- 8.1 This chapter provides an overview of the perceived outcomes of receiving the ASG for providers and families, as reported by setting staff and parents during the survey and qualitative interviews.

### Outcomes for the individual child in receipt of support

- 8.2 Both providers and parents were generally positive about the impacts of ASG funding on the individual child who received support.

#### *Overall child development*

- 8.3 Of the 35 providers that had received ASG funding, 28 agreed that ASG funding has increased the quality of support they provide to children with ALN while only three neither agreed or disagreed and three disagreed. There were some differences by setting type. For example, the two childminders who received funding were more ambivalent towards its impact on the child, with both neither agreeing nor disagreeing with this statement. Conversely, those settings who applied for staff training were very positive about the quality of support provided as a result of the ASG, with all five settings who applied for this agreeing that support had improved.
- 8.4 This improved quality of support was also commonly mentioned in interviews with providers and families, alongside a view that this had significantly aided the child's overall development. All providers and families reported that children had noticeably progressed in their development since receiving the additional support and felt this would have a positive long-term benefit for the child.

“Initially, he wouldn't go anywhere near the painting...and within probably six months of having the one-to-one, he was painting at the easel all the time, he was joining in with the play dough.” – Full daycare setting

#### *Communication and social skills*

- 8.5 As well as contributing to children meeting key development goals, the additional support played a key role in improving children with ALN's ability to interact with their peers. In the survey, 27 out of 35 providers agreed that that receiving the ASG had led to children with ALN having more frequent or greater quality engagement with their peers while only five neither agreed or disagreed and two disagreed. Agreement varied slightly according to the type of support received: 10 out of 11 providers delivering 'helping hands' agreed that support had improved the child's

engagement with peers, compared to 19 out of 25 providers delivering 'additional staff'.

- 8.6 Similar improvements in social skills were reported during interviews. The resulting interactions had a positive effect on the child's development and wellbeing, particularly for children with autism or speech and language delays. For example, some parents mentioned that their child was learning positive behaviours from other children now that they were interacting more frequently. Others reported that children who used to isolate themselves from the main group had become much more comfortable interacting with other children, even sometimes seeking out social interaction. Indeed, one parent mentioned that their nursery sent regular photos to parents of their children in the setting: before support, they would only ever see their child in the background, but since receiving 1:1 support through the ASG the photos often showed them interacting with all the other children.
- 8.7 Parents reported that having an additional support worker was key in providing a safe environment for the child to explore these new interactions. Many mentioned that the child developed a strong bond with their support worker which made them more receptive to their suggestions of activities. The presence of someone who understood them also provided a valuable security blanket for the child if the activity became overwhelming.

"Obviously she can't strike up that conversation, so it helped her be able to do stuff with other children and give her the comfort if she was stressed out of having a familiar person there for her." - Parent

### *Transition into school*

- 8.8 These improved social skills, alongside the routine of attending childcare five days a week, helped prepare children for the transition into school. Several settings reported instances where the additional support had allowed a child to attend mainstream school instead of specialist provision.

"We had a little one, he came to us non-verbal from another nursery. He had ASG and has now gone to a mainstream Welsh school. That's the difference we can make!" - Full daycare setting

- 8.9 The majority of children were now attending school, generally in specialist provision, and parents of those in specialist provision still reported the ASG-funded support had smoothed the transition into education.

“[Without the support] he definitely wouldn’t have been going the five days a week, and like I said it makes you wonder how he would have transitioned into school – going from two or three days up to five days would have been stressful for him, stressful for us.” - Parent

## **Outcomes for other children in the setting**

- 8.10 Providers also commented that the ASG had had a broader impact beyond the specific children receiving additional support. Of the 35 providers who responded to the survey and had received ASG funding, 23 agreed that the funding had improved the quality of the support they could provide to all children, eight neither agreed or disagreed and only three disagreed. There were some differences by setting type. For example, all five of the settings who had received funding for staff training agreed with the statement, while only 16 of the 25 that received funding for additional staff agreed.
- 8.11 This was mirrored in the interviews with providers, where most indicated that the ASG had allowed them more flexibility to support those with ALN without reducing the opportunities available to other children. As such, several settings emphasised that since receiving ASG funding they had been able to provide better care for other children as well as the children directly receiving the support. The reasons for this fell into two main categories:
1. Staff who previously had to spend time ensuring the safety and management of the behaviour of the child with ALN now had the support of an additional staff member who could shoulder this responsibility. As a result, they could dedicate more of their time to look after other children.
  2. Disruptive behaviour from the child with ALN was much less common due to the child’s progression as a result of the additional support. Other children therefore experienced less disruption to their activities and were less likely to “copy” negative behaviours.
- 8.12 Providers also had greater flexibility in the range of activities they could run. In particular, prior to support, some settings could only run activities suited to the child with ALN, whereas they now have the capacity to separate children into groups doing activities tailored to their needs.

“It might be that they don’t like going outside, so then all the children have to miss out on that until we can draft further staff in to get them out. So it affects lots of different things and the staff morale as well.” – Full daycare setting

## **Outcomes for families**

8.13 Of the 35 providers who responded to the survey and had received ASG funding, 25 agreed that it had increased the confidence of parents of children with an ALN or suspected ALN. There were some differences by setting type: as before, the five providers who received funding for staff training all agreed with this statement, compared to 18 of the 25 providers who received funding for additional staff.

8.14 This increased parental confidence was apparent in conversations with parents as well. For the families of the children receiving support, the main outcome reported was that they felt more confident taking their child to the setting. Generally, knowing that their child was receiving additional support reassured parents that their child was safe, and removed a lot of the stress of leaving their child in the setting. For example, one parent said the child had become happier attending the setting since receiving support, which made it easier to leave them:

“He loves going which is the main thing, you know, he’s not upset when I drop him off, he runs in! He was very eager this morning, which is very reassuring. That takes a lot of stress and pressure off, like I have no concerns leaving him.” - Parent

8.15 Other outcomes that parents mentioned were being able to increase their working hours, spend more money doing things with their other children, and that it had helped them to know what activities to do with their child at home. All parents we spoke to said they would have had difficulty keeping their child in childcare without the funding. Many thought that their child would not have been able to attend childcare, either because they believed the setting would not have taken the child, or because they would not have been confident leaving their child without additional support.

“They did say to me when he turned three about last year that they didn’t feel like it was safe for him to be in the nursery unless he did have a one-to-one with him.” - Parent

- 8.16 Some parents mentioned that if they had not received the support, they would have had to reduce their working hours to care for the child or give up work altogether due to concerns about the child's safety in the setting. One family reported that one parent did give up work while they were struggling to source support, and that this put a huge strain on the family.
- 8.17 As well as mentioning these options, many parents did say they would have tried to pay for the one-to-one support themselves to allow their child to attend the setting. However, all who suggested this thought this would have caused financial difficulties for the family, with many saying they would have had to ask other family members for a contribution. One parent said they would not have been able to pay for full-time care, which would have made the child's transition into school more difficult.

### **Outcomes for providers**

- 8.18 Of the 35 providers who had received ASG funding, ten agreed it had led to more children being able to access the Childcare Offer for Wales, while seven disagreed and the majority (18) did not know. This reflects the mixed response from providers about whether they would have continued to provide support for the child regardless of whether they had received the ASG. Indeed, of the 33 providers who had gone on to obtain support via the ASG, 12 said they would have provided this support to the child even if they had not received the funding, 13 said they would not have and eight said they did not know. Of the 12 who said they would have still provided the support, eight said they would have funded this as a business cost.
- 8.19 This uncertainty regarding whether the ASG increased numbers accessing the Childcare Offer was reflected in conversations with providers, where many said they would have continued to offer the child support, regardless of whether they had received ASG funding. This was not because the ASG funding was not vital to the child's development, but rather that many providers felt it was their duty not to turn a child away and therefore they would have continued to provide care to the child, although they acknowledged this posed many challenges on the setting.

“There have been occasions where we have funded it ourselves...but obviously that's not sustainable for a long time. We did have a parent offering to pay for a one-to-one member of staff themselves as well, but obviously we didn't want to accept because they shouldn't have to.” – Full daycare setting



8.20 Where providers were hesitant to report that children receiving the ASG would have been turned away without the funding, this strong desire to offer these children a place sometimes led to the quality of care being compromised. Many therefore suggested that they would try to ‘make do’ or ‘find a way’ without the funding. Several providers suggested that due to lack of resource, they would not have hired extra staff to support the children with ALN, potentially creating an unsafe environment, reducing the quality of care received by other children, and negatively affecting staff morale. Another suggested that managers would have to work overtime as a result.

“It’s very, very difficult when a child requires that level of support and they haven’t got it...so it might be that a manager has to go into a room, which then affects our job role. We’re then working on the weekend, in the evenings, to catch up because it’s so important for that child to have that support.” - Full daycare setting

8.21 Despite this reluctance to report turning children away, many providers did express that their setting may have been forced to do so in the absence of funding, even if they would have tried other avenues before doing so. This was generally due to safety concerns. Similarly, many parents reported that their provider had said they could not take their child without the additional support, and commonly reported being turned away by providers in the past, either because they had not been able to source support, or did not know it was available. It may therefore be that the providers we spoke to were particularly interested in ALN and so were more likely to try to accommodate these children.

“As soon as I mentioned it was 1 to 1 support, they just said they haven’t got the numbers of staff to facilitate her needs...so it just felt a bit disheartening really.” - Parent

8.22 While children with ALN would still, in some cases, have been able to access the Childcare Offer without ASG funding, the ASG ensured that childcare providers could consistently meet the child’s needs without compromising conditions for staff and other children. For example, of the 35 providers who completed the survey and had received the ASG, 28 agreed it had made it easier for staff at the setting to provide quality support for children with ALN or suspected ALN. This indicates that while settings may have been able to provide some level of support regardless, ASG funding made providing this support easier, and improved the quality of

support that was provided so that children with ALN could access childcare safely. Providers also tended to agree that ASG funding had contributed to staff development. Of the 35 providers who received the ASG, 23 agreed that it had increased their knowledge of ALN, or their awareness of how to support and provide care for children with ALN. In the five cases where the ASG had specifically funded staff training, all five settings agreed with both statements. This shows that the training provided was successful in improving staff knowledge and awareness. Those who had employed an additional staff member also generally agreed with both statements (16 and 17 agreed out of 25), suggesting that having a specialist member of staff may have helped other staff in the setting develop their skills and knowledge of ALN.

## **Conclusion**

- 8.23 Overall, both providers and families expressed that ASG funding has had a positive impact on the children it supported, and to a slightly lesser extent on their families. In all cases, children were reported as progressing significantly in their development following the introduction of additional support, in many cases allowing them to reach key milestones. The impact on providers was more mixed, with many providers claiming they would have tried to provide support for the children regardless. However, this support risked being of lower quality due to stretched resources within the setting without additional funding.

## 9. Conclusions

- 9.1 This chapter summarises the key findings of the research and discusses their implications for the implementation of the ASG. The chapter concludes with a set of recommendations for Welsh Government policy stakeholders in relation to the design and delivery of the ASG going forward.
- 9.2 The research found that the ASG has been welcomed by local authorities as a much-needed resource to help with their response to growing demand for additional support for children with ALN. The feedback from local authorities indicated that they had invested a great deal of thinking into developing processes to make effective use of the grant and integrate it in the overall budget that was allocated for ALN support in their respective areas.
- 9.3 The research identified an overall common model of processing applications to the grant, with an element of tailoring by local authorities, to ensure that the process was appropriate and relevant to the context in their respective areas. However, in some cases LAs used multi-agency panels established to consider ALN as a mechanism to distribute the ASG, meaning that some children with additional support needs but without an identified ALN could miss out.
- 9.4 The grant funding was most commonly used to increase the number of staff in early years settings, to increase child-staff ratios where needed and ensure the safety of the child with ALN as well as the other children in the setting. While the additional staff provided immediate much-needed support for the child and the setting, this type of support was highly dependent on the provision of the funding for the additional post, and this meant there was a risk of termination of the support should the funding cease. The grant funds were also used for training, to upskill early years setting staff in working with children with various ALN, for equipment, and in a small number of local authorities, to fund an ALN coordinator role, either partly or in full. These resources tended to be more sustainable and have the potential to have a longer-term impact for the children and the providers.
- 9.5 The evidence in relation to spend and levels of satisfaction suggest that overall, the implementation of the ASG has been effective to some extent. Where ALN were identified, local authorities and early years providers appeared to have worked effectively together, reaching an understanding of what evidence was required for the application and how best to obtain it, agreeing what support to put in place and allocating the funding to put the support in place. The vast majority of applications

were reported to be successful, meaning it was rare for an identified need to be left unanswered. Families and providers were overall satisfied and reported positive changes for the child, the family and the setting overall.

9.6 That said, the research found a number of challenges and issues related to the implementation of the ASG:

9.6.1 Local authorities reported having to navigate a complex system of funding streams, of which the ASG was one. This added complexity to the funding process, as local authorities had to ensure they assessed eligibility criteria and used the correct funding stream for the wide range of different cases they were dealing with. Working with a complex and convoluted system poses a risk of funding options being overlooked, which can mean eligible families might miss out.

9.6.2 Levels of understanding of the ASG allocation structures varied between and within local authorities. Some local authorities were aware that they could make a business case to increase their funding, should they need to, but others were not. This means that local authorities did not always use the ASG funding stream fully to meet their needs.

9.6.3 There were varied levels of awareness of the ASG amongst providers and families. Feedback from local authorities suggested that some of this was intentional, as local authorities limited how widespread their communications on the ASG were, to avoid a risk of demand for ASG funding reaching over capacity levels. However, awareness also appeared to vary by setting type, with small, private, and childminder settings tending to be the least aware of the grant. This means that potentially there are children and families who are missing out because they are not aware of the option for funding of support through ASG. In addition, some providers may struggle to support children with additional support needs appropriately in the absence of ASG funding.

9.7 The research found that the majority of applications made to the ASG were for children who were already accessing childcare, but who needed additional support to enable them to access childcare more safely and maximise the benefit to the child. In some cases, the children were known to have ALN before they started attending the setting (or before they have become eligible for the Childcare Offer; that is, before they turned three), but the discussions on what support needed to be arranged and the application for funding did not start until they were settling in the setting and the setting required additional support. In other cases, children had not

yet been identified as having ALN and their behaviours that required additional support were only identified when they started attending the setting when they became eligible for the Childcare Offer. All providers interviewed indicated that in cases where they were involved in identifying the ALN it was rare for a child to come to them with already having had a formal assessment or a care plan in place. The process of arranging and funding support appears to be done reactively with limited activity to forward plan the support that setting may require. Forward planning where ALN are known could allow local authorities to predict what type of support would need to be put in place, how much funding they may require, and to make applications ahead of time. This could assist with the financial management of the ASG and with improving the support provided to children.

- 9.8 These challenges and issues suggest that while the implementation of the ASG appeared to have been by and large effective, where the ASG was implemented successfully, it tended to rely on high levels of awareness amongst providers and knowledgeable and confident staff to lead the process, leaving substantive gaps elsewhere. Welsh Government may wish to consider a number of steps and actions to improve the design and implementation of the ASG going forward.
- 9.9 **Recommendation 1:** Welsh Government may wish to review the current guidance and consider amendments to make what the ASG can be used to fund clearer. In particular, there should be greater clarity about the option for local authorities to request additional funding, and information should be shared about how to make a business case to request for an increase in allocation of the funds.
- 9.10 **Recommendation 2:** the varied levels of awareness to the ASG amongst providers and families pose a risk that there are parents who may be eligible for the ASG but do not access childcare because they cannot afford the additional support that their child needs and are not aware of the ASG or requirement for the local authority to meet the costs of additional support for children with ALNs. In addition, some children who require additional support but do not access ASG funding may struggle with the environment of the childcare setting, impacting on their wellbeing, relationships with peers and how ready they are to start school. Welsh Government might consider working with local authorities to jointly develop communications and information campaigns to providers and families to ensure that all those who are eligible and need ASG support have access to it.

- 9.11 **Recommendation 3:** related to the issue of varied levels of awareness, particular attention should be given to raising awareness amongst small, non-maintained settings and childminders. The research found that these settings faced particular challenges with resource when looking after children with ALN, and in many cases this meant they felt they could not offer a place to a child with higher levels of need, although ASG funding could have bridged the gap.
- 9.12 **Recommendation 4:** the research found that local authorities and providers tended to address support needs reactively, starting to consider support needs and what support can be provided only when the child was already accessing childcare. Providers commented that while they were waiting for the application process to complete and funding to be awarded, there could be delays in providing the support that a child needs to attend the setting. This delay is, in part because children must first qualify for the Childcare Offer before an application for ASG funding can be made. However, the delay could be minimised if assessments, discussions and planning were to take place ahead of the child qualifying for the Childcare Offer, especially in cases where additional needs are known from a younger age. Local authorities could work with providers in all sectors (early years and schools) and families to identify children's additional support needs at an earlier stage. Welsh Government may wish to consider ways in which they can work with local authorities to promote joint working across sectors and implement better forward planning, including better information sharing and improved referral processes.
- 9.13 **Recommendation 5:** there is limited data on the number of children and settings that are receiving ASG funding. This makes management of the grant challenging at the national level and means it is not possible to accurately assess grant outcomes and impacts on the children, the families and the sector. Welsh Government may wish to consider developing and implementing a process and templates for a consistent and systematic procedure to capture and report more granular grant management information from local authorities to Welsh Government.

## **Appendix A – Survey of childcare providers**

### **A Intro**

**Welcome to the Childcare Offer for Wales Additional Support Grant survey of providers.**

**The Welsh Government has commissioned IFF Research to undertake a programme of research on the Additional Support Grant (ASG). The ASG is part of the Childcare Offer for Wales. Your responses to this survey will help inform the Welsh Government's future plans and policies. If you have provided childcare funded by the Childcare Offer for Wales, you will be asked to answer questions on your views and experiences of providing childcare for children with additional learning needs (ALN), and any experiences you have with the ASG.**

**The survey will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Participating in the survey is voluntary. More information about your data and your rights is available in this privacy notice. If you would like to receive further information about the research please contact:**

**[additionalssupportgrant.research@iffresearch.com](mailto:additionalssupportgrant.research@iffresearch.com)**

#### **FAQS (drop down box)**

##### **How did you get my information?**

The Welsh Government hold your details because you provided them when you applied to deliver the Childcare Offer for Wales.

##### **How will my data be stored and processed?**

To find out more about how your data will be stored and processed, please see the privacy notice for the survey.

##### **Do I have to take part?**

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and if you do not wish to take part or be sent reminders then please just reply to the invitation email and your details will be

removed. We would appreciate you taking part as this will help Welsh Government make any changes needed to the ASG.

**Who can I contact to find out more?**

If you have any questions about this research, please email us on [additionalssupportgrant.research@iffresearch.com](mailto:additionalssupportgrant.research@iffresearch.com) . If you would like to check the bona fide nature of this survey, please contact [research.childrenandfamilies@gov.wales](mailto:research.childrenandfamilies@gov.wales) .

**If you are happy to continue, please press 'next'.**

ASK ALL

A1 **Firstly, would you like to complete this survey in Welsh or in English?**

*SINGLE CODE*

Welsh	1	Continue in Welsh
English	2	Continue in English

ASK ALL

A2 **Has your setting ever delivered any childcare funded by the Childcare Offer for Wales?**

*SINGLE CODE*

Yes	1	
No	2	SCREEN OUT
Don't know	3	



## B Context - Learning about the provider

ASK ALL

B1 **What Local Authority area is your childcare setting located in?**

*SINGLE CODE*

Isle of Anglesey	1	
Gwynedd	2	
Conwy	3	
Denbighshire	4	
Flintshire	5	
Wrexham	6	
Powys	7	
Ceredigion	8	
Pembrokeshire	9	
Carmarthenshire	10	
Swansea	11	
Neath Port Talbot	12	
Bridgend	13	
The Vale of Glamorgan	14	
Cardiff	15	
Rhondda Cynon Taf	16	
Merthyr Tydfil	17	
Caerphilly	18	
Blaenau Gwent	19	
Torfaen	20	

Monmouthshire	21	
Newport	22	
Don't know	23	Screen out

ASK ALL

B2 **How many children do you have on roll in your setting?**

**Please include all on roll, even if they do not attend full time.**

WRITE IN (NUMERIC)		
Don't know	1	

ASK ALL

B3 **How many of these children are funded by the Childcare Offer for Wales?**

WRITE IN (NUMERIC)		
Don't know	1	

ASK ALL

B4 **What type of childcare service is your setting registered as?**

*MULTI-CODE*

Childminder	1	
Full day care	2	
Sessional day care	3	
Out of school childcare	4	
Open access play provision	5	
Creche	6	
Other childcare provider / not sure – please specify	7	

ASK ALL EXCEPT CHILDMINDERS (B4=2-6)

B5 **Is your setting maintained by the local authority? E.g. the local authority is responsible for controlling and funding your setting.**

*SINGLE CODE*

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

## C ALN - Experiences, resources, and challenges

ASK ALL

- C1 **In this survey we are interested in your experiences with children who have Additional Learning Needs (ALN). Please click the box below to read the definition of ALN from the ALN Code for Wales 2021. Point 3 refers specifically to children under compulsory school age.**

Expanding box:

Additional learning needs

(1) A person has additional learning needs if he or she has a learning difficulty or disability (whether the learning difficulty or disability arises from a medical condition or otherwise) which calls for additional learning provision.

(2) A child of compulsory school age or person over that age has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she—

(a) has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or

(b) has a disability for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010 which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities for education or training of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream maintained schools or mainstream institutions in the further education sector.

(3) A child under compulsory school age has a learning difficulty or disability if he or she is or would be if no additional learning provision were made, likely to be within subsection (2) when of compulsory school age.

(4) A person does not have a learning difficulty or disability solely because the language (or form of language) in which he or she is or will be taught is different from a language (or form of language) which is or has been used at home.

**How many children in your setting have a need that requires additional support? Please include children who may not have received a statement of special educational needs, an individual development plan (IDP) or been formally identified as having an ALN.**

WRITE IN - NUMERIC		
Don't know	1	

ASK ALL

C2 **How might you identify that a child in your setting has a potential Additional Learning Need (ALN)?**

*MULTI-CODE*

Children entering the setting with a pre-recognised ALN	1	
Parents raising concerns	2	
Members of staff in the setting observing the child's progress	3	
Information passed on from staff from another service (including from the local authority, an education provider, a GP or Health Visitor)	4	
Other (please specify)	5	
Don't know	6	EXCLUSIVE
None of these	7	EXCLUSIVE

ASK ALL

C3 **Do you face any barriers in identifying whether or not a child might have an ALN?**

*MULTI-CODE*

Child's age making identification less certain	1	
Severity of condition	2	
Lack of staff knowledge / awareness	3	
Lack of staff confidence in identifying ALN	4	

Time constraints	5	
Lack of parental engagement	6	
Lack of information passed to us from other agencies and services	7	
Don't know	8	EXCLUSIVE
None of these	9	EXCLUSIVE

ASK ALL

C4 **If you identified that a child in your setting had a potential ALN, do you know who to contact in order to have this formally assessed?**

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

ASK ALL

C5 **To what extent do you agree with the following statements:**  
*SINGLE CODE*

	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree	Don't Know
_1 I, and any other staff in my setting, are confident identifying if a child might have an ALN	1	2	3	4	5	6
_2 I, and any other staff in my setting, know the steps to obtain a formal ALN assessment for a child	1	2	3	4	5	6
_3 I, and any other staff in my setting, are confident in working with children with an ALN	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK ALL

C6 **In the last 12 months, have you identified a child in your setting who you thought could have had an unrecognised ALN?**  
*SINGLE CODE*

Yes	1	
-----	---	--

No	2	
Don't know	3	

## D ASG - The application process

ASK ALL

D1 **Before today, had you heard of the Additional Support Grant (ASG)?**

*SINGLE CODE*

Yes, my setting is in the process of applying for the ASG or has previously applied for it	1	MOVE TO D4
Yes, but my setting has never applied for the ASG	2	MOVE TO D3
No, I have never heard of it	3	MOVE TO D2

ASK IF NEVER HEARD OF THE ASG (D1=3)

D2 **Does your setting require any of the following to ensure that parents of children with ALN, disabilities, or other health needs, can access the childcare elements of the Childcare Offer for Wales?**

*MULTI-CODE*

Staff training	1	
Additional staff	2	
Helping-hands	3	
Equipment	4	
Physical adjustments to settings	5	
Administration costs	6	
Information from other services, such as education providers or health professionals.	7	
Transport	8	
Another type of support (please specify)	9	
No, we don't require any of these types of support	10	EXCLUSIVE
Don't know	11	EXCLUSIVE

ASK IF HEARD OF IT BUT NOT APPLIED (D1=2)

D3 **Why have you not applied for the ASG? Please tick all that apply.**

*MULTI-CODE*

My setting faces barriers in identifying whether or not a child has ALN, disability or health need	1	
My setting does not require any additional support for children with an ALN, disability or health need.	2	
I was unsure how to make the application	3	
I was unsure what the funding could be used for	4	
I was unsure whether the children we provide care to would qualify for the support	5	
The support I required is not covered by the funding	6	
I have not had the time to make an application	7	
Other (please specify)	8	
Don't know	9	EXCLUSIVE

ASK IF HEARD OF ASG (D1 =1-2)

D4

**To access the ASG the Welsh Government do not require children to have undergone a formal assessment and diagnosis of an ALN. Instead, it defines children who are eligible for support as those who have:**

- **Cognition and Learning, including specific, moderate, severe or profound learning difficulties;**
- **Behavioural, emotional and social development difficulties;**
- **Communication and interaction, including autism; speech, language and communication difficulty;**
- **Sensory and/or physical, including hearing and/or visual impairment or physical difficulties;**
- **Medical conditions;**
- **Other health needs (not captured by the formal definitions of SEN and ALN) which mean they need more support than some of their peers to fully benefit from the childcare element of the Offer.**

**How confident would you, or any relevant staff, be to determine a child's potential eligibility for the grant? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is not at all confident and 5 is very confident,**  
*SINGLE CODE*

	Not at all confident				Very confident	Don't Know
_1	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK IF MADE AN APPLICATION (D1=1)

D5

**How many applications for the ASG has your setting been involved in making?**

WRITE IN (NUMERIC)		
Don't know	1	

ASK IF MADE AN APPLICATION (D1=1)

D6 **What type(s) of support has your setting applied to the ASG for?**

(IF MADE MORE THAN ONE APPLICATION (D5>1)) **If you have made more than one application, please consider all your applications.**

*MULTI-CODE*

Staff training	1	
Additional staff	2	
Helping-hands	3	
Equipment	4	
Physical adjustments to settings	5	
Administration costs	6	
Another type of support (please specify)	7	
Don't know	8	EXCLUSIVE

ASK IF MADE AN APPLICATION (D1=1)

D7 **How easy or difficult was it to access information about the ASG to inform your application? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very difficult and 5 is very easy.**

*SINGLE CODE*

	Very easy	Quite easy	Neither easy nor difficult	Quite difficult	Very difficult	Don't Know
_1	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK IF MADE AN APPLICATION (D1=1)

D8 **From what sources, if any, did you access information or get support to make your application?**

*MULTI-CODE*

Welsh Government Website	1	
--------------------------	---	--



A Local Authority Contact	2	
Other early years practitioners	3	
ALN specialists	4	
Parents	5	
Other (please specify)	6	
I did not receive any support to make the application	7	

ASK IF MADE AN APPLICATION (D1=1)

- D9 **Thinking solely about the application process for the ASG, how easy or difficult was it compared with the experience of making applications for other early years funding streams?**  
*SINGLE CODE*

Much easier	1	
Slightly easier	2	
About the same	3	
Slightly more difficult	4	
Much more difficult	5	
Not applicable – I've never made any other applications for funding	6	

ASK IF EXPERIENCE WAS EASIER (D10=1/2)

- D10 **In a few words, please explain why it was a 'easier' experience than other funding applications?**

**In your response, please name the funding applications you are comparing the ASG against.**

WRITE IN		
Don't know	1	

ASK IF EXPERIENCE WAS MORE DIFFICULT (D10= 4/5)

- D11 **In a few words, please explain why it was a 'more difficult' experience than other funding applications?**

In your response, please name the funding applications you are comparing the ASG against.

WRITE IN		
Don't know	1	

**E ASG – Demand and Use**

ASK IF MADE AN APPLICATION (D1=1)

E1 **You indicated you had made [INSERT ANSWER AT D5] applications for the ASG. How many of these applications were you successful in securing funding for?**

<i>WRITE IN (NUMERIC) DS: LIMIT MAX NUMBER TO ANSWER GIVEN AT D5</i>		
Don't know	1	
My setting is still in the process of submitting an application	2	

ASK IF HAD AT LEAST ONE UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICATION (E1<D5)

E2 **What reason(s) were you given for why the application(s) were unsuccessful? MULTI-CODE**

The application was missing information	1	
The application had incorrect information	2	
The child was not eligible	3	
The grant did not cover the support I was requesting	4	
My setting was ineligible	5	
Other (please specify)	6	
I was not given a reason	7	EXCLUSIVE
Don't know	8	EXCLUSIVE

ASK IF HAD AT LEAST ONE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION (E1>=1)

E3 **Of your [INSERT ANSWER AT E1] successful application[s], for how many applications did you receive the full amount of funding you applied for?**

<i>WRITE IN (NUMERIC)</i>		
Don't know	1	

E4 ASK IF HAD AT LEAST ONE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION (E1>=1)  
**Thinking about your successful applications, what type(s) of support did you obtain funding for?**  
 [IF HAD MORE THAN ONE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION (E1>1): **If you had more than one successful application, please consider all of them.**  
*MULTI-CODE*

Staff training	1	
Additional staff	2	
Helping-hands	3	
Equipment	4	
Physical adjustments to settings	5	
Administration costs	6	
Transport	7	
Another type of support (please specify)	8	
Don't know	9	EXCLUSIVE

E5 ASK IF HAD AT LEAST ONE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION (E1>=1)  
**Which of these types of support have you successfully procured since the application was approved?**

**E.g. if you successfully applied for support with staff training, has this training happened yet?**  
*MULTI-CODE*

Show codes selected at E4	1	
Another type of support (please specify)	2	
Don't know	3	EXCLUSIVE

E6 ASK IF HAVE NOT PROCURED ALL SUPPORT THEY APPLIED FOR YET (NOT ALL CODES AT E1 SELECTED AT E5)  
**What are the reasons you have not been able to successfully procure all of the support you applied for yet?**  
*MULTI-CODE*

Haven't had enough time since the application was approved but still planning to procure the support	1	
Struggling to source the support	2	
Needs have changed	3	
Other (please specify)	4	
Don't know	5	EXCLUSIVE

ASK IF HAD AT LEAST ONE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION (E1>=1)

E7 **How easy or difficult was it to provide the support you've managed to procure in practice? Please answer on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very difficult and 5 is very easy.**

*SINGLE CODE*

	Very easy	Quite easy	Neither easy nor difficult	Quite difficult	Very difficult	Don't Know
Show all codes selected at E5	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK IF HAD AT LEAST ONE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION (E1>=1)

E8 **What barriers, if any, did you face in providing this support?**

[IF FUNDING COVERS MORE THAN 1 TYPE OF SUPPORT (>1 CODE SELECTED AT E4): **If you were successful in securing funding for more than one type of support, please consider the barriers you faced to providing any of this support.**

<i>WRITE IN</i>		
Don't know	1	

ASK IF HAD AT LEAST ONE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION (E1>=1)

E9 **If your application(s) for ASG had not been successful, would you have still provided this support?**

*SINGLE CODE*

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

ASK IF WOULD HAVE STILL PROVIDED SUPPORT (E9=1)

E10 **How would you have funded this support?**

*MULTI-CODE*

Through another government funding stream	1	
Through another local authority funding stream	2	
Through another charity funding stream	3	
Asking parents for a contribution	4	
Funded it as a business cost	5	
Applied for financial support from a bank or other mainstream lender	6	
Other (please specify)	7	

## F ASG - Outcomes and programme changes or improvements

ASK IF HAD AT LEAST ONE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION (E1>=1)

F1 **Do you think more children are able to access the childcare offer since your successful ASG application compared to before?**

*SINGLE CODE*

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

ASK IF ASG HAS ALLOWED THEM TO SUPPORT MORE THAN ONE EXTRA CHILD (F1=2)

F2 **How many extra children have you been able to support?**

*WRITE IN (NUMERIC)*

<i>WRITE IN (NUMERIC)</i>		
Don't know	1	

ASK IF HAD AT LEAST ONE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION (E1>=1)

F3 **To what extent would you agree that access to ASG funding has...**

*SINGLE CODE*

	Strongly disagree	Tend to disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to agree	Strongly agree	Don't Know
_1 Increased the quality of the support you provide to children with an ALN or suspected ALN, disability or health need	1	2	3	4	5	6
_2 Increased the quality of the support you provide to all children	1	2	3	4	5	6
_3 Increased the confidence of parents of children with an ALN or suspected ALN, disability or health need in the quality of the support you can offer	1	2	3	4	5	6
_4 Made providing quality support to children with an ALN or suspected ALN, disability or health need easier for you or your staff	1	2	3	4	5	6
_5 Increased your knowledge of ALN, disabilities or health needs	1	2	3	4	5	6
_6 Increased your awareness of how to support and provide care for children with an ALN, disability or health need	1	2	3	4	5	6
_7 Increased the range or complexity of ALN, disabilities or health needs your setting can support	1	2	3	4	5	6
_8 Led to children with an ALN, disability or health need having more frequent or greater quality engagement with their peers	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK IF HAD AT LEAST ONE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION (E1>=1)

F4 **Have the payments you received from the ASG arrived in a timely and accurate manner?**  
*SINGLE CODE*

Yes, always	1	
Yes, usually	2	
No	3	

ASK IF HAD AT LEAST ONE SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION (E1>=1)

F5 **Overall, how satisfied are you with the ASG funding process?**  
SINGLE CODE

	Very satisfied	Quite satisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Quite unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Don't Know
	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK IF MADE AN APPLICATION (D1=1)

F6 **Overall, how likely are you to...?**  
SINGLE CODE

	Very likely	Quite likely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Quite unlikely	Very unlikely	Don't Know
1_ Recommend the ASG to another early years provider	1	2	3	4	5	6
2_ Apply for more ASG funding	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK IF MADE AN APPLICATION (D1=1)

F7 **Please provide any final comments on the ASG funding process or any suggestions for how you would like to see the funding improved?**

WRITE IN		
Nothing else to add	1	EXCLUSIVE

G Thank and close

ASK ALL WHO HAD A SUCCESSFUL ASG APPLICATION (E1<=1)

G1 **Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey. As part of this research for the Welsh Government, we will be carrying out additional interviews with some early years providers to understand more about your experience with the ASG and the impact it had.**

**The discussion would take place over video call (Microsoft Teams) at a time that is convenient for you in November. It would last around 60 minutes and we would offer you £25 for your time as a thank you for taking part. We can offer this via PayPal, Amazon e-voucher, or Wise transfer.**

**Please note: If you answer ‘yes’ to this question, you will be asked to provide your name and contact details (in the form of an email address and telephone number). We are asking for your details because your survey responses are otherwise anonymous.**

**IFF Research will arrange interviews with a sample of those that indicated they would be willing to undertake an interview, representative of a range of experiences, including, but not limited to geographical location within Wales and what type of childcare services are provided. You would not be identifiable in any information shared with the Welsh Government or any outputs produced as a result of this research. To find out more, please see our privacy notice here.**

**Would you be happy to be recontacted about taking part closer to the time? Please note that saying yes now does not mean that you are obliged to take part when contacted.**

*SINGLE CODE*

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

**ASK IF AGREE TO RECONTACT (F1=1)**

G2 **Thank you very much. Please provide the best contact details to reach you on for possible participation in the follow-up discussion.**

Name:		WRITE IN
-------	--	----------



Email:		WRITE IN, NUMERIC
Telephone:		WRITE IN EMAIL
Prefer not to say	1	

G3 **This is the end of the survey. Thank you for your time.**

*SINGLE CODE PER ROW*

## H SCREEN OUT TEXT

ASK ALL

**Thank you for taking part in this research.**

**To find out more about the Additional Support Grant, how to access it and how it can be used, please see the [guidance document](#). For the Welsh translation of this the document please see [Y cynnig gofal plant i Gymru: canllawiau i awdurdodau lleol | LLYW.CYMRU](#).**

## **Appendix B – Local authority topic guide**

### **A Participant introduction**

#### **A1 Roles and responsibilities**

- About their role in the local authority (team, level, broad area)
- Responsibilities (probe: relationship with childcare providers, Welsh Gov, financial/administrative, childcare and ALN funding)
- Length of time in role and related roles

#### **A2 Overview of their involvement in the Childcare Offer and in the Additional Support Grant**

- Nature of involvement (E.g. responsibility for overseeing Childcare Offer and Additional Support Grant locally, ALN assessment/support, e.g)
- Length of time involved in each
- Any specific role in terms of the Additional Support Grant programme

### **B Demand for and use of the ASG**

#### **B1 What is your understanding of what the Additional Support Grant is and why it was introduced?**

- Probe: Did you have any experience of supporting additional needs in childcare/early years prior to the ASG?
- If yes: How did this compare?

#### **B2 What is the level of demand for the ASG in your local area?**

- Is the level of demand more or less than you expected?

#### **B3 Does the level of demand for the ASG vary within your LA, and if so how?**

- Probe:
  - By type of provider e.g. childminders vs. nurseries, LA Maintained vs Private?
  - By area e.g. rural/urban
  - By levels of deprivation
  - Any variance over time?
- IF VARIES: why do you think that is?

**B4 Is there 'enough' funding for your LA to meet the demand?**

- IF NOT ENOUGH FUNDING
  - What happens when your budget is used up?
  - What alternatives do providers/families have?
  - What other funding would you try to access?
  - How has this varied over time? Any specific peaks in demand?

**C Support available through the ASG**

**C1 What kinds of interventions or adaptations are requested by childcare providers?**

- Are certain interventions/adaptations more common than others?
  - Why could this be?
- Types of intervention to probe on: training, additional staff, equipment?

**C2 Is there much variance in the type of ASG requests made?**

- E.g. by type of provider, time of year, level of child's need?

**C3 Is there any difference in the type of requests received by whether the provider is LA maintained or independent?**

**C4 Are there any gaps in the type of support available through the ASG?**

- Any themes?
- Why do these gaps exist?
- How are these gaps currently being filled?

**D The application process for the ASG**

**D1 Please describe the process for applying for the ASG. We are interested in the process of your LA application to draw down funds from the Welsh Government, and the process for childcare providers applying to you for the funding.**

- Ask them to walk through the process step by step
- Who is involved and at what points?
- What information is made available to providers and families?
- What is the process for agreeing which applications will be made by the LA?

**D2 What is the process for determining whether the request is eligible for the ASG?**

- PROBE FOR: family eligibility and type of intervention eligibility
- Who is involved in making the decision?

**D3 What is the process for determining if the child is eligible for the ASG?**

- Is the definition of what additional learning needs are eligible for ASG clear?
- Who is responsible for assessing the child's needs?
  - How does this process differ for maintained nurseries?

**D4 Of the children that are supported by the ASG, approximately how many have had no formal diagnosis or assessment for ALN?**

- Do you keep a record/collect data about this?

- How many children receive ASG that have received support through Flying Start? This could include a Growing Skills assessment or an assessment by a Health Visitor.

**D5 What guidance is available for the application process?**

- How useful is it?
- Is there any further guidance that would be useful to have?

**D6 To what extent do you agree that the application process is clear and straightforward?**

- Are there any points in the process you struggle with? Why is this?
- What improvements would you recommend?

**D7 What proportion of your applications to ASG are successful?**

- What are the main causes for unsuccessful applications?
  - Completed application form wrong?
  - Request / family / provider not eligible? Why would this be?

**D8 Walk me through the process once an application is approved?**

- Who is responsible for:
  - Commissioning the item requested?
  - [If the respondent is a Delivery Authority] Making the payment?
  - [If the respondent is an Engagement Authority] Liaising with the relevant Delivery Authority?
  - Notifying the family?
- IF PROVIDER RESPONSIBLE: How is that monitored?

**D9 How do you manage spending to ensure that your LA has sufficient funds to cover the needs that you identify?**

- What is the process for estimating costs before applying for the ASG?
- How do you manage any changes in costs that occur after the application has been granted?

**D10 What happens when a grant application is rejected?**

- Who notifies you?
- What is the process for letting the provider and family know?
- What are the next steps to identify other available support?

**E Knowledge of the funding in Providers / Families (c. 5-8 mins)**

**E1 [IF NOT COVERED ALREADY IN APPLICATION SECTION] In your view how do levels of awareness of the ASG funding stream differ between providers?**

- Difference by provider type?
- Do you think this due to differences in demand or other factors e.g. the knowledge of individual staff?
- Is there any further guidance that would be helpful for providers?

**E2 What is done to build knowledge of the ASG in providers?**

- Who has responsibility is this?
- Is the ASG actively advertised?
- IF YES – How?
- IF NOT - Why not?

**E3 How much do you think families know about the grant?**

- Do they understand what the grant will fund and how to access it?
- Is there any further guidance that would be helpful for families?

## F Programme changes and improvement

F1 **Thinking about the future of the ASG, what do you think could be kept, removed, changed or added to improve it's delivery?**

- Probe:
  - The application processes
  - The delivery of the funds
  - The spending of the fund

F2 **For each recommendation made:**

- Who should be responsible for this?
- What could be done to make it work better?
- How would this improve outcomes for providers, families and children?
  - How would you know it has worked?

## G Thank and close

**Thank you for taking the time to talk to us about this today. Your input in this research is really valuable to us and to the Welsh Government.**

G1 **Do you have anything else you wanted to add to our discussion today?**

## **Appendix C – Childcare provider topic guide**

### **A Participant introduction**

**A1 To begin with, could you tell me a bit about the setting you work in and what your role is?**

- Type of childcare provided (e.g. childminding, daycare, after school care, sessional care etc)
- Their role and responsibilities
- Length of time in role and related roles

### **B Awareness of ALN**

**B1 Please can you tell me about your understanding of what an Additional Learning Need (ALN) is and how this may present in young children?**

- Confidence in identifying ALN?
- How they know this? Experience, training?
- How confident are their staff? If some staff are more confident than others, why?

**B2 What are the most common ways that Additional Learning Needs (ALN) are identified in the children you work with?**

- Probe: Observing the child? Health visitor? Family raising concerns?
- IF MENTION HEALTH VISITORS, how many children are identified from being part of flying start?
- Barriers to identifying ALN? E.g. cross-agency information sharing?
- Most common types of ALN identified?

**B3 Have there been any changes in the last few years in the number of children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN), or any other needs, that you provide childcare for?**



- If yes, what is driving this? Covid, greater awareness of ALN?

**B4 Please describe the steps you, or your staff, would take once a child has been identified as having a suspected ALN?**

- Is there a clear process for staff or on a case-by-case basis?
- How do they identify any necessary next steps?
- If they would contact the Local Authority – how would they do this? Is there a clear referral pathway for support?
- IF NOT COVERED, at what point would you raise your concerns with the local authority?

**B5 What support is available to childcare providers in your local area to help support with identifying or supporting children with an Additional Learning Need (ALN)?**

- Support from their LA, local charities, Welsh Gov guidance?
- Any gaps in the support available?

**C Support available through the ASG**

**C1 What is your understanding of what the Childcare Offer for Wales Additional Support Grant (ASG), is and who can access it?**

- Probe to see whether they understand the eligibility criteria for children e.g. age, funded through the Childcare Offer and with any type of additional need including ALN, medical conditions and other health needs.

**C2 What is your understanding of what the ASG can be used for?**

- Staff time, training, equipment?

**C3 In our survey you previously said that your setting had been involved in making at least one application for the ASG. If that's still correct, please can you talk me through what the/each application was for?**

- What ALN had been identified?
- What type of support was requested? Why?

**C4 Please describe the process of making an application**

- Ask them to walk through the process step by step
- Who is involved and at what points?
- What is the process for determining whether the request/ the child is eligible for the ASG?

**C5 How did you find the application process?**

- What has worked well and what has worked less well?
- To what extent do they agree it is clear and straightforward?
- Are there any points in the process you struggle with? Why is this?
- What improvements would you recommend?

**C6 What, if any, guidance was available to you during the application process?**

- How useful is it?
- Is there any further guidance that would be useful to have?

**D Delivery and impacts of the grant**

**D1 How many of your applications were successful?**

**D2 Please walk me through the process once an application is approved.**

- How were you notified?
- What were the next steps?
- Who is responsible for:
  - Commissioning the item requested?
  - Notifying the family?

**D3 Were any of your applications not successful? If so, what happened when the application was rejected?**

- ENSURE TO PROBE ON ALL THE BELOW:
- Who notifies you?
- Were you given any reasons for why the grant was rejected? IF YES: What were these?
- What is the process for letting the family know?
- Were you still able to offer the child a place at your setting?
- What steps were taken to identify other support available?

**D4 How has the ASG funding been used in practice at your setting?**

- Is the support that was needed now in place?
- Any issues procuring the support needed? E.g. recruitment issues?

**D5 Is the funding provided sufficient to the level of need you identify in your setting?**

- Does it cover the right things or is anything missing?

**D6 What impact has the funding had on your setting and the child/children you support?**

- What difference is the ASG making to children and families and staff?

**D7 What would have happened if this funding was not available?**

- What other funding options are available to you?

**D8 How have you found the process of working with your local authority in receiving ASG funding?**

- Would you say that the process has been straightforward?
- Have there been any delays to receiving the funding?
- Process of supplying evidence/receipts etc

**E Programme changes and improvement**

**E1 What advice would you give to other providers like yours who are thinking of applying for the ASG?**

- E.g. Is there anything you wish you had known before applying for the ASG?

**E2 Thinking about the future of the ASG, what do you think could be kept, removed, changed or added to improve its delivery?**

- Who should be responsible for these changes?

**F Thank and close (c 2 mins)**

**Thank you for taking the time to talk to us about this today. Your input in this research is really valuable to us and to the Welsh Government.**

**F1 Do you have anything else you wanted to add to our discussion today?**

## **Appendix D – Family topic guide**

### **A Participant introduction**

**A1 Please could you briefly introduce yourself and explain what kind of childcare services you currently access?**

- How many children do they have?
- How many children have additional learning needs or require additional support in their setting?
- What type of ALNs do they consider their child to have?
- What kind of childcare do they access? E.g. Nursery, childminder etc? Full day care or sessional?
- How many hours of childcare do they access?

### **B Access to childcare**

**I would now like to ask you some questions about how you have found accessing childcare for your children. Please can you answer these questions thinking about you child/ren who have additional learning needs or require additional support.**

**B1 How long have you been accessing childcare for your child?**

- Always with the same provider?
- Using the same provider as they use for other children?

**B2 Did you have any difficulties accessing childcare for your child? If so, what were they?**

- Probe for: costs, availability of childcare places, additional needs of child
- How helpful was the childcare provider in helping to overcome these difficulties?

**B3 What has been your experience of accessing the Childcare Offer for Wales?**

- How long have you been accessing the offer?
- How did they first learn about it?
- Any difficulties accessing their funded childcare hours?

## C Additional learning needs

### C1 **Please can you tell me a bit about how you realised your child needed some additional learning support?**

- Were they already aware before accessing childcare?
- Any identification of need from an early age e.g. via a health visitor or through flying start?
- Does their child have a formal diagnosis or IDP?

### C2 **Once you realised your child needed some additional support, what were the next steps you took?**

- Who did you originally seek support from?
- Did you receive any support from health, education, or childcare?

## D Accessing the ASG

### D1 **Before taking part in this research, had you heard of the Childcare Offer for Wales's Additional Support Grant?**

- What is your understanding of what the fund is and who is it aimed at?
- When did you first learn about the Additional Support Grant?
- How did you first hear about it e.g. through other parents, the application for the Childcare Offer, childcare, health?
- What information did you have about the ASG at first?

- Did you originally know whether you'd be eligible to receive it?

**D2 Please can you talk me through the steps you took between first hearing about the ASG to finding out your child was eligible to receive it?**

- How was the decision made about what support should be put in place?
- If applied for multiple strands of funding, how was the decision made on which funding stream should cover which needs?
- Who made the application for the ASG?
- Did their child have to be discussed at a panel before a decision was made?
- What involvement/awareness did they have at each step of the application process?
- Who kept them updated?

**D3 What type of support did you apply for?**

- How did you hope this support would help you to access the childcare offer?
- How did you make this decision?
- Who was involved in the process of deciding what support would be appropriate for your child?
- How did you find this process?

**D4 How did you find the process of applying for the ASG?**

- How long did the process take?
- Was it stressful?
- Did they receive any guidance or reassurance?
- Were they kept fully up to date with developments?

## E Impact of the ASG

### E1 **What impact has the support provided had on your child?**

- Impact on the child? Any noticeable differences?
- Impact on wider family e.g. able to access childcare when they couldn't before or access more sessions, able to pick up more shifts at work, relief of stress or worry?
- If no noticeable differences, why do they think this is?

## F Programme changes and improvement

### F1 **What advice would you give to other parents who need additional support for their child to access childcare?**

- Is there anything you wish you had known before starting the process?

### F2 **Thinking about the whole process from first finding out about the support available to today, is there anything that could have been done differently?**

- What difference would this have made and why?

## G Thank and close

**Thank you for taking the time to talk to us about this today. Your input in this research is really valuable to us and to the Welsh Government.**

### G1 **Do you have anything else you wanted to add to our discussion today?**