

Social research number: 99/2025

Publication date: 15/10/2025

Report of the Childcare Offer for Wales from September 2023 to August 2024

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.

OGL © Crown Copyright Digital ISBN 978-1-80633-541-1

Report of the Childcare Offer for Wales from September 2023 to August 2024

Authors: Bethan Gilson and Dr Jack Watkins

Full Research Report: Gilson, B & Watkins, J. (2025). Report of the Childcare Offer for Wales from September 2023 to August 2024. Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 99/2025

Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/report-childcare-offer-wales-september-2023-august-2024>

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

For further information please contact:

Name: Dr Jack Watkins

Department: Equality, Poverty and Children Evidence Support Division

Welsh Government

Cathays Park

Cardiff

CF10 3NQ

Email: Research.ChildrenAndFamilies@gov.wales

Table of contents

1. Introduction	7
Data sources.....	9
2. Take-up of the Offer	14
Measuring take-up	14
Language.....	17
Parents in Education and Training	18
Parent earnings.....	19
3. Accessing the Offer	22
Awareness	22
The application process	25
Provider administration	29
4. The impact of the Offer on families	32
Changes in childcare usage	32
Employment and education.....	36
Cost saving, ability to work and family well-being.....	42
5. Impacts on providers	49
Profile of providers	49
Income and sustainability.....	50
6. Additional fees.....	53

List of tables

Table 1: Parent survey responses to the question: “In which local authority do you live?”	11
Table 2: Provider survey responses to the question “In which local authority is your setting based?”	13
Table 3: Number of children accessing the Childcare Offer for Wales by local authority, 2023-24	15
Table 4. Estimated take-up rate of the Childcare Offer for Wales, 2023-24	16
Table 5: Number and proportion of claims by language of service, 2023-24.....	18
Table 6: Parent earnings as reported in responses to the parent survey and in information collected through parent applications, 2023-24.....	21
Table 7: Parent survey responses to the question “How did you hear that your child may be eligible for the Childcare Offer?”, 2023-24	23
Table 8: Provider survey responses to the question “Are you aware of any of your customers / parents, who are eligible for the Offer but have decided not to take it up?”	24
Table 9: Parent survey responses to the question: “Did you experience any of the following difficulties when applying for the Childcare Offer? Please tick all that apply”	26
Table 10: Parent survey responses to the question “Guidance is available online for parents using the Childcare Offer for Wales. How useful have you found this guidance?”	28
Table 11: Parent survey responses to the question “How helpful did you find the advice that you received through the national telephone helpline?”	29
Table 12: Provider survey responses to the question: “Approximately how much time do you (or your staff) spend monthly on the following administration tasks linked to the Childcare Offer?: Registering as a provider to deliver the Offer”	30
Table 13: Provider survey responses to the question: “Approximately how much time do you (or your staff) spend monthly on the following administration tasks linked to the Childcare Offer?: Submitting claims for payment”	31
Table 14: Provider survey responses to the question: “Approximately how much time do you (or your staff) spend monthly on the following administration tasks linked to the Childcare Offer?: Processing requests from parents for funded hours” ...	31

Table 15. Parent survey responses to the question “Before you began accessing the Childcare Offer, did you use any formal childcare (such as childcare at nurseries, playgroup or childminders)?”	32
Table 16. Parent survey responses to the question “If the Childcare Offer did not exist my child would have”	33
Table 17: Parent survey responses to the question “Some six months before you accessed the Childcare Offer, approximately how many hours of formal childcare were you using in a typical week?”	34
Table 18: Parent survey responses to the question “Some six months before you accessed the Childcare Offer, approximately how many hours of informal childcare (family, friends, extended family - not including yourself or other members of your household) did you use?”, 2021-22 – 2023-24	35
Table 19: Combined hours of formal and informal childcare used prior to accessing the Offer, as reported by parent survey respondents, 2023-24	35
Table 20: Parent survey responses to the question “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:”	37
Table 21: Parent survey responses to the question “If the Childcare Offer had not been available to you, what do you think your current employment situation would be? (Please tick all that apply)”	38
Table 22: Parent survey responses to questions on the impact of the Offer on their employment	39
Table 23: Parent survey responses to the question To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: [Targeted at parents in education]	41
Table 24: Parent survey responses to the question “If the Childcare Offer had not been available to you, what do you think your current situation would be? (Please tick all that apply)”	42
Table 25: Parent survey responses to the question “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Accessing funded childcare has had a positive effect on my own and/or my partner’s wellbeing.”	43
Table 26: Parent survey responses to the question: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Accessing the Childcare Offer has reduced the financial burden of childcare.”	44
Table 27: Parent survey responses to the question “What difference, if any, has accessing funded childcare through the Offer made to your family finances in terms of the amount of money you have at your disposal each month?”	45

Table 28: Parent survey responses to the question “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Accessing the Childcare Offer has made it easier for me to undertake my work than would have been the case otherwise.”	46
Table 29: Parent survey responses to the question “Do you think there have been any positive or negative benefits from your child accessing formal childcare?” . 47	
Table 30: Providers delivering the Offer by local authority, 2023-24	49
Table 31: Provider survey responses to the question “Are the payments you receive for delivering the Childcare Offer places delivered to you in a timely and accurate manner?”	50
Table 32: Provider survey responses to the question “Has the Childcare Offer had a positive or negative effect on the profitability of your business?”	52
Table 33: Provider survey responses to the question “Has the Childcare Offer had a positive or negative effect on the sustainability of your business?”	52
Table 34. Provider responses to the question “Do you include additional charges for any of the following? (Please tick all that apply)”, 2021-22 – 2023-24	54
Table 35: Parent survey responses to the question “Did you pay for any of the following additional charges with any of the childcare providers that your child attended using Childcare Offer funding? Please include regular charges for lunches, snacks or transport, but please do not include any fees for any additional hours you use.” , 2021-22 – 2023-24	55
Table 36. Provider responses to the question “Do you include additional charges for any of the following? (Please tick all that apply)”, 2023-24, by service characteristics	56

List of figures

Figure 1: Frequency plot of gross annual earnings of parents accessing the Childcare Offer for Wales, 2023-24	20
---	----

Glossary

Additional Learning Needs (ALN)

The Special Educational Needs (SEN) framework, which had been in place for around 25 years, has been replaced by the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system, which was established by the 2018 Act. The definition for ALN is essentially the same as the definition previously used for SEN. This is:

- the learner has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age (that cannot be addressed solely through differentiated teaching); or
- the learner has a disability (for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010) which prevents or hinders them accessing education or training that's generally provided for others of the same age; and
- the learning difficulty or disability calls for Additional Learning Provision (ALP).

Additional Support Grant

Grant available to enable local authorities to ensure that the childcare element of the Childcare Offer is inclusive to eligible children with additional learning needs or physical disabilities (ALN). See note above.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW)

CIW is the independent regulator of social care and childcare in Wales. CIW register, inspect and take action to improve the quality and safety of services for the well-being of the people of Wales.

Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (C-CAS)

Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme for pre-school children of critical workers and vulnerable children from April to August 2020.

Childcare Offer (the Offer)

Up to 30 hours a week of government-funded early education and childcare for eligible parents of children aged 3 and 4, for up to 48 weeks of the year.

Flying Start

Welsh Government programme providing support in some of Wales' most disadvantaged communities for children (0-3 years) and their families. Part of the Flying Start provision includes 12.5 hours of funded childcare per week, for 39 weeks, to support the development of the children aged 2 and 3 eligible for support.

National digital service

Work is underway to plan and design a central administrative service – this is being designed and developed to make the administration of parent applications and arrangements for making payments to providers more efficient, and to provide a more consistent experience for parents and providers across Wales.

Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Children have special educational needs if they have a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for them. The term “Special Educational Needs” (SEN) has been replaced in Wales by the term “Additional Learning Needs” (ALN), though this transition occurred during the period relevant to this research. See ALN above.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Childcare Offer for Wales (“the Offer”) is a Welsh Government-funded programme that provides up to 30 hours of combined nursery education and childcare a week, for up to 48 weeks of the year, for children aged 3 and 4 years of eligible parents.
- 1.2. All local authorities in Wales are required to provide a minimum of 10 hours per week of nursery education for children aged 3 and 4 years, which can be delivered either through a local authority maintained setting (typically a school) or in a non-maintained early education provider (typically a private nursery, funded by the local authority). The Offer funds additional hours of childcare to ensure that eligible parents in each area can access 30 hours in total.
- 1.3. Funded childcare is provided by childcare services. To deliver funded hours of childcare through the Offer, a childcare provider must be registered with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW). Services are either childminders, who provide care in their own home, or children’s day care providers, who provide care in centres or other facilities.
- 1.4. Parents make applications to access the Offer through an online service hosted on the Welsh Government website. As part of this application, parents must demonstrate that they meet [the eligibility criteria](#). To be eligible for the Offer, each parent must:
 - live in Wales
 - have a child aged 3 or 4 years old
 - have a gross income of £100,000 or less per year

All parents also must be either:

- employed and earning at least, on average, the equivalent to 16 hours a week at National Minimum Wage or Living Wage;
- on Statutory Pay and Leave (Sick, Maternity, Paternity, Parental, Bereavement or Adoption Leave); or
- enrolled on a further or higher education course that is at least 10 weeks in length

1.5. The Offer was launched in seven pilot areas in 2017. Rollout expanded to more areas in September 2018. For the purposes of reporting, the Offer is considered to run alongside the school year, beginning in September and ending in August. Children can begin to access funded childcare in the term after their third birthday, and their access ends in the September of the school year in which they will turn five.

1.6. [The Offer has been the subject of government social research and analysis](#). This has included published evaluations of the first five years of the programme, including the temporary Coronavirus Childcare Assistance Scheme (C-CAS) which operated in place of the Offer during 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.7. The present report addresses the delivery of the Offer in the academic year 2023-24. Where possible, data relating to this year has been presented alongside comparable data from previous years.

Data sources

1.8. The present report was informed by the following data sources:

- Monitoring information collected by the Welsh Government from parents and providers; and
- Surveys of parents and providers conducted in July and August of 2023 and 2024.

1.9. From 2018 to 2022, monitoring information about use of the Offer was collected by selected local authorities. Monthly and termly reports were submitted to the Welsh Government, and these were used to identify the number of children accessing hours funded by the programme. Since 2022, monitoring data has been collected directly by the Welsh Government.

1.10. Parents and providers were surveyed as part of the previously published evaluations of the Offer. Since 2022, the Welsh Government has continued to administer these surveys annually in July and August of each year.

1.11. This report uses data from parent surveys collected in 2021-22 (n=2,002), 2022-23 (n=752) and 2023-24 (n=1,606), and from provider surveys collected in the same years (n=330, n=333 and n=244 respectively). In 2021-22, surveys were undertaken by a contractor as part of the [evaluation of year five of the Offer, \(Arad Research, 2022\)](#). In 2022-23, parents and providers were invited to contribute through a notification sent through the gov.uk website, and this appeared to result in a reduced response from parents. In the following year, emails were sent directly to parents and this resulted in an increased response rate compared to 2022-23.

1.12. The sample for the parent survey in 2023-24 was broadly representative of the distribution of parents using the programme across local authority areas in Wales. Comparing survey responses to monitoring records, in all but two cases

the proportion of respondents in each local authority was within one percentage point of the proportion of parents recorded in monitoring for each local authority. Table 1 below presents the breakdown of respondents in the survey and from monitoring records.

Table 1: Parent survey responses to the question: “In which local authority do you live?”

Response Option	2023-24 Survey		Monitoring record	
	Response Percent	Response Total	Response Percent	Difference
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	2.0%	31	1.9%	0.1%
Bridgend County Borough Council	3.1%	49	3.1%	0.0%
Caerphilly County Borough Council	6.7%	106	5.5%	1.1%
Carmarthenshire County Council	10.9%	172	11.1%	-0.2%
Ceredigion County Council	4.4%	69	5.6%	-1.2%
City and County of Swansea	2.0%	31	2.3%	-0.3%
City of Cardiff Council	4.2%	66	4.0%	0.1%
Conwy County Borough Council	5.0%	79	4.0%	1.0%
Denbighshire County Council	6.3%	100	6.5%	-0.2%
Flintshire County Council	5.3%	84	4.7%	0.6%
Gwynedd Council	3.1%	49	2.5%	0.6%
Isle of Anglesey County Council	1.3%	21	1.0%	0.4%
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	3.1%	49	3.8%	-0.7%
Monmouthshire County Council	4.7%	74	4.4%	0.3%
Neath Port Talbot Council	4.2%	67	5.5%	-1.3%
Newport City Council	2.6%	41	3.4%	-0.8%
Pembrokeshire County Council	5.9%	94	5.1%	0.8%
Powys County Council	5.7%	91	5.9%	-0.1%
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	6.6%	105	6.1%	0.6%
Torfaen County Borough Council	4.2%	67	5.0%	-0.8%
Vale of Glamorgan Council	4.0%	63	3.4%	0.6%
Wrexham County Borough Council	4.8%	76	5.4%	-0.6%

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey; Childcare Offer for Wales monitoring data, 2023-24

1.13. The sample of providers completing surveys was less representative of distribution across Welsh local authority areas than was the parent sample. Table 2 below shows that three local authorities were underrepresented (Torfaen, Cardiff and Wrexham) while three were overrepresented (Gwynedd, Isle of Anglesey and Conwy).

Table 2: Provider survey responses to the question “In which local authority is your setting based?”

Response Option	2023-24 Survey		Monitoring	
	Response Percent	Response Total	Response Percent	Difference
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	2.2%	5	1.4%	0.9%
Bridgend County Borough Council	1.8%	*	2.4%	-0.6%
Caerphilly County Borough Council	5.8%	13	5.6%	0.2%
Carmarthenshire County Council	6.7%	15	10.1%	-3.4%
Ceredigion County Council	6.3%	14	4.9%	1.3%
City and County of Swansea	3.1%	7	2.9%	0.2%
City of Cardiff Council	6.7%	15	4.6%	2.1%
Conwy County Borough Council	3.6%	8	4.2%	-0.6%
Denbighshire County Council	6.7%	15	7.4%	-0.7%
Flintshire County Council	9.8%	22	6.0%	3.8%
Gwynedd Council	6.3%	14	2.9%	3.3%
Isle of Anglesey County Council	0.9%	*	1.1%	-0.2%
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	3.6%	8	3.5%	0.1%
Monmouthshire County Council	3.6%	8	4.0%	-0.4%
Neath Port Talbot Council	3.1%	7	3.9%	-0.8%
Newport City Council	4.5%	10	4.0%	0.5%
Pembrokeshire County Council	4.9%	11	6.8%	-1.9%
Powys County Council	6.7%	15	5.3%	1.4%
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	5.8%	13	4.9%	0.9%
Torfaen County Borough Council	4.0%	9	2.6%	1.4%
Vale of Glamorgan Council	0.9%	*	6.0%	-5.1%
Wrexham County Borough Council	3.1%	7	5.5%	-2.4%

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales provider survey, 2023-24.

* - Numbers below five have been suppressed

1.14. As a result, findings from the survey of providers should be treated as marginally less representative of all services providing the Offer.

2. Take-up of the Offer

Measuring take-up

2.1. Between September 2023 and August 2024, a total of 21,283 children used hours of childcare funded through the Offer. Table 3 below shows the distribution of these children across Welsh local authority areas.

Table 3: Number of children accessing the Childcare Offer for Wales by local authority, 2023-24

Local Authority	Total children accessing the Offer, 2023-24
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	394
Bridgend County Borough Council	660
Caerphilly County Borough Council	1,181
Carmarthenshire County Council	1,184
Ceredigion County Council	484
City and County of Swansea	1,298
City of Cardiff Council	2,371
Conwy County Borough Council	857
Denbighshire County Council	847
Flintshire County Council	1,375
Gwynedd Council	1,006
Isle of Anglesey County Council	534
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	209
Monmouthshire County Council	803
Neath Port Talbot Council	940
Newport City Council	1,162
Pembrokeshire County Council	729
Powys County Council	1,089
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	1,236
Torfaen County Borough Council	718
Vale of Glamorgan Council	1,063
Wrexham County Borough Council	1,143
Total	21,283

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales monitoring data, 2023-24

2.2. The number of children using the Offer in each year is influenced by a range of factors including the number of 3 and 4 year olds living in Wales and the eligibility

status of families. To consider the reach of the Offer, we estimate a 'take-up rate'. This is estimated using a modelled estimate of the eligible population. The ONS Annual Population Survey can be used to estimate the number of families in Wales with children aged three or four years, who meet the eligibility criteria for the programme. [Estimates of the eligible population under various eligibility scenarios are available as an ad hoc statistical release.](#)

- 2.3. Table 4 below shows the estimated take-up rate of the Offer in 2023-24. Based on current eligibility criteria, we estimate that 58% of eligible children accessed the Offer in 2023-24.

Table 4. Estimated take-up rate of the Childcare Offer for Wales, 2023-24

Variable	Value
Children in Offer-funded childcare this year	21,283
Estimated eligible population for this year	36,600
Estimated take-up rate	58%

Sources: Childcare Offer for Wales monitoring data, Welsh Government analysis of the ONS Annual Population Survey 2023

- 2.4. In the 2023-24 survey, 56 providers gave reasons why parents did not take up the Offer. These responses are likely to relate to the experiences of parents who were already using paid, formal childcare at that service. The most common response (25) was that these parents found the application process and requirements to submit information too complex and time-consuming, with some mentioning that parents found it intrusive into their personal finances. Some responses (8) mentioned that this was a particular issue for parents who were self-employed. Some providers (12) mentioned parents' preference for a different balance of government support, through Universal Credit childcare and other tax credits, which they believed they would lose if either taking up the Offer or becoming eligible to take-up the Offer (i.e. by being employed for the requisite amount of hours). Examples of written comments from the responses are provided below:

“The registration process was too complicated for their situation”

“Some [parents are] self employed and do not have accounts ready”

“As it affects their benefits/universal credit [parents] will be worse off after the agreement ends and during the 4 weeks of the year the funding doesn't cover”

Language

2.5. Children using the childcare component of the Offer attend registered childcare services. These services report to Care Inspectorate Wales their main language of operations, whether English, Welsh or bilingual. In some cases, one child will attend multiple services as part of the Offer, splitting their hours between these. In this sense it is not possible to say that one child will always access the programme wholly in one language. In order to assess language use, we therefore consider the proportion of claims received from services with each different main language of operations. Claims are made by childcare providers to the Welsh Government for payment. These claims are used to record use of the programme. Table 5 below shows the proportion of claims in each local authority area attending funded childcare in services by main language of operation.

Table 5: Number and proportion of claims by language of service, 2023-24

Type of claims	Number of claims	Proportion of all claims
Claims for provision in Both Languages	71,630	10.2%
Claims for provision in English	499,845	70.9%
Claims for provision in Unknown Language	9,243	1.3%
Claims for provision in Welsh	123,882	17.6%
Total claims	704,600	100%

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales monitoring data

2.6. The table shows that around 28% of claims were either in services using Welsh (17.6%) or both languages (10.2%).

Parents in Education and Training

2.7. In 2022-23 eligibility for the Offer was extended to parents in full-time training and education. Of the 21,283 children using the Offer in 2023-24, 963 (4.5%) were in households where at least one parent was in education or training.

2.8. Modelling work using the ONS Annual Population Survey has estimated that in 2023-24 approximately 1,500 children were eligible for the Offer due to having a parent in education or training. This is approximately 4.10% of the total eligible population of 36,600 children. Monitoring data therefore suggests that the proportion of children supported through the programme who have a parent in education is broadly comparable to that of the modelled eligible population.

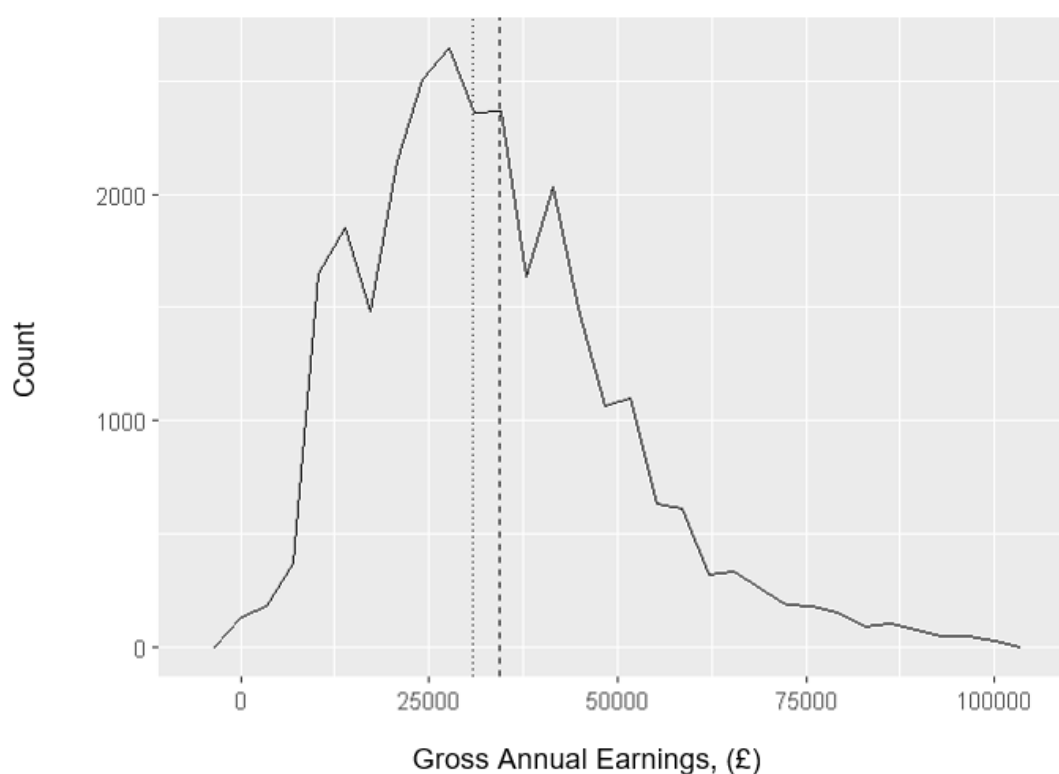
Parent earnings

2.9. In order to prove their [eligibility for the Offer](#), parents are required to submit information about their gross earnings as part of their application. Parents are also prompted to update this information to reflect any changes and ensure continued eligibility throughout the time in which they use the Offer.

2.10. Based on applications submitted by parents using the Offer in 2023-24, the median gross annual earnings were **£30,800**. For context, the Welsh Government estimates that the [median gross annual earnings for full-time adults working in Wales for the tax year ending on 5 April 2024](#) were **£34,303** (however, it should be noted that not all parents accessing the Offer will be considered as working full-time).

2.11. Figure 1 below shows a frequency plot of gross annual earnings for parents accessing the Offer in 2023-24, with vertical intersects showing the median earnings for Wales and for parents accessing the Offer. The dotted line shows the median gross annual earnings of parents accessing the Offer (£30,800). The dashed line shows the median gross annual earnings for full-time adults working in Wales for the tax year ending on 5 April 2024 (£34,303). The figure illustrates that the Offer median is lower than the Wales median, though not all parents included in the Offer will be full-time equivalent.

Figure 1: Frequency plot of gross annual earnings of parents accessing the Childcare Offer for Wales, 2023-24



Source: Childcare Offer for Wales monitoring data, 2023-24

2.12. Table 6 below presents a summary of reported earnings of the parent completing the 2023 survey and their partner, split into categories, combined with a summary of the earnings of all parents using the Offer as taken from parent applications. The table shows that the parent survey over-sampled the highest earners and under-sampled the second-highest earnings bracket and in the £20,800 - £25,999 bracket. Data have been cleaned to remove entries from both the survey and monitoring indicating that a parent earned more than £100,000. As this would make parents ineligible, these have been presumed to be data entry errors.

Table 6: Parent earnings as reported in responses to the parent survey and in information collected through parent applications, 2023-24

Response option	Parent Survey	Application Monitoring 2023-24			Difference
		Response Percent	Response Total	Response Percent	Response Total
Up to £5,199	0.7%	19	1.2%	307	-0.5%
£5,200 to £10,399	3.2%	87	4.4%	1,159	-1.2%
£10,400 to £15,599	10.0%	269	10.5%	2,734	-0.5%
£15,600 to £20,799	4.7%	127	1.9%	502	2.8%
£20,800 to £25,999	10.6%	286	14.5%	3,795	-3.9%
£26,000 to £31,199	14.4%	388	15.1%	3,948	-0.7%
£31,200 to £36,399	15.7%	424	13.0%	3,409	2.7%
£36,400 to £51,999	21.0%	567	26.2%	6,861	-5.2%
£52,000 to £99,999	19.6%	527	13.2%	3,441	6.4%
Total	100%	2,694	100%	26,156	n/a

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales monitoring data, Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey, 2023-24

3. Accessing the Offer

Awareness

3.1. Parents became aware of potential eligibility for the Offer through a variety of sources. Table 7 below summarises parent survey respondents' reflections on how they became aware of the programme. The table shows that current childcare providers and word of mouth were the most important sources of information, with 46% and 38% of parent respondents reporting these sources respectively.

Table 7: Parent survey responses to the question “How did you first hear about the Childcare Offer for Wales?” 2023-24

Response Option	Response Total	Response Percent
Current childcare provider	723	45.7%
Word of mouth	607	38.4%
Local Authority information and promotion	227	14.4%
Welsh Government website	220	13.9%
School	177	11.2%
Other (please specify):	112	7.1%
Childcare Offer social media campaign	96	6.1%
Other social media	67	4.2%
Family centres (e.g. Flying Start centre)	58	3.7%
Employer	35	2.2%
Radio adverts	16	1.0%
Parent Childcare and Employment advisor	12	0.8%
Mumsnet/Netmums	11	0.7%
Poster displayed in a playcentre	11	0.7%
Wales Online	10	0.6%
Newspaper	6	0.4%
Job Centre	5	0.3%
Advert on S4C (online or on television)	5	0.3%
Working Wales	4	0.3%
Teulu Cymru (social media / website)	2	0.1%
Advert on Google	2	0.1%
Asda mail outs	1	0.1%

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

3.2. Providers of the Offer were asked about their experiences of working with parents as part of the programme. In particular, they were asked about the potential for parents to not access the programme, despite potentially being eligible. A summary of responses is presented in table 8 below.

Table 8: Provider survey responses to the question “Are you aware of any of your customers / parents, who are eligible for the Offer but have decided not to take it up?”

Response Option	2021-22	2022- 23	2023- 24
Yes	24.1%	30.8%	27.7%
No	75.9%	69.2%	72.3%
Total	303	328	224

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales provider survey

3.3. Providers were asked to expand on these answers with written comments. The most commonly discussed theme was the administrative burden faced by parents.

“The registration process was too complicated for their situation”

“They found the process too complicated and time consuming”

“Some parents in the past have said the application process and submitting of evidence is too confusing or time consuming and haven't applied because of this.”

3.4. The second most commonly discussed theme in relation to eligible parents not applying was the potential interaction of the Offer with Universal Credit Childcare.

“[Parents] prefer to stay on [Universal Credit], they feel it will mess up their [Universal Credit]”

“As [the Offer] affects their benefits/universal credit so will be worse off after the agreement ends and during the 4 weeks of the year the funding doesn't cover”

“they tell me its to much paperwork and that it will mess up other benefits they claim. I have offered to help and explain it does not but they decide against taking up the offer”

- 3.5. Other highlighted themes included the difficulties in applying that are faced by self-employed parents, and personal preferences around other options, including informal care by grandparents and working part time in order to spend more time with their children.

The application process

- 3.6. To access the Offer, parents are required to complete an application form and provide evidence of their eligibility, including proof of income. The period September 2022 to August 2023 saw a change in the application process: prior to this period applications were submitted to local authorities, whereas after this period applications have been submitted directly to the Welsh Government via a national digital service.
- 3.7. Surveyed parents have been asked whether they experienced challenges when completing their application. A summary of responses over several years is presented in table 9 below.

Table 9: Parent survey responses to the question: “Did you experience any of the following difficulties when applying for the Childcare Offer? Please tick all that apply”

Response Option	2021- 22	2022- 23	2023- 24
The application form was difficult to find	50.2%	37.5%	30.1%
I had technical difficulties with an online application process	26.6%	33.5%	21.7%
It was time consuming completing the application	56.2%	52.8%	59.1%
The accompanying documentation was difficult to provide (e.g. payslips, child's birth certificate etc.).	55.7%	39.0%	47.1%
The eligibility criteria for the Offer was unclear	32.5%	21.4%	18.2%
I did not understand the application form	17.2%	11.5%	7.5%
Response total	203	538	1,078

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

3.8. The table above shows that a majority of parent respondents in each of the last three years reported that the application was time consuming. A large proportion of parent respondents in each year (between 39.0% and 55.7%) reported that the accompanying documentation was difficult to provide. As reported further above from provider survey responses, many parent survey respondents in 2023-24 highlighted in comments that self-employed individuals struggled to provide evidence of eligibility.

“Because partner is self employed it was a hassle getting required info from Accountants”

“Self employed tax return required for the most recent year but that only ended 2 months prior to applying when I hadn’t filed it yet so delayed being able to send application”

“Application needs more clarity or information on what we need in order to provide proof of income for self employed people that are just starting out”

Other parents highlighted the challenge of providing payslips over a long period of time.

“Its hard to get 3 months of payslips when paid weekly and all are on email took forever when government know your earnings anyway”

“Providing info every 3 months was a pain, especially since payslips came encrypted and had to undo this in order to be able to provide.”

3.9. In comparing data over these 3 years, it's important to note that the way in which parents, childcare providers and Local Authorities interacted with the Childcare Offer for Wales changed significantly between November 2022 and August 2023. The parent application function of the new national digital Childcare Offer for Wales service was launched in November 2022, and its childcare provider claims function was launched in January 2023. Until August 2023, the national digital service and legacy systems ran concurrently. The national digital service was launched as a minimum viable product (MVP). This is in line with the principles of Agile software development. The MVP is not 'done' or perfect but is released as a product that will offer a solution to customer needs but will be refined and developed based on user behaviour and feedback. As such, the service is constantly evolving to deliver for user needs. It is inevitable that some users will compare the new service with legacy systems, which were in place

Guidance and information for parents

3.10. To support parents applying for the Offer, the Welsh Government provides guidance through online resources and a telephone helpline. Table 10 below presents parent survey responses to a question about use of two sources of online guidance.

Table 10: Parent survey responses to the question “Guidance is available online for parents using the Childcare Offer for Wales. How useful have you found this guidance?”

Response option	“Get 30 hours of childcare for 3 and 4 year olds”	“Parents get help with the Childcare Offer for Wales”
I have not seen this guidance	29.6%	45.1%
I have seen this guidance and found it very useful	13.2%	10.5%
I have seen this guidance and found it useful	35.7%	26.3%
I have seen this guidance and found it neither useful nor of no use	10.8%	10.3%
I have seen this guidance and found it of little use	9.4%	6.8%
I have seen this guidance and found it of no use	1.3%	1.0%
Response Total	1,581	1,569

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

3.11. Table 10 above shows that of parents who had seen these forms of guidance, more found it useful (48.9% and 36.8%) than not useful (10.7% and 7.8%).

3.12. In the 2023-24 survey, 29.2% of parent respondents reported that they had used the telephone helpline. Table 11 below presents these parents' experiences of using the helpline.

Table 11: Parent survey responses to the question “How helpful did you find the advice that you received through the national telephone helpline?”

Response Option	Response	Response
	Total	Percent
Very helpful	185	40.0%
Helpful	179	38.7%
Neither helpful nor unhelpful	62	13.4%
Unhelpful	12	2.6%
Very unhelpful	19	4.1%
Don't know	6	1.3%

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

3.13. The table above shows that a large majority of parents who had used the telephone helpline (78.7%) found the advice received to be helpful or very helpful.

Provider administration

3.14. Providers of the Offer must complete a registration process to begin accessing funding to deliver childcare as part of the programme. This registration process involves demonstrating that the service is registered with Care Inspectorate Wales, and relevant staff also register as users of the national digital service. Providers are able to register once and are not required to update evidence of their eligibility.

3.15. Table 12 below summarises provider survey responses about time spent on registration. To note, in the year 2022-23 all providers who were delivering the Offer were required to register for the new national digital service. This is likely

to influence both the number of services undertaking registration and the reported time spent by those services. Despite this, the table shows that in general, the last three years have seen a decrease in the proportion of respondents reporting spending more than 2 hours on registration.

Table 12: Provider survey responses to the question: “Approximately how much time do you (or your staff) spend monthly on the following administration tasks linked to the Childcare Offer?: Registering as a provider to deliver the Offer”

Response Option	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Up to one hour	59%	74%	66%
1-2 hours	25%	20%	25%
2-5 hours	12%	3%	7%
5+ hours	5%	3%	1%
Total	182	323	166

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales provider survey

3.16. Table 13 below summarises responses to a similar question on time spent on submitting claims for payment. Providers are required to submit claims to the Welsh Government in order to receive payment for hours of childcare provided. The table shows that the proportions of respondents spending each amount of time on submitting claims has been more stable over the last three years.

Table 13: Provider survey responses to the question: “Approximately how much time do you (or your staff) spend monthly on the following administration tasks linked to the Childcare Offer?: Submitting claims for payment”

Response Option	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Up to one hour	71%	71%	75%
1-2 hours	18%	19%	19%
2-5 hours	8%	9%	5%
5+ hours	3%	1%	1%
Total	262	326	219

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales provider survey

3.17. Table 14 below summarises responses to a similar question on time spent on processing requests from parents. Providers receive requests from parents as part of their ongoing agreements. The table shows that the overall time spent by providers has decreased over the three years, with a reduction in the proportion spending over one hour.

Table 14: Provider survey responses to the question: “Approximately how much time do you (or your staff) spend monthly on the following administration tasks linked to the Childcare Offer?: Processing requests from parents for funded hours”

Response Option	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Up to one hour	58%	72%	73%
1-2 hours	26%	18%	19%
2-5 hours	11%	6%	5%
5+ hours	5%	4%	3%
n	185	326	208

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales provider survey

4. The impact of the Offer on families

Changes in childcare usage

4.1. Parent surveys since the beginning of the Offer in 2017-18 have asked about parents' use of formal childcare prior to accessing the Offer. A summary of responses is presented in Table 15 below.

Table 15. Parent survey responses to the question “Before you began accessing the Childcare Offer, did you use any formal childcare (such as childcare at nurseries, playgroup or childminders)?”

	Percentage of respondents using formal childcare before accessing Childcare Offer
2017-18	94%
2018-19	89%
2019-20	93%
2020-21	88%
2021-22	87%
2022-23	88%
2023-24	89%

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

4.2. Table 15 above shows that in each year of the Offer, a large majority of parents surveyed were using formal childcare prior to accessing the Offer

4.3. Since 2019-20, surveyed parents have also been asked a hypothetical question about what they would do while their child is aged three and four if the Offer did not exist. Responses are summarised in Table 16 below.

Table 16. Parent survey responses to the question “If the Childcare Offer did not exist my child would have”

Year	Number of respondents	Proportion of respondents whose child would attend the same number of hours of formal childcare if Offer did not exist	Proportion of respondents whose child would attend fewer hours of formal childcare if Offer did not exist	Proportion of respondents whose child would use no hours of formal childcare if Offer did not exist
2019-20	1,762	50%	32%	n/a
2020-21	2,108	44%	28%	11%
2021-22	2,002	39%	32%	11%
2022-23	715	33%	38%	11%
2023-24	1,585	37%	31%	12%

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

4.4. Table 16 above shows that across the period 2019-20 to 2023-24 between 28% and 38% of parents survey respondents in each year have reported that their child would attend fewer hours of formal childcare if the Offer did not exist.

4.5. Parents have been asked about the number of hours of formal childcare used prior to accessing the Offer. Table 17 below provides a summary of responses for the years 2021-22 and 2023-24.

Table 17: Parent survey responses to the question “Some six months before you accessed the Childcare Offer, approximately how many hours of formal childcare were you using in a typical week?” 2021-22, 2023-24

Response Option	2021-22	2023-24
Number of respondents	1,977	1,572
0-5 Hours	9.4%	11.8%
6-10 Hours	10.6%	9.9%
11-15 Hours	12.8%	12.3%
16-20 Hours	15.2%	19.1%
21-25 Hours	7.5%	13.5%
More than 25 Hours	44.6%	33.3%

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

- 4.6. As shown in Table 17 above, of parents who used formal childcare prior to using the Offer in 2021-22 or 2023-24, most were using a relatively high number of hours, with over 40% in both years using 21 or more hours.
- 4.7. In 2021-22 and 2023-24 parents were also asked about their use of informal childcare prior to accessing the Offer (data on this question was not used from 2022-23 due to data collection issues). Table 18 below shows the number of hours of informal care that parents were using prior to accessing the Offer. The table shows that in each of these years around half of parents used 10 hours or fewer of informal childcare per week, with the other half using more than 10 hours.

Table 18: Parent survey responses to the question “Some six months before you accessed the Childcare Offer, approximately how many hours of informal childcare (family, friends, extended family - not including yourself or other members of your household) did you use?”, 2021-22, 2023-24

Response Option	2021-22	2023-24
0-5 Hours	28.1%	36.9%
6-10 Hours	18.9%	17.3%
11-15 Hours	11.8%	12.1%
16-20 Hours	10.4%	16.3%
21-25 Hours	3.8%	6.9%
More than 25 Hours	27.0%	10.4%
Total respondents	1,964	1,582

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

4.8. To understand the full impact of the Offer compared to previous childcare use, Table 19 below presents a combined total of the informal and formal hours of childcare use reported by parents in the 2023-24 survey. The table shows that over three quarters of parent survey respondents (76.3%) were using more than 25 hours of childcare per week across both types prior to accessing the Offer.

Table 19: Combined hours of formal and informal childcare used prior to accessing the Offer, as reported by parent survey respondents, 2023-24

Response Option	Response Total	Response Percent
0-5 Hours	63	4.0%
6-10 Hours	56	3.5%
11-15 Hours	66	4.1%
16-20 Hours	109	6.9%
21-25 Hours	83	5.2%
More than 25 Hours	1,214	76.3%
Total	1,591	

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

Employment and education

- 4.9. Surveyed parents were asked about the impact of the Offer on their employment or education. Table 20 on the page below summarises responses to a question about impacts on employment. The table shows that parents were more likely to report an impact on hours worked (43.7% agree or agree to an extent) compared to an impact on starting or returning to work (20.2%) or changing their job (16.4%).

Table 20: Parent survey responses to the question “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:”

Response Option	Agree	Agree to an extent	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree to an extent	Disagree	Don't know / not applicable	Response Total
The Childcare Offer has been an incentive for me to increase the number of hours I work	27.5%	16.2%	18.8%	3.7%	19.8%	14.0%	1,552
The Childcare Offer has been an incentive for me to change my job	10.5%	5.9%	23.1%	1.8%	32.0%	26.6%	1,550
The Childcare Offer prompted me to start working or return to work	13.1%	7.1%	16.1%	1.7%	25.9%	36.2%	1,546

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

4.10. Parents were also asked a hypothetical question about what their employment situation would be if they did not access the Offer. Table 21 below provides a summary of these responses from 2023-24. The table suggests that for around half of respondents their employment would be the same without the Offer. Just over a third of respondents reported that without the Offer they would be working fewer hours (34.1%), with 13.3% reporting that they would not be in work.

Table 21: Parent survey responses to the question “If the Childcare Offer had not been available to you, what do you think your current employment situation would be? (Please tick all that apply)”

Response option	Response Percent	Response Total
My employment situation would be the same or very similar	50.0%	769
I would be working more hours	3.7%	57
I would be working fewer hours	34.1%	524
I would be working in a job with lower pay	7.0%	108
I would be working in a job with higher pay	0.5%	8
I would be on a career path with fewer opportunities for progression	8.8%	135
I would be on a career path with more opportunities for progression	0.5%	7
I would not be in work	13.3%	205
Other (please specify):	2.6%	40

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

4.11. Table 22 below provides a summary of parent responses to questions on other impacts of the Offer in relation to their employment. These data suggest that the Offer has had a greater impact on parents' ability to work flexibly (49.5% reporting 'yes') than to undertake training and development or increase their earnings.

Table 22: Parent survey responses to questions on the impact of the Offer on their employment

Response option	Yes	No	Don't know	Total
Has accessing the Childcare Offer given you more flexibility in the way you work?	49.5%	44.2%	6.3%	1,551
Has accessing the Childcare Offer improved your opportunities for in-work training and other learning and development?	33.5%	53.8%	12.8%	1,544
Has accessing the Childcare Offer given you the potential to increase your earnings?	42.4%	50.3%	7.3%	1,554

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

4.12. In written comments, many respondents noted that the availability of funded childcare allowed them to work during traditional hours rather than late evenings or weekends. For instance, some were able to increase their hours from part-time to full-time, or from three days a week to four days a week, thanks to the support.

“[I] can work earlier starts and not having to to [sic] work evening and weekends when my partner is home we can work same time and have more time as a family.”

“I have signed up for additional hours during staff shortages. I can rearrange my work hours during childcare times if I need to.”

4.13. However, others noted that their ability to change their work was limited by other family commitments, notably having other children who were not eligible for funded childcare:

“I still only work part time as I have two older children who need to be picked up from school and I can’t afford to pay for them all to go to childcare.”

4.14. Notably, some respondents highlighted that a lack of flexibility in their employment not only limited the impact of the Offer on their ability to work, but that the structure of how the programme was delivered by their provider created issues in their work.

“Very difficult to arrange pick ups around the 12.5 (2.5x5) hours a week due to low supply of wraparound options. I work a very busy job and it has caused large amounts of stress trying to move her from one setting to another in the middle of the day- I don't get any protected breaks (doctor).”

“As childcare settings sometimes can't offer flexible days, only set days, I work shifts that change from week to week, therefore not had more flexibility through this.”

4.15. Parents who were eligible for the Offer through being in education were asked comparable questions but with reference to their experience of study. Table 23 below summarises responses on the impact of the Offer.

Table 23: Parent survey responses to the question “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:” [Targeted at parents in education]

Response Option	Agree	Agree to an extent	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree to an extent	Disagree	Don't know / not applicable	Response Total
Being able to access the Offer during my studies has enabled me to increase the number of hours I spend studying for my course.	66.7%	20.0%	3.3%	0.0%	3.3%	6.7%	30
Being able to access the Offer has been an incentive for me to pursue new educational related opportunities.	63.3%	16.7%	10.0%	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%	30

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

4.16. Table 23 above shows that large majority (87.6%) of these respondents felt that accessing the Offer enabled them to increase the number of hours spent on their studies. A slightly smaller, albeit still large, majority also reported that the Offer encouraged them to explore new educational opportunities (80%).

4.17. Table 24 below presents a summary of responses to a hypothetical question about circumstances if the Offer had not been available for parents in education. The table shows that a large majority of respondents (79.3%) reported that they would not be able spend as many hours studying.

Table 24: Parent survey responses to the question “If the Childcare Offer had not been available to you, what do you think your current situation would be? (Please tick all that apply)”

Response Option	Response Percent	Response Total
I would not have been able to spend as many hours studying for my course	79.3%	23
I would not have considered undertaking an undergraduate, postgraduate or further education course	31.0%	9
I would not have been able to develop my skills and knowledge in order to pursue new career related opportunities	41.4%	12
Total	100%	29

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

Cost saving, ability to work and family well-being

4.18. Parents have been asked over several years about the impacts that they believe the Offer has had on their lives and the lives of their families.

4.19. Table 25 below summarises responses to a question about the impact of the Offer on parents' wellbeing. The table shows that over two thirds in each year have agreed that the Offer has a positive impact on their own or their partner's wellbeing. A very low proportion of respondents disagree with this statement.

Table 25: Parent survey responses to the question "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Accessing funded childcare has had a positive effect on my own and/or my partner's wellbeing."

Response Option	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Agree	66.2%	69.4%	69.5%
Agree to an extent	19.6%	18.9%	19.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	10.0%	7.7%	6.9%
Disagree to an extent	0.8%	1.0%	1.3%
Disagree	1.9%	2.0%	1.8%
Don't know / Not applicable	1.4%	1.0%	1.1%
Total	1,808	736	1,583

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

4.20. Table 26 below presents a similar summary for a statement relating to impacts on the financial burden of childcare. The responses show a higher level of agreement on this impact than for wellbeing.

Table 26: Parent survey responses to the question: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Accessing the Childcare Offer has reduced the financial burden of childcare.”

Response Option	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Agree	81.0%	79.6%	78.9%
Agree to an extent	13.5%	16.0%	15.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	2.2%	1.8%	2.1%
Disagree to an extent	0.8%	1.1%	1.4%
Disagree	1.9%	1.5%	1.5%
Don't know / Not applicable	0.5%	0.0%	0.4%
Total	1,810	736	1,582

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

4.21. Parents were asked in more detail about the financial impacts of the Offer. Table 27 summarises responses to a question about family finances. The responses suggest that the Offer allows families to spend more on things other than childcare, with over 80% reporting either some or a lot more money available.

Table 27: Parent survey responses to the question “What difference, if any, has accessing funded childcare through the Offer made to your family finances in terms of the amount of money you have at your disposal each month?”

Response Option	Response Percent	Response Total
We/I now have much more money to spend on things other than childcare each month as a result of accessing the Childcare Offer	28.7%	450
We/I now have slightly more money to spend on things other than childcare each month as a result of accessing the Childcare Offer	53.0%	832
We/I have about the same amount of money available as before I wasn't paying for childcare before	8.8%	138
We/I have about the same amount of money available as before as I was paying about the same for childcare now as before	5.9%	92
Don't know	3.6%	57
Total	100%	1,569

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

4.22. A mitigating factor for the financial benefit of accessing the Offer was highlighted in comments from parents, with a number of respondents having children relatively close in age. This meant that while funded hours reduced cost for a child age three or four, those parents are likely to also be paying childcare for a sibling.

“We were only able to have children close in age by accessing funding as our younger child started nursery at the same time as our older one became eligible for 30 hours, therefore there has been little changes in our finances”

“We weren't paying for childcare as I'm self employed and work around the children. Whilst being able to access childcare for my eldest has been great it didn't make a huge difference to my ability to work as we still have a 1 year old at home that we can't afford to pay childcare for.”

4.23. Table 28 below provides a similar summary for a statement relating to the ease of undertaking work.

Table 28: Parent survey responses to the question “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Accessing the Childcare Offer has made it easier for me to undertake my work than would have been the case otherwise.”

Response Option	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Agree	59.5%	68.8%	69.5%
Agree to an extent	15.0%	14.7%	14.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	12.6%	9.1%	7.2%
Disagree to an extent	1.1%	1.8%	1.9%
Disagree	7.3%	5.0%	5.4%
Don't know / Not applicable	4.4%	0.7%	1.3%
Total	1,809	736	1,582

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

4.24. Tables 25 to 28 above suggest that the strongest impact of the Offer is on reducing the financial burden of childcare, though large majorities of surveyed parents have also reported positive impacts on their ability to work and on wellbeing.

4.25. The impact of the Offer on parents' ability to work can also be assessed by responses to survey questions about their working patterns. Surveyed parents were asked about the hours that they worked prior to and after accessing the programme.

4.26. Parents were asked about their views on the impacts of the Offer on their child.

Table 29 below presents a summary of responses from 2023-24.

Table 29: Parent survey responses to the question “Do you think there have been any positive or negative benefits from your child accessing formal childcare?”

Response Option	Positive	No change	Negative	Not sure	Total
Language learning (and other aspects of cognitive development)	88.9%	9.0%	0.3%	1.8%	1,581
Playing with other children (and other aspects of social development)	93.4%	5.6%	0.2%	0.8%	1,583
Managing their feelings (and other aspects of behaviour development)	82.5%	13.4%	1.4%	2.7%	1,580
Progression towards being toilet trained	65.4%	30.2%	2.1%	2.3%	1,582
Health and fitness	76.5%	20.5%	0.5%	2.5%	1,582

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales parent survey

4.27. Table 29 above shows that a majority of parents reported positive impacts in relation to each of the components. The largest response has been in relation to the positive impact of the programme on children playing with other children and other aspects of social development.

4.28. The smallest response was in relation to progress towards being toilet trained, with 65.4% reporting a positive impact of the Offer. There is a widespread perception that the proportion of children who are toilet trained by the time they begin primary school has declined ([BBC Wales News, 07/01/2025](#)). Engagement with academic experts in Wales has identified that

delays in toilet training may be linked to the disruptive impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bajjada, Richardson, Tully and KilBride, 2024)

5. Impacts on providers

Profile of providers

5.1. In 2023-24, 2,068 childcare providers were funded to deliver the Childcare Offer for Wales. Table 30 below shows the location of these services in the 22 local authorities.

Table 30: Providers delivering the Offer by local authority, 2023-24

Engagement Authority	Providers	Proportion of providers
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	47	2%
Bridgend County Borough Council	57	3%
Caerphilly County Borough Council	134	7%
Carmarthenshire County Council	146	7%
Ceredigion County Council	66	3%
City and County of Swansea	93	5%
City of Cardiff Council	217	11%
Conwy County Borough Council	102	5%
Denbighshire County Council	89	4%
Flintshire County Council	142	7%
Gwynedd Council	121	6%
Isle of Anglesey County Council	47	2%
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	18	1%
Monmouthshire County Council	80	4%
Neath Port Talbot Council	83	4%
Newport City Council	72	4%
Pembrokeshire County Council	72	4%
Powys County Council	118	6%
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	119	6%
Torfaen County Borough Council	33	2%
Vale of Glamorgan Council	107	5%
Wrexham County Borough Council	105	5%
Total	2,068	

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales monitoring data

5.2. Care Inspectorate Wales collects data from all registered childcare and play services as part of an annual data collection. As of 2024, self-reported data indicates that 86% of all childcare and play services were registered with the Welsh Government to deliver the Offer, with 70% actively delivering the programme at that time. SASS shows that the proportion of registered services delivering the programme has increased, at a time when the overall size of the sector has decreased. These proportions have increased since these data were first collected 2021, when 81% of services were registered to deliver the Offer with 64% actively delivering. This suggests that delivering the Offer is widely accessible to a large majority of registered services.

Income and sustainability

5.3. Table 31 below presents responses to a question on the timeliness and accuracy of payments for delivering the Offer, taken from provider surveys from 2021-22 to 2023-24.

Table 31: Provider survey responses to the question “Are the payments you receive for delivering the Childcare Offer places delivered to you in a timely and accurate manner?”

Year	Total	Yes, always	Yes, usually	No
2021-22	294	61%	27%	13%
2022-23	327	66%	27%	8%
2023-24	220	67%	28%	4%

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales provider survey

5.4. Table 31 above shows that respondents to the provider survey have felt that payment has improved since 2021-22, with the proportion disagreeing with the statement having declined from 13% to 4%. Some comments provided in

response to this question suggest that this improvement has been linked to the introduction of the national digital service.

"Much better this way than 2 weeks in arrears on the old system"

"With the new digital offer the payments are a lot quicker and paid weekly which as a setting we find better "

5.5. However, some respondents noted that payment in arrears on the Offer caused some challenges and differed from their approach in their private business.

"I don't see why I need to wait several days after submitting hours on a Friday to then be paid the following Thursday. I have always been advance fees and the offer effects my household bills and my own finances. "

"Around bank holidays there is a delay and this impacts us negatively"

"Having had this payment at the beginning of the month previously, it's becoming increasingly hard to receive these payments at the end of the month especially when going onto the offer due to costs of running the childcare setting"

5.6. Provider survey respondents have been asked over several years about the impact of the Offer on their profitability and business sustainability. Tables 32 and 33 below present a summary of responses.

Table 32: Provider survey responses to the question “Has the Childcare Offer had a positive or negative effect on the profitability of your business?”

Year	A strong positive effect	Some positive effect	No effect	Some negative effect	A strong negative effect
2022	31.7%	39.9%	19.1%	7.2%	2.0%
2023	26.5%	29.3%	21.5%	16.2%	6.5%
2024	22.7%	29.1%	18.2%	20.0%	10.0%

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales provider survey

Table 33: Provider survey responses to the question “Has the Childcare Offer had a positive or negative effect on the sustainability of your business?”

Year	A strong positive effect	Some positive effect	No effect	Some negative effect	A strong negative effect
2022	34.1%	39.0%	19.7%	5.9%	1.4%
2023	29.9%	31.8%	21.7%	10.8%	5.7%
2024	25.7%	34.1%	19.2%	13.6%	7.5%

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales provider survey

5.7. Tables 32 and 33 above show a decline in the proportion of providers survey respondents reporting that the Offer had a positive effect on their profitability and sustainability between 2022 and 2024. Separate Welsh Government analytical work - [Technical note: setting the Childcare Offer for Wales hourly rate for April 2025 to March 2026](#) - suggests that these changes are likely to result from high price inflation in the Welsh economy over a period in which the funding rate for the Offer did not change. The Welsh Government has subsequently reviewed and increased its funding rate for the Offer from April 2025 and will continue to review this on an annual basis.

6. Additional fees

- 6.1. Annual surveys of parents and childcare services have indicated that many parents using the Offer are charged additional fees by childcare services in relation to their funded hours. Additional charges may cover a variety of goods and services, including food and snacks, nappies, transport and administration as described [in Welsh Government guidance \(see Welsh Government, 2025, p.33\)](#). The guidance issued to providers of the Offer allows for additional fees to be charged for transport, for trips outside of the setting, and for up to £9 per day for meals and snacks, however providers are not permitted to charge ‘top-up’ fees for childcare.
- 6.2. Annual surveys of parents and providers as part of routine monitoring of the Offer have indicated that the practice of charging additional fees has increased over time. In 2018-19, 15% of providers surveyed indicated that they charged additional fees, including ‘top-up’ fees ([Glover, Harries, Lane and Lewis, 2018](#)), increasing to 20% the following year ([Glyn, Harries, Lane and Lewis, 2019](#)). By 2023-24, the majority of surveyed providers were charging additional fees, with 17% reporting that they charged a ‘top-up’ fee.

Table 34. Provider responses to the question “Do you include additional charges for any of the following? (Please tick all that apply)”, 2021-22 – 2023-24

Response Option	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Meals / snacks	28%	38%	38%
Transport	20%	21%	22%
Other consumables e.g. equipment, music lessons, trips etc	8%	7%	7%
Registration and administration costs	7%	8%	6%
Top-up fees	9%	15%	17%
No additional charges are included	57%	48%	42%
Other (please specify):	8%	14%	13%
Total	277	303	218

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales provider survey

6.3. Table 34 above shows that the proportion of respondents charging each fee has increased over the period for all fees apart from Registration and Administration Costs. Notably, the number of providers reporting that they charge ‘top-up fees’ has nearly doubled, from 9% to 17%. It should be noted that the Welsh Government’s official guidance for local authorities and providers of the Offer does not permit providers to charge top-up fees.

6.4. Compared to the proportion of provider respondents charging additional fees, the proportion of parent respondents who had been charged fees is higher. This may suggest that provider respondents who care for larger numbers of children are more likely to charge additional fees. Table 13 below shows that in each of these years fewer than half of parent survey respondents had not paid any kind of additional fee. As of 2023-4, 28% of parent respondents believed they were charged a top-up fee, nearly twice as high as proportion of provider respondents who reported charging these fees.

Table 35: Parent survey responses to the question “Did you pay for any of the following additional charges with any of the childcare providers that your child attended using Childcare Offer funding? Please include regular charges for lunches, snacks or transport, but please do not include any fees for any additional hours you use.”, 2021-22 to 2023-24

Response Option	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Meals / Snacks	37%	50%	51%
Transport	14%	15%	17%
Registration and administration costs	4%	8%	7%
Top-up fees	24%	24%	28%
No, I didn't pay for any additional charges	39%	24%	31%
Other (please specify):	5%	5%	4%
Response	1,923	752	1,565

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales provider survey

6.5. Childminders were less likely to use additional charges than centre-based, children’s day care providers, with a majority of childminders (61.5%) including no additional charges. Services caring for 25 or more children (the median number of children cared for in the survey sample), were more likely to use additional charges, and the likelihood increased further for services caring for more than 40 children.

Table 36. Provider responses to the question “Do you include additional charges for any of the following? (Please tick all that apply)”, 2023-24, by service characteristics

Response Option	Child minder	Children’s Day Care	More than 25 children cared for	More than 40 children cared for
Meals / snacks	23%	50%	52%	56%
Transport	14%	28%	33%	38%
Other consumables e.g. equipment, music lessons, trips etc	9%	6%	8%	9%
Registration and administration costs	1%	9%	10%	13%
Top-up fees	17%	18%	20%	20%
No additional charges are included	62%	33%	30%	28%
Other (please specify):	15%	12%	11%	10%
Total	78	131	107	71

Source: Childcare Offer for Wales provider survey

6.6. Some written comments from providers in response to this question suggest that additional fees were used to make delivery of the Offer more financially sustainable.

“Will be charging from September as funding doesn't cover full fees”

“We have started charging for meals since April 2024 to try to make it more sustainable.”

“I haven't been [using additional charges] but I want to as I loose [sic] £1.50 per hour per child as the funding is only £5 an hour. It's not fair.”

“Began charging for meals and snacks in July/August to support financial viability”

- 6.7. Other comments suggested that additional fees were used to cover hours that were not used while a child was attending early education.

“Space reservation fee while child is in school”

“They are charged for the 2.5 hours that they don't attend, due to not being able to fill that space”

- 6.8. Anecdotal evidence including online discussions among parents (see [Mumsnet, no date](#)), media reporting ([BBC, 04/11/2021](#)), surveys of parents by the campaigning group [Pregnant Then Screwed](#) and feedback given by services to the Welsh Government suggests that, in some cases, additional charges labelled as being for food, transport or administration are in fact used to fund the core delivery of childcare on funded programmes, on the basis that funding rates are not sufficient to cover this. This practice contravenes the guidance for providers of the Offer; however, it may indicate that, at the time of the fieldwork (July and August 2024) the rate paid to providers of the Offer was not sufficient.

- 6.9.

In general, practice around additional fees creates several challenges. It reduces transparency in pricing, causing concern to parents around unexplained or unexpected charges, but also reducing parents' ability to make informed decisions about childcare. In the context of the Offer and other funded programmes, it is likely that additional fees to parents will reduce the accessibility of funded hours and therefore reducing the potential impacts of the programme on parents and children.