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Early Learning and Childcare

The experiences of parents

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Ipsos MORI Scotland for Audit Scotland



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Summary

Introduction

In Scotland, 3 and 4 year olds, and 2 year olds who are looked after (including in kinship care) or whose families meet the eligibility criteria for free school meals, are eligible for 600 hours of funded Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) per year. The Scottish Government has pledged to increase free provision for eligible 2 to 4 year olds, from 600 hours to 1,140 hours a year by 2020. In advance of this extension, Audit Scotland is conducting a performance audit of ELC services. As part of this assessment, Ipsos MORI was commissioned to conduct research to explore the impact of funded ELC on children and parents. The main aim of the study was to gather the views and experiences of parents/carers on the provision of Scottish Government funded ELC. In order to meet this aim, the research was structured around four key objectives:

1. What are parents' current childcare arrangements and how does funded ELC fit into this, if at all?
2. Why do parents use the current pattern of childcare that they do and how well does it meet their needs?
3. What impact does their current childcare provision have on a) enabling them to work, train or study and b) the quality of their family life?
4. What would their ideal childcare provision comprise and what difference would this make to a) enabling them to work, train or study and b) the quality of their family life?

Methods

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, comprising in-depth interviews with parents of 3 year olds, 4 year olds, and eligible 2 year olds. A total of 28 parents were interviewed.

The interviews were conducted across five local authorities in Scotland in order to provide a geographical spread. Participants were from a mix of affluent urban areas, deprived urban areas, affluent rural areas and deprived rural areas.

All interviews were conducted by members of the Ipsos MORI research team and took place between 1st August and 15th September 2017. The majority (23) of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, with the remainder conducted by telephone.

What are parents' current childcare arrangements and how does funded ELC fit into this, if at all?

Among parents who took part in the study, childcare arrangements varied widely and included the use of local authority nurseries, private nurseries, informal childcare (grandparents and other wider family) and

childminders, with some families using two, or even three, different types of childcare. Families were keen to use funded ELC and used their full entitlement where possible. For some families, the only childcare used was the funded hours, while others used additional childcare on top of this.

Reflecting the provision offered, parents using private nurseries tended to use full or half day sessions and used the nursery all through the year.

Among parents using local authority nurseries, there was a great deal of variation in parents' arrangements. This reflected their individual circumstances and the flexibility offered by different providers. On the one hand, there were parents who were not offered any choice in the hours or days their child could attend – children were typically offered either a 3-hour morning or afternoon session, five days a week. On the other hand, there were nurseries which offered parents the option of distributing the hours over two, three, four, or five days and/or offering the option to pay for extra hours on top of the funded hours.

Why do parents use the current pattern of childcare that they do and how well does it meet their needs?

Parents' decisions around childcare were multifaceted and were influenced by the following factors in particular:

- quality of provision
- location of provision
- availability of places
- opening hours of the provider
- flexibility of the sessions offered.
- cost of provision (which was linked to their own financial situation)
- their own working patterns
- the availability of informal childcare from grandparents (in particular), other family and friends

Parents often needed to compromise. In particular, local authority nurseries were, on the whole, viewed more favourably than private nurseries in terms of the quality of early learning offered and the degree to which they prepared children for school. They also tended to be a cheaper option. Parents, therefore, tended to want their children to attend a local authority nursery if they could fit it around their working patterns. However, as local authority nurseries tended to offer less flexibility than private nurseries, parents often had to consider multiple factors (including financial costs, logistical issues and the benefits to their children) when choosing whether to use them. Some put in place extremely complex arrangements in order to use their funded hours at a local authority nursery and had to use additional childcare to cover their working hours

In the two urban areas covered by the research, there was evidence of very high demand for places at certain funded providers. As a consequence, there were families who were unable to get a place at their chosen

provider until their child's pre-school year. For different, but largely logistical, reasons, the families did not feel there were other suitable options that would allow them to use their funded hours. As a result, their children missed out on the funded hours, for at least some of the time they were eligible.

The extent to which parents were satisfied with their arrangements varied. Where they were dissatisfied, this tended to relate to logistical issues and/or not being able to take advantage of the funded hours – rather than the quality of care. On the whole, those using local authority nurseries which offered flexible provision reported fewer logistical problems with their arrangements than others.

In terms of how well the needs of their children were met, parents whose children were receiving the funded hours of early learning and childcare were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of the provision and the benefits for their children. They frequently praised the skills, qualifications, experience and warmth of staff – particularly staff in local authority nurseries. When discussing the impact on their children, they highlighted the following:

- improvements in speech and language
- improvements in cognitive development
- improvements in social skills
- improvements in behaviour
- being better prepared for school (including, when the nursery was attached to the primary school they would be attending, getting to know other children who would be in their class).

They also felt their children benefitted from:

- the opportunity to try new activities and experiences
- the opportunity to use different toys, books and outdoor equipment.

What impact does their current childcare provision have on a) enabling them to work, train or study and b) the quality of their family life?

a) There was some evidence of the provision enabling parents to work where they could not have afforded to pay for childcare themselves. However, due to a combination of the number of hours available and the fact that there was often little flexibility in *when* those hours were available (e.g. three hours in the morning or afternoon, five days a week), the impact of this was limited.

Parents who *did* feel the funded provision had enabled them to work, tended to be those who were using a local authority nursery that offered flexibility in terms of the distribution of the funded hours and/or the option to purchase additional hours at an affordable rate.

Parents who took part in the research talked mainly about work, rather than training or studying. However, one parent felt that the funding had enabled her to go to college and another parent, who was hoping to begin a university course, felt the funded hours would give her time to study.

b) The benefits of funded ELC for children are discussed in the section above. More broadly, the main impact on family life for parents who would have been working anyway was the financial saving (because they did not have to pay for a private nursery or did not have to pay for so many hours).

However, this financial saving was limited for some parents. As the sessions offered by the local authority nurseries they used did not fit in well with their working hours, they had to use private nurseries both in the morning before, and in the afternoon after, their child's session at the local authority nursery. As the private nurseries were unable to offer a space to someone else for the limited amount of time the child was at the local authority nursery, they charged parents for a full day or half day session at the private nursery. Had parents been able to consolidate their funded hours into, say, two full days at a local authority nursery, and then pay for full days at private nursery on the other days they required childcare, this would have offered a significant financial saving.

While parents tended to emphasise the benefits for their children, parents who were not working while their child was at nursery also talked about the additional benefits for them in terms of having more time to do household chores, spend time with friends and family or simply have a break and rest. Those with younger children felt that both they, and the younger child, benefitted from more one-on-one time.

What would their ideal childcare provision comprise and what difference would this make to a) enabling them to work, train or study and b) the quality of their family life?

Parents would like childcare to be: **available locally, high quality, affordable and flexible**. Overall, parents viewed **local authority** providers more favourably than private nurseries in terms of the quality of early learning offered and the degree to which they prepared children for school. This was linked to the fact that they were often attached to the primary school their child would attend – meaning they would become familiar with the school and would get to know children they would go to school with.

Taking these factors into account, the childcare provision which would have the greatest impact on parents' ability to work and their family life (particularly in terms of making things easier logistically and offering financial savings) would be nurseries that:

- offer high quality early learning and childcare
- offer choice in the sessions children attend
- allow parents to condense the funded hours across 2, 3 or 4 days rather than just offering 5 short sessions
- offer the option of purchasing additional hours at an affordable rate

Working parents would also welcome funded provision during school holidays.

1. Introduction

Background

Improving and increasing access to high quality, flexible early learning and childcare has been a key focus of early years policy in Scotland in recent years. Prior to 2014, 3 and 4 year olds in Scotland were entitled to 475 hours per year of free pre-school education. However, the 2014 Children and Young People (Scotland) Act significantly expanded this, extending provision to 600 hours for 3 and 4 year olds and for 2 year olds from particular disadvantaged backgrounds (specifically children who are looked after, including kinship care, and those whose parents are in receipt of out of work benefits). From August 2015, provision for 2 year olds was extended further, to those whose families meet the eligibility criteria for free school meals. An estimated 27% of 2 year olds are now entitled to 600 hours per year (or 16 hours a week during term time) of free ELC. The Scottish Government has pledged to increase hours of free provision for eligible 2 to 4 year olds, from 600 hours to 1,140 hours a year by 2020.

The extension of free, formal ELC provision has two main policy aims: to support parents into employment, training or study, and to improve outcomes for children. Achieving both these aims requires that: the places on offer are of a sufficiently high quality (since research shows that quality of pre-school provision is key to achieving positive social and behavioural outcomes for children¹); that parents take these places up; and that parents use the free provision to support them to work (either at all, or to increase their hours) or to undertake education or training that will ultimately lead to work or improved quality of work. While uptake of free ELC for 3 and 4 year olds has been almost universal – 99% of all 3 and 4 year olds in Scotland were registered for places in 2016² – take up for eligible 2 year olds has been much lower than anticipated. While the Scottish Government estimates that around 27% of 2 year olds are eligible, only 9.3% of 2 year olds were registered, according to the latest figures³.

Audit Scotland has a remit to look at public spending and policy across the whole of the public sector. Given the recent developments in Early Learning and Childcare, it decided to explore this policy area in depth for the first time through a performance audit of these services. As part of this assessment, Ipsos MORI was commissioned to conduct research to explore the impact of funded ELC on children and parents.

¹ Siraj-Blatchford, I. et al. (2011), Performing against the odds: developmental trajectories of children in the EPPSE 3-16 study, Department for Education, Research Report DFE-RR128 quoted in Department for Education (2013) More Great Childcare, London, Department for Education https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/183318/DFE-RR128.pdf

² Based on figures in Tables 4 and Appendix 2 of the Scottish Government's Additional tables on Early Learning and Childcare to accompany Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland, No.7: 2016 <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Children/Pubs-Pre-SchoolEducation/ELCAdditionalTables2016>

³ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/12/9271/0>

Aims of the research

The main aim of the study was to gather the views and experiences of parents/carers on the provision of ELC, paid via Scottish Government funded hours. This was within the wider context of Audit Scotland's performance audit of Early Learning and Childcare provision in Scotland.

In order to meet this aim, the research was structured around four key objectives:

- What are parents' current childcare arrangements and how does funded ELC fit into this, if at all?
- Why do parents use the current pattern of childcare that they do and how well does it meet their needs?
- What impact does their current childcare provision have on a) enabling them to work, train or study and b) the quality of their family life?
- What would their ideal childcare provision comprise and what difference would this make to a) enabling them to work, train or study and b) the quality of their family life?

2. Methods

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, comprising in-depth interviews with 28 parents of 3 year olds, 4 year olds, and eligible 2 year olds.

The interviews were conducted across five local authorities in Scotland in order to provide a geographical spread, and to include both urban and rural and both more and less deprived areas. The local authorities selected also covered different combinations of rurality and deprivation – this meant that participants were recruited in affluent urban areas, deprived urban areas, affluent rural areas and deprived rural areas.

The sample was not designed to be statistically representative of all parents of children eligible for funded ELC. Rather it was designed to include parents in a broad range of circumstances (Table 2.1). This approach maximises the chances of identifying the range of experiences in relation to the uptake of funded ELC. Table 2.1 outlines the factors that were taken into consideration and the number of interviews achieved for each.

It should be noted that we found it very difficult to find parents of 3 and 4 year olds who were not using funded ELC. We had intended to include six who were unable to use it because they could not find a suitable provider (this would include parents using a private nursery which was not a partner provider). However, in the local authorities in which the research was conducted, there seemed to be very few nurseries who were not offering funded places. It was also difficult to find parents of eligible 2 year olds who knew about the funded provision but were not using it. This is discussed further in Chapter 6.

Table 2.1: Sample profile

Characteristic/factor	2 year olds (n =4)	3 year olds (n = 14)	4 year olds (n = 10)
	Number of interviews	Number of interviews	Number of interviews
Accessing funded ELC	3	11	10
Not accessing funded ELC	1	3	0
Using funded ELC only (no other childcare)	2	4	3
Using funded ELC and other formal childcare	0	5	2
Using funded ELC and informal childcare	1	0	2
Using funded ELC, other formal and informal childcare	0	2	3
Use LA nursery for funded provision	3	9	10
Use private nursery for funded provision	0	2	0
Single parent	2	1	1
Household in receipt of income based benefits	4	3	2
Parents of children with additional support needs	0	1	1

Recruitment was largely carried out face-to-face using the specialist qualitative recruitment team at Ipsos MORI. As the research involved recruiting some hard-to-reach groups (i.e. those using childcare but not

accessing their ELC entitlement), this approach was supplemented by the use of ‘snowballing’ – recruiting the friends and acquaintances of existing participants.

All interviews were conducted by members of the Ipsos MORI research team and took place between 1st August and 15th September 2017. The interviews were carried out as an individual interview or in pairs with a friend who was also the parent of child eligible for funded ELC. Overall, 26 interviews were conducted (24 individual depths and two paired depths with friends). The mother was interviewed in all but one of the interviews, where the father took part. The majority (23) of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, with the remainder conducted by telephone. Participants were given a payment of £30 as a ‘thank you’ for their time.

All interviews were structured around discussion guides (see Appendix 1), designed by Ipsos MORI in consultation with Audit Scotland. Interviews were audio-recorded (with participants’ permission). The transcripts of recordings and interviewer notes were then systematically analysed to identify the substantive themes which emerged. The report uses the families’ anonymised stories to illustrate the key themes.

Interpreting the findings

Unlike survey research, qualitative social research does not aim to produce a quantifiable summary of population experiences or attitudes, but to identify and explore the different issues and themes relating to the subject being researched. The assumption is that issues and themes affecting participants are a reflection of issues and themes in the wider population concerned. Although the extent to which they apply to the wider population, or specific sub-groups, cannot be quantified, the value of qualitative research is in identifying the range of different issues involved and the way in which these impact on people.

A guide to the symbols used in the case studies

At the start of each case study, the family’s circumstances are illustrated using the following symbols.

Adults in the household

and their working status

Not currently in
paid employment



Working /studying
fulltime



Working/ studying
part time



Number of children in the household



Age of child receiving Scottish Government funded hours

2 years old

3 years old

4 years old



Whether the family live in an urban or rural area

Urban area

Rural area



Type/s of childcare used for child eligible for funded hours

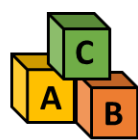
Local authority nursery

Private partner nursery

Private non-partner nursery

Informal childcare

Childminder



Local Authority

Private - partner

Private – non partner

Informal

Childminder

3. Benefits and impacts of funded ELC

Parents whose children were receiving the funded hours of early learning and childcare were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of the provision and the benefits for their children. They frequently praised the skills, qualifications, experience and warmth of staff – particularly staff in local authority nurseries. They also tended to have found the registration process straightforward. When discussing the impact on their children, they highlighted the following:

- improvements in speech and language
- improvements in cognitive development
- improvements in social skills
- improvements in behaviour
- being better prepared for school (including, when the nursery was attached to the primary school they would be attending, getting to know other children who would be in their class).

They also felt their children benefitted from:

- the opportunity to try new activities and experiences
- the opportunity to use different toys, books and outdoor equipment.

While parents tended to emphasise the benefits for their children, parents who were not working while their child was at nursery also talked about the additional benefits for them in terms of having more time to do household chores, spend time with friends and family or simply have a break and rest. Those with younger children felt that both they, and the younger child, benefitted from more one-on-one time.

The main impact for parents who were working (provided they did not need to pay for wrap-around care from a private nursery) was the financial saving.

There was some evidence of the provision enabling parents to work where they could not have afforded to pay for childcare themselves. However, due to a combination of the number of hours available and the fact that there was often little flexibility in *when* those hours were available (e.g. three hours in the morning or afternoon, five days a week), the impact of this was limited.

The discussion and case studies in the following chapters provide more detail on the impact of the provision for families in different circumstances. The problems encountered by some families, and the ways in which the potential impact of the provision is therefore limited, are also illustrated.

4. Demand for nursery places

In the two urban areas covered by the research, there was evidence of very high demand for places at certain funded providers. This chapter discusses the impact of this for families whose children were not offered places at their preferred nurseries.

The families described in case studies 1 – 3, had been unable to get a place at their chosen provider until their child's pre-school year. For different reasons, the families did not feel there were other suitable options that would allow them to use their funded hours. As a result, their children missed out on the funded hours, for at least some of the time they were eligible.

Parents living in rural areas who took part in the study did not report any problems obtaining nursery places.⁴ Indeed, one parent explained that a local nursery had closed due to the very low number of children applying (referred to in case study 14 in Chapter 5).

The parents in case study 1 described the logistical issues preventing them from using the funded hours for their 3 year old daughter and the ways in which they felt she was missing out as a result.

Case study 1 - an example of how a lack of places at parents' first choice nurseries can lead to their child not being able to use their funded hours at all.



Parents Gillian and Neil lived with their 5 year old son, Max, and 3 year old daughter, Holly, in an affluent area in the suburbs of a city. The area was popular with young families due to the excellent reputation of the local schools. Neil worked fulltime in a management position and Gillian worked Monday - Thursday as a project manager. They had no informal childcare available to them.

From the ages of 1 – 4 years, Max attended a private (partner) nursery close to Gillian's work. Holly attended the same nursery from the ages of 1 – 2.5 years. Max accessed his funded hours at the private nursery from the age of 3, for a year, and Gillian and Neil had been very satisfied with this nursery. However, they decided to move their children as they wanted Max to attend the local authority nursery attached to their catchment primary school for his preschool year (August 2016 – June 2017). They felt that his transition to school would be easier if he got to know some of the children he would go to school with.

⁴ This is not to say that this issue does not exist in any rural areas in Scotland, just that the current study found no evidence of it

Max was offered a morning place (8.30-11.30, five days a week) at the local authority nursery from August 2016. He used his funded hours there and Gillian and Neil found a private (non-partner) nursery, close to the school, which would collect him from the local authority nursery and take him to the private nursery, where he spent the afternoons. As far as they were aware, no other nurseries in the area offered this 'wrap-around' service of collecting children from the local authority nursery. Holly (then 2 years and 9 months) attended for four full days at the same private nursery as Max. Gillian and Neil had been very happy with how things were going - and felt that attending the local authority nursery was benefiting Max in the way they had hoped.

Holly was born in October 2013 and would have been eligible for a funded place from January 2017. Her parents applied for a place at the same local authority nursery attached to the local primary school. However, due to capacity reasons, Holly was not offered a place until August 2017. Allocation of places was done on the basis of date of birth and the places had already been filled by slightly older 3 year olds. As the private nursery Holly (and Max) currently attended was a non-partner nursery, there was no possibility of using her funded hours there. Holly did not use her funded hours at all from January – June 2017.

Gillian and Neil considered moving Holly to another nursery where she could have accessed her funded hours from the date from which she was eligible. However, for two main reasons they did not feel this would work for them. Firstly, due to Neil's work commitments, Gillian had to pick up both children. To pick them both up in time meant that they needed to be in the same place (the private nursery). Secondly, once Holly did start to attend the local authority nursery, she would still need to attend the private nursery in the afternoons. Moving her to a partner provider in the meantime risked losing her place at the private nursery – and might also have been unsettling.

The other options were moving her to somewhere else but logistically it's quite difficult and it's also emotionally quite difficult for her...

She could have gone to another nursery but she would have lost her place at [nursery which did the wrap-around]. They couldn't just leave an empty space in case she came back. You know, they're a business, they need to fill that space. So, if she had then got a place at the school nursery, I wouldn't have had the wrap-around for her.

Gillian and Neil were unhappy that Holly missed out on funded hours from January – June 2017. As Max was attending the local authority nursery, they had experienced the benefits it could offer – for Max, improving his language and learning and preparing him for school – and were annoyed that capacity issues were preventing Holly from attending. They also described her as being 'out of the system,' meaning that she missed out on things such as the BookBug and Childsmile initiatives. They were looking forward to Holly starting at the local authority nursery in August 2017.

I had to accept that I couldn't get the money and then there's the other stuff, there's the BookBug bag, the Childsmile scheme, everything that is run through the nurseries that they can't get access to.

*The fact that Holly did not get to access her funded hours immediately upon turning 3 did not have any **financial impact** for Gillian and Neil. Had she got a place at the local authority nursery from January to June 2017, it would have been an afternoon place (12.20 - 3.20pm, five days a week). Because Holly would have had to attend the non-partner nursery both in the morning before, and in the afternoon after, the non-partner nursery would still have charged them for a full day place. **The local authority nursery did not offer any flexibility in terms of the sessions it offered – 4 year olds attended in the mornings and 3 year olds in the afternoons.***

Case study 2 highlights a similar situation of a 3 year old missing out on the funded hours due to a lack of available places at any of the local providers.

Case study 2 - an example of a 3 year old missing out on the funded hours due to a lack of available places at any of the local providers



Parents Mhairi and Scott lived in an affluent area of a city with their three children Bella (5), Maisie (nearly 3) and Luke (6 months). Mhairi was on maternity leave from her job as a psychologist and Scott worked fulltime as an accountant. Maisie had not obtained a place at any of the local partner providers and was attending a local play group three mornings a week.

*Maisie will be 3 in November 2017. Mhairi and Scott had **applied for a funded place for her at the three nearest partner providers** to their home. The nearest two had said they do not have a January intake and Maisie would not receive a place until August 2018 at the earliest (because older children received priority). The third had put her on a waiting list. However, Mhairi understood that they were quite full and, in any case, the location was a few miles from their home and, given the need to take Bella to the local primary (in the other direction) and look after Luke, she did not think that would be logistically feasible. **In order to try and find a funded place, they would have had to ‘shop around the city’ for spaces even further afield.***

*Mhairi was happy with the play group provision. However, she felt that it was **unfair that they were missing out on the benefits of funded provision** (the higher quality of early learning experiences and the financial savings) **just because Maisie had a November birthday** (a child next door born in, say, March would likely have received two full years of provision before starting school rather than the one year that Maisie would likely receive) **and because of the lack of places at local partner providers.** She felt there was ‘inequality in areas’ across the city.*

The parent described in case study 3 felt that a combination of demand for places and the process of applying for places had prevented her son starting nursery as early as she would have liked. He did not get a place at her first, second or third choice nurseries and she understood that, if she then applied for another nursery, her son would lose his place on the waiting list at her first to third choice nurseries.

Case study 3 – an example of a 3 year old not being able to get a place at first – third choice nurseries and missing out on funded place



Leanne lived in a deprived area of a city with her children Riley, (3) and Chloe (21 months old). Leanne was not in paid work and Riley attended a local authority nursery five mornings a week.

Leanne knew, through family and friends, that Riley would be able to attend nursery when he turned 3. She wanted him to go as she felt it would 'be good for his development'. Before he turned 3, she had completed and submitted his application form. The form allows parents to include up to three nurseries and rank them in order of preference. She chose three local authority nurseries which were close to her home. However, Riley did not get a place at any of them. Leanne was not sure why but thought that it might have been because priority was given to children who had already been at those nurseries from a young age.

Leanne's health visitor told her that there was still a chance Riley would get a place at one of her preferred nurseries as panels met whenever spaces became available to decide who should be allocated a place. Leanne had been unsure whether to keep Riley on the list for her preferred nurseries or whether to apply for another nursery. On the one hand, she wanted him to start nursery and was feeling pressured by her family to get him into a nursery but, on the other hand, her health visitor told her that she would lose the chance of getting him into her preferred nurseries if she applied for another one.

After Riley had been unsuccessful in getting a place at three successive panels, and was coming up for his pre-school year, Leanne took the decision to apply for a place at a different nursery and this application was successful. He started there in August 2017 (he will turn 4 in October 2017). While Leanne was satisfied with the nursery he was attending, she was dissatisfied with the fact that the application process had delayed his start date.

It took me a full year to get him somewhere. What they said was you get a form and you put in 3 choices so I put in 3 choices but none of them could take him. ...It's just as well I went to [name of nursery] as he still didn't get a place at the ones on my form...They (health visitors) told me... I was like 'can I try other nurseries?'. They were like 'that's the whole point of putting you 3 choices down because you need to stick to them' so if I applied for other nurseries that would cancel my request at the other nurseries so it's a nightmare but I eventually got him in.

Leanne thought that one of the main benefits of attending nursery was improving children's language and learning skills and she was worried that Riley was behind in his development due to not getting a place when he was 3. She had begun to see positive changes in his speech almost immediately after he started nursery.

Leanne was also enjoying being able to spend more time with Chloe now that Riley was at nursery. She had no plans to look for work until Chloe started nursery as she didn't think she would be able to afford childcare. She wasn't sure, however, if she would be able to find work that would fit around nursery hours if Chloe was also offered five 3-hour sessions per week when she started. She would prefer to be able to use two full-day sessions.

5. Hours offered by nurseries

The opening hours and the flexibility of sessions offered by childcare providers varied widely – from private nurseries offering long opening hours and year-round provision to local authority nurseries offering fixed 3-hour morning or afternoon sessions during term time only. In the middle of the spectrum were local authority nurseries offering more flexible options including the ability to condense funded hours into a smaller number of full-day sessions, the ability to purchase additional hours at the nursery and opening during school holidays.

This chapter illustrates the link between the options offered by providers and parents’:

- decisions about childcare;
- satisfaction with their childcare arrangements; and
- (perceived) ability to work.

Private nurseries

Private nurseries tend to have longer opening hours than local authority or third sector providers and are also more likely to provide year-round rather than term time only care. These advantages can strongly influence parents’ decisions about childcare. One example of this is the family described in case study 4 who chose to use a private nursery for their daughter. Both parents were working and they did not have any informal childcare available to them.

Case study 4 – an example of parents feeling private nursery was the only workable option to meet their needs



Parents Amy and James lived with their 3 year old daughter, Eva, in an affluent area close to the city centre. James worked fulltime in the financial sector and Amy worked three days a week in marketing. They had no informal childcare available to them.

Amy went back to work when Eva was 11 months old. Prior to that, Amy and James discussed the different childcare options available to them and chose a private nursery. They needed provision that was available from 8am until 5.30pm. They thought that a private nursery would work better for them than a childminder as it did not rely on one person – they were concerned about what they would do if a childminder was unwell as they did not have any family nearby who could help out at short notice. They felt a private nursery offered the greatest convenience and chose one on the basis of location (close to home and to Amy’s work), quality of

care and the fact that meals were provided. Another consideration was the social benefits it would offer Eva. Amy described her as 'shy' and thought the nursery environment would be good for her as she would spend time with lots of other adults and children.

Amy had heard about the funded hours for 3 and 4 year olds through word of mouth but she wasn't sure whether she would be able to use them at Eva's nursery. When Eva was 2, the nursery informed her that she could and advised her on how to apply. Eva had been using the funded hours at her private nursery since she turned 3. Amy and James received a discount on their nursery fees which took into account the funded hours.

Amy and James were very happy with their childcare arrangements. They did not consider moving Eva to a local authority nursery when she turned 3 as they didn't think it would have fitted around their work commitments. They were very happy with the private nursery and would have continued to use it even if they had not been able to use their funded hours there as they could easily afford to pay for it. They did not consider the funded hours to have had a significant impact on their lives - they viewed the money they saved as a 'bonus' and were putting it into a savings account for Eva. They were aware that not all parents were as well off financially as them and considered themselves 'lucky' to be in a position to be able to save the money they received for the funded hours.

They felt that the main benefits of Eva having attended nursery were improvements in her language and learning, developing her social skills and preparing her for school (through being in a similar environment and learning to follow instructions).

We were looking through a '1000 things to learn' book and she asked to look at the page about planets. I said 'What's the red planet?' and she said 'Mars'. I was like, 'how did you know that?' [and she said] 'learnt it at nursery'. I've been delighted with the stuff that she learns at nursery...

...One thing I like about her nursery is that it's set up almost like a school, there's a reception area and lots of classrooms off a long corridor. It makes it feel like a primary school.

Another family were using a private nursery as they felt it was the best way of making their childcare arrangements fit around their working hours. However, for a number of years, the nursery did not offer funded places. As case study 5 illustrates, while they were unhappy with not being able to use their hours, they did not feel there was another option which would both allow them to use their funded hours and fit around their working patterns. They were generally fairly dissatisfied with their childcare arrangements.

Case study 5 – an example of a family using a private nursery to fit in with their working patterns and then missing out on funded hours when it stopped offering funded places



Parents Katherine and Sam lived in an affluent suburb of a city that was very popular with families. They had 4 children - Thomas (8), Alistair (5), Angus (3) and Emma (11 months). Sam worked fulltime as a civil servant and Katherine worked 1.5 days a week as a librarian. Thomas and Alistair were at primary school, Angus attended both a private and a third sector nursery and Emma attended a private nursery. Katherine and Sam had no informal childcare available to them.

When Katherine returned to work when her first child, Thomas, was 1, her main consideration in choosing childcare, was the opening hours of the provider. She started work at 8.15am and needed a nursery that was close to both home and work and which opened at 7.30am. She found a private nursery which met her requirements and enrolled Thomas there. At that point, her chosen nursery offered funded hours for 3 and 4 year olds and this was a factor in her decision. However, very soon after Thomas started, the nursery stopped offering funded places. She believed this was because they did not have enough funding to offer them to all children who applied and felt it was fairer not to offer them at all. Katherine had been disappointed about this and would have 'looked harder' for an alternative nursery had she known this before Thomas started - she knew she wanted to use the funded hours when he was 3 but she did not want to move him now that he had settled.

Before Thomas turned 3, Katherine and Sam reconsidered their options and, although they were annoyed about not being able to use their funded hours, they decided to keep Thomas at the same nursery. Their main reason was not wanting to unsettle Thomas. However, they also didn't think it would be easy to find an alternative - it had been difficult to find a nursery that opened at 7.30am and they also knew that many local nurseries were oversubscribed so there was no guarantee of getting a funded place elsewhere. Alistair attended the same nursery from the ages of 1 - 4 and didn't use his funded hours for the same reason.

Thomas and Alistair were now at school and went to an afterschool club one day a week when Katherine was working. Angus and Emma were at the same nursery that Thomas and Alistair attended. Just after Angus turned 3, the nursery became a partner provider again and started to offer funded places. Angus attended the private nursery one day a week and used some of his funded hours there and the remainder at a third sector provider, which was much cheaper, another day (Katherine was only able to use that nursery on the day she worked a half day as it was not open long enough to cover a full working day). She was pleased she had been able to use Angus' funded hours and the financial impact was a factor in her decision to return to work after having Emma.

Katherine was happy with the quality of care and learning at the nurseries she used and had seen benefits for her children, particularly in relation to their social skills and in preparing them for school. However, she was not very happy with her childcare arrangements as it involved 'a lot of juggling around'. The sessions offered by nurseries also didn't fit with her ideal working pattern. She would prefer to work two short days (9am-2.15pm) rather than one full day and one half day as this would mean not having to use the afterschool club. However, particularly in relation to Emma's childcare, this would not make financial sense as the private nursery only offered full or half day places. If she worked two short days she would have to pay for two full days at the private nursery as opposed to the one and a half she was currently paying for. She would be able to achieve her ideal working pattern if nurseries offered the option of paying by the hour rather than per session.

One other family (case study 6) had chosen to use a private nursery. They felt it was better suited to their needs but for different reasons than for the families described above. In particular, they liked the ethos of the nursery – it had a focus on self-learning and on outside play. Furthermore, they liked the fact that it was small – compared to their closest local authority nursery - with only around 10 children per session.

Case study 6 – an example of parents using a private nursery for their funded hours



Rachel and Gordon lived with their children William (3) and Olivia (1) in a rural area. Gordon worked fulltime as a vet and Rachel was not in paid work. William attended a private nursery for 2 days a week from 9am-3pm. They had no informal childcare available to them.

William started private nursery when he was 2 and a half. Rachel felt he was 'ready for nursery' by then and that it would be good for his development. As she knew they would be entitled to a funded place after he had turned 3, they felt they could afford to pay for him to start a bit earlier. They chose the particular private nursery for a number of reasons – its 'self-learning' ethos, the fact the children spent a lot of time outdoors, the flexibility of the sessions and the small number of children per session.

Rachel was very happy with the nursery. She described William as having come on 'leaps and bounds' in terms of his confidence, social development and independence since he started. She was also enjoying being able to spend more time with Olivia.

Local authority nurseries

As discussed in Chapter 3, local authority nurseries were, on the whole, viewed more favourably than private nurseries in terms of the quality of early learning offered and the degree to which they prepared children for school. Parents, therefore, tended to want their children to attend a local authority nursery if they could fit it around their working patterns. However, as local authority nurseries tended to offer less flexibility than private nurseries, families often had to consider multiple factors (including financial costs, logistical issues and the benefits to their children) when making their decisions about which childcare to use.

Within the local authority sector there was also a great deal of variation in the flexibility offered by different providers. On the one hand, there were nurseries which did not give parents a choice in the hours or days their child could attend – children were typically offered either a 3-hour morning or afternoon session, five days a week. On the other hand, there were nurseries which offered the option of distributing the hours over two, three, four, or five days and/or offered the option to pay for extra hours on top of the funded hours.

The following section describes the different experiences of families using local authority nurseries. First, it covers those whose chosen nursery did not offer any flexibility and the degree to which this was problematic for families – which was linked to their personal circumstances. It then covers the experiences of parents whose nurseries did offer a greater degree of flexibility.

Using local authority nursery which offers little or no flexibility

At some local authority nurseries, the only option available was a morning or afternoon place of three hours, five days a week. Parents did not always get the choice of whether their child was allocated a morning or afternoon session and it appeared that this may have been linked to the demand for places, with less flexibility being offered where demand was greatest. The extent to which the lack of flexibility was problematic for parents differed and is discussed below.

Losing out on the financial benefit of funded hours

The families described in case studies 7 and 8 missed out on the financial benefit of some of their funded hours. They wanted their child to attend a local authority nursery as they felt it was better for their development and/or their transition to school. However, because the sessions offered did not fit in well with their working hours, they had to use private nurseries both in the morning before, and in the afternoon after, their child's session at the local authority nursery. As the private nurseries were unable to offer a space to another child for the limited amount of time the child was at the local authority nursery, they charged parents for a full day or half day session at the private nursery. Had parents been able to consolidate their funded hours into, say, two full days at a local authority nursery, and then pay for full days at private nursery on the other days they required childcare, this would have offered a significant financial saving.

Case study 7 – An example of needing wrap-around childcare so not getting the full financial benefit of the funded hours



Parents Caroline and Stewart lived with their 8 year old son, Brodie, and 3 year old daughter, Lucy, in an affluent area in the suburbs of a city which was very popular with families. Stewart worked fulltime as an accountant and Caroline worked 4 days a week in an administrative role. Lucy used her funded hours at a local authority nursery and also attended a private nursery. Brodie attended the local primary school and went to afterschool club at the same private nursery Lucy attended. They had no informal childcare available to them.

*From the age of 1, Lucy had been attending a non-partner private nursery close to the family home. While Caroline and Stewart knew the nursery would not offer funded hours, they had already decided **they wanted** Lucy to use her funded hours at the local authority nursery when she turned 3 as they thought this was*

important for her transition to school. They chose the non-partner private nursery as it was the only nursery they knew of in the area which would offer wrap-around care for the local authority nursery when the time came for Lucy to go.

Lucy was allocated an afternoon (12.20-3.20pm) place, five days a week, at the local authority nursery from the term after her third birthday. There was no choice in the hours she was offered as the nursery gave morning places to pre-school children and afternoon places to 3 year olds. Caroline and Stewart realised at this stage, that the private nursery would need to charge them for a full day place to do the 'wrap-around' care they needed. While they understood the reasons for this, they were frustrated that it meant that they were not seeing any financial benefit of the funded hours - with the exception of the one day Caroline didn't work.

She's in [private nursery's] care for the full day. [the local authority nursery] didn't let me have choices when I could take her. It was an afternoon place. The other thing I could have done was put her in a private nursery that offered pre-school provision and then I would have got the government funding.

I: so, as it is, you're paying for full days at the private nursery,

The 3 hours a day she goes to the school nursery, the private nursery has no difference in its staff and its costs. so, they're not saying 'she's away for a couple of hours, we'll take a bit off your day rate. Which I understand...

Caroline and Stewart considered other options that would allow them to benefit financially from the funded hours and came close to moving Lucy. The main options they considered were using a childminder to cover the time when Lucy was not at the local authority nursery and moving Lucy to a private nursery that did offer funded hours. They discounted a childminder as they knew there were not many available locally and they also thought that their older son, Brodie, would be happier in an afterschool club with lots of children his own age than with a childminder as he was very sociable and active. They also decided against moving her to a partner private nursery. They knew that in a year's time, when Lucy turned 4, she would be offered a morning place at the local authority nursery. Caroline would then be able to take her to the local authority nursery in the morning and she would only need to go to her current private nursery in the afternoon. They would therefore only be charged for a half day place. As this fitted with their preference for her preschool year, they did not feel that moving her elsewhere for one year to then move her back again, in order to benefit financially, was worth the stress it would cause, particularly to Lucy.

The main con of moving her was moving a 3 year old who is perfectly happy in nursery. I was really tempted to move her. And I still don't know if I'd made the right or wrong decision...I've got a full year where in theory there is government funding but I'm not seeing financially any benefit from it at all.

While they have been unhappy with the financial consequences of the lack of flexibility offered by the local authority nurseries, Caroline and Stewart have been very happy with the quality of the care and early learning. They saw the main benefits as: helping to improve children's social skills and independence; and helping to prepare them for school by being with other children they will also go to school with and getting used to being in the school building.

They would like the sessions offered by the local authority nursery to be more flexible to prevent parents being in this type of situation. If Lucy had been given the option of a morning place from the age of 3, this would have allowed them to have benefitted financially from the provision. When only afternoon places are offered – and the afternoon session finishes at 3.20 – it is very difficult for parents to arrange childcare around this. Their ideal childcare arrangements would be for the local authority to be open longer hours each day (say 8.30 – 5) and for them to offer parents more choice in the hours they used. They might then choose to condense Lucy's funded hours into two full days at the local authority nursery and to pay for two full days at a private nursery, meaning that they were only paying for the childcare they were actually using.

Case study 8 – An example of needing wrap-around childcare so not getting the full financial benefit of the funded hours



Parents Louise and Craig lived in a suburb of a city, popular with families. They had 2 children Ciaran (4) and Erin (2). Louise worked part time in the financial sector and Craig worked full time as teacher. Ciaran attended a local authority nursery five mornings a week for his funded hours and also a private nursery to cover the other times that Louise was working. Erin also attended the private nursery when Louise was working.

Ciaran attended a private nursery when Louise went back to work after maternity leave. He had some additional support needs and, when he approached 3, his speech and language therapist advised attending the local authority nursery for his funded hours because there would be more specialist input. He attended from 8.30am to 11.30am every weekday morning.

Louise worked Monday afternoons, Wednesday mornings and all day Friday. On Monday mornings, she took Ciaran to the local authority nursery in the morning and looked after Erin at home. She then took them both to a private nursery where they attended from 1pm to 6pm while she was at work. On Wednesdays, she took them both to the private nursery at 7.30am to enable her to start work at 8am. Staff from the private nursery then took Ciaran to the local authority nursery for 8.30am and picked him up again at 11.30am. Louise then picked them both up at 1pm. On Fridays, she took them both to the private nursery at 7.30am, and they did the drop-off and pick up of Ciaran from the local authority nursery. Craig's mother was then able to pick up the children at 1pm and look after them in the afternoons.

Louise was extremely happy with the provision at the local authority nursery. She felt it had helped prepare Ciaran better for a school environment (partly because it was attached to the local primary school). She also praised the expertise and accessibility of the staff. They had provided Ciaran with considerable one-on-one input and had given her advice on strategies to encourage positive behaviour. While she was also happy with the private nursery, she felt the staff were less qualified: they were 'minding' the children rather than providing the same early learning experiences.

[At the local authority nursery] Ciaran got a lot of input and things and he had a one-on-one person towards the end, so they were very good, treated him well and they always seemed very nice and approachable and you could always speak to someone.

However, she felt 'a bit gutted' that they did not get the full financial benefit of the funded hours – they had to pay for the full cost of the half days at the private nursery in order to get the wrap-around care that they needed before and after the local authority hours. Ideally, she would have wanted the local authority nursery hours (or her own working hours) to be more flexible so that she could have dropped off and picked up Ciaran herself – not just to avoid having to pay a half day of private nursery fees, but also because it would mean a less disruptive day for Ciaran and it would give her more opportunities to talk to the staff and to other parents.

But I suppose you just do what you feel is right for your children so we just did it, it seemed like the right thing, and I suppose we were lucky that we're not completely skint or thinking too much about money.

Encountering significant logistical challenges in order to use local authority provision

The families in case studies 9 and 10 wanted their children to attend local authority nurseries. For this to happen, they were having to rely on the support of grandparents and also, in case study 9, a flexible employer. While the logistics were difficult, they felt these were outweighed by the benefits to their children.

Case study 9 - An example of the logistical difficulties that need to be overcome to take up the funded hours when both parents work fulltime and the funded hours are inflexible



Parents Grant and Theresa lived in a rural area. They had 2 children Uma (6) and Karla (3). Grant worked fulltime as an IT programmer and Theresa worked fulltime as a secondary teacher. Uma was at primary school and Karla attended a local authority nursery and a private nursery. Both children were also looked after by their grandparents.

Grant and Theresa lived a few hundred yards from the local authority nursery which was attached to the local primary school. They were keen for Karla to attend this nursery to help ease her transition to primary school. However, because the hours were inflexible (8.45am to 11.55am Monday to Friday), and because they both worked fulltime, they needed to put in place quite complex arrangements to take advantage of the funded hours. Theresa worked some distance away so she was not able to drop off or pick up the children. However, Grant's employer was reasonably flexible – otherwise their current arrangements would not have been possible.

I drop off Uma and Karla in the mornings at quarter to eight. [On a Monday], Theresa's parents get Karla from nursery at 11.55 and take her and then they get Uma when school finishes, and they have them both

until me or Theresa pick them up at about 6ish. It's the same on a Tuesday. On a Wednesday [Thursday and Friday], I drop them off and I pick Karla up at 11.55 and give her an early lunch and then I take her to the [private] nursery. And she's there from one until about half five and then I pick her up again. [In the meantime] I come back at quarter to four to get Uma from school. Sometimes the other grandparents are able to help, if I have work stuff that means I'm not able to get away, but they live further away [...] My current employer is a bit more flexible [...] I wouldn't have been able to do it if I'd still been in my previous job.

Because Theresa was a teacher, she was generally able to look after both children in the school holidays (when the local authority nursery was also closed). However, they still had to pay for Karla's place at the private nursery and, because Theresa worked in a different local authority and the school holidays weren't exactly the same, they sometimes had to call on grandparents to help or Grant took time off work.

Grant was very happy with the quality of provision at both the local authority and the private nursery. However, he described the arrangements as

...not ideal in the slightest, in terms of drop-offs and pick-ups, but we just have to make it work.

They had considered putting Karla in the private nursery fulltime to make life easier but, mainly for financial reasons, had opted for their current arrangements. Paying for a private nursery fulltime may have required them to get into debt.

Grant would have preferred the option of taking the funded hours over two full days (which would have been easier logistically and would have reduced the amount of hours they needed to pay for at a private nursery) or – better still – being able to pay the local authority nursery for the additional hours they required.

Case Study 10 – an example of the logistical difficulties that need to be overcome to take up the funded hours when both parents work fulltime and the funded hours are inflexible.



Parents Fiona and Chris lived in a suburb of a city, popular with families, with their two children Harris (5) and Joe (4). Fiona worked fulltime as an office manager and Chris worked fulltime in a supermarket. Harris was in Primary 1 and Joe attended a local authority nursery, a private nursery and was looked after by his grandparents.

Fiona thought the local authority nursery, which Joe attended five mornings a week was 'fantastic', in particular, because of the qualifications and experience of the staff. She felt the staff at the private nursery, which he attended three afternoons a week, were less experienced and less engaged with the children.

I just feel the learning environment is better [at the local authority nursery] and it brings the children on a bit more and, having spoken to friends who are teachers, they certainly advocate that if you can take up your funded hours at the school nursery – or whatever provision there is locally – you do it.

However, in order to take advantage of the funded provision at the local authority nursery, Fiona and Chris had to put in place quite complex arrangements. On Mondays and Thursdays, Chris drops off Harris and Joe at his parents' house at 8am. They then take them to school/nursery for 8.30am. They pick Joe up at 11.30am, Harris at 2.45 pm and take them back to their house until Chris picks them up at around 6.30pm. On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, Chris drops the children off at Fiona's parents at 7.50am. They take them to school/nursery. Someone from the private nursery then picks up Joe at 11.30am and walks him to the private nursery. Fiona's parents (having picked up Harris at 2.45pm) then pick up Joe at 3.30pm and take him back to their house. Fiona then picks them up around 6pm. On Fridays, Chris drops the children off in the playground with a parent that he knows. The private nursery picks up Joe at 11.30am, and he is there until Fiona picks him just before 6pm. She then picks up Harris who goes to an after-school club from 2pm to 6pm.

Because she is never dropping off or picking up Joe from the local authority nursery, Fiona never gets to meet the staff. In an ideal world, she would want the provision to start earlier or finish later, so that she could sometimes do the drop-off or pick-up.

Currently happy with arrangements but think it would be difficult to find work to fit around them

Using set morning or afternoon sessions tended to work for families while mothers were not working. However, mothers who wanted to return to work once their youngest child was at nursery were not sure whether it would be possible to find work that would fit around the nursery hours. The mother described in case study 11 had just found herself in this situation as the youngest of her 4 children had just started nursery. Similar concerns existed for the mother described in case study 3 (Chapter 3).⁵

Case study 11 – an example of a mother who is not sure if she will be able to find work to fit around nursery hours



Parents Jacqui and Robert lived in a rural area. They had four children – Jade (16), Cameron (15), Dylan (8) and Ethan (3). Robert worked full time as a plumber and Jacqui was not in paid employment. The three older

⁵ Although these mothers were concerned about finding a job to fit around nursery hours, it is worth noting that none of the mothers who participated in the study reported having looked for a job and not being able to find one. Mothers tended to have chosen not to work or were working and finding a way to make their childcare arrangements work.

children were at school and Ethan had just started at a local authority nursery five mornings a week. They had very limited informal childcare available to them.

Jacqui and Robert applied for a nursery place for Ethan at the local authority nursery attached to the primary school Dylan attended. They didn't consider any other options as they were not able to drop Dylan and Ethan at two different locations in the mornings. The nursery offered Ethan a place for five 3-hour morning sessions. This was the only option given to them and the nursery did not offer the option of paying for additional hours.

Alongside developmental and social benefits for Ethan, one of the main reasons Jacqui wanted him to go to nursery was to enable her to look for work. She had wanted to work while he was younger but it wouldn't have been financially worthwhile given they would have needed to pay for childcare. She had just started to look for work but thought it was going to be difficult to find something that would fit around the short nursery sessions.

Council nurseries, it's your morning, afternoon, full days so if you worked, say, 9-1.30, you're going to have to keep them in for the full day and pay for that when you're not using that. I think there should be more flexible hours for nurseries.

If she doesn't find something that fits, she would consider asking grandparents to help out (although she doesn't like asking too much of them as they are elderly) or using a childminder.

She would prefer the nursery to offer longer sessions as this would make it easier to find a job that would fit around nursery sessions.

Parents managing with arrangements due to the flexibility of their work and/or presence of informal childcare

Some families with two working parents were able to fit their working arrangements around the funded hours fairly easily, even when the nursery offered little flexibility. Two such families are described in case studies 12 and 13 – one was able to do this because they had informal childcare and one because the mother's job was very flexible.

Case study 12 – an example of a family managing to work well around inflexible provision, due to the presence of informal childcare



Parents Tracey and Tony lived in a deprived area of a city with their 4 year old son, Jackson. Tony worked fulltime as a courier and Tracey worked four mornings a week in an office. Jackson attended the local authority nursery five mornings a week (9am until 12pm) and his grandmother looked after him from 12-2pm on the four days Tracey worked.

Tracey and Tony knew they wanted to use their funded hours when Jackson turned 3. They felt it would help with Jackson's development and confidence and would enable Tracey to work. Tracey found a part time job and then planned Jackson's childcare around it.

Tracey and Tony were very satisfied with their childcare arrangements as Tracey has been able to work yet they have not had to pay anything for childcare (aside from £10 a day that they give Jackson's grandmother to cover costs). Tracey was not sure whether she would have been able to afford to work had they not had the funded hours. They had also seen developments in Jackson's language and confidence since he started.

Case study 13 – an example of a family managing to work well around inflexible provision, due to the flexible nature of the mother's job



Parents Nick and Sarah lived in a rural area with their children, Amelia (7) and Orla (4). Nick worked fulltime as a dentist and Sarah worked 10 hours a week as a counsellor. Amelia attended primary school and Orla attended a local authority nursery five mornings a week from 9am-12pm. They had no informal childcare available to them.

Orla attended a private nursery from the ages of 1-3 and moved to a local authority nursery after she turned 3. Nick and Sarah felt that attending the local authority nursery would help with Orla's transition to school, as it had for Amelia. They also felt that the environment would be better suited to Orla, who they described as 'shy' – it was a much smaller nursery with only six children in the class.

As Sarah's job is flexible and she can choose the hours she works, she was able to fit most of her work in around the nursery hours. Nick also finishes early one day so that she can work one afternoon/evening per week. Sarah really enjoyed her work and, although she would have worked anyway, the funded hours had made it financially more worthwhile. On the days she was not working, she really enjoyed having the time to exercise while Orla was at nursery.

Although she was managing to fit work in around childcare, Sarah would prefer the nursery hours to be slightly longer, say 9am – 2pm, as she would like to be able to work more hours. She would happily pay for these extra hours at the local authority nursery if that option was available.

Using local authority nursery which offers flexibility of sessions

The families included in this section all had children who attended a local authority nursery that offered them choice in the sessions their child attended. Some were also given the option to pay for their child to attend additional sessions, at what they considered an affordable cost per hour/session. Their experiences tended to

be positive, although, as shown in case studies 22 - 24, there was still some concern around whether the funded hours were long enough, or the offerings flexible enough, for working parents.

Satisfied with current arrangements

The eight case studies below (14 -21) highlight some of the positive experiences reported by families when there is a greater level of flexibility offered by nurseries.

Case study 14 – an example of the benefits of flexible provision



Parents Paul and Gail lived in a rural area with their children, Adam (4) and Lewis (3 weeks). Paul had his own joinery business and Gail helped with the administrative work for his business. Adam attended a local authority nursery and was also looked after by his grandmother.

Adam attended morning sessions at a local authority nursery from the age of 3. Paul and Gail wanted Adam to go as they felt he needed more stimulation than he could get at home – they described him as very ‘active, outgoing and sociable’ – and they thought it would help his transition to school. Gail also wanted to have more time to help with Paul’s business.

Yes, I definitely wouldn’t have been able to do the same number of hours if he hadn’t been at nursery.

Adam moved to a different local authority nursery when he was 4 as the nursery he had previously attended had to close as the number of children was too small for it to operate:

This year he’s had to go to [current] nursery rather than [previous] nursery. He was at [previous] nursery but they’ve had to close it because there’s not enough kids there. [previous nursery] is a really good nursery. It’s just at the top of the road. It’s not far to [current] nursery (about 15 minutes drive) but it’s not at the top of the road. He had been the only 3 year old at the nursery and the others were all preschool [so were about to leave to go to school]. They tried to keep the nursery open just for him in the hope that others would come. Then a month before the end of term, they said they couldn’t keep it open so I had to scramble around to find somewhere.

Paul and Gail looked at a few different nurseries and chose his new nursery largely due to the flexibility it offered. In particular, Gail liked the fact it offered full day sessions and the option to pay for additional hours. Adam’s funded hours were spread across two long days (9 – 3.20) and one short day (9-12.). He also attended for one additional session which Paul and Gail paid for. Adam’s grandmother collected him from nursery at lunchtime one day a week and looked after him for the afternoon.

Apart from the fact his new nursery was a 15-minute drive away, Gail felt the new arrangements were working much better as she was able to get a lot more work done with him being there for a full day instead of just a morning: 'three hours was never long enough'. As she had just had a new baby, she was also enjoying being able to spend more time with him.

Gail was very enthusiastic about the social benefits of nursery for Adam. This was particularly important to her as they were in a very rural area and there were not many children his age close by.

In the future Gail would like to work more hours for Paul's business as well as possibly finding some other work. However, as 'money is very tight', she would not be able to do this until Lewis is at nursery as the costs of childcare would be too high.

Case study 15 – an example of the benefits of flexible provision



Julie lived with her husband Eric and four children, Alfie (6), Leah (4), Millie (2) and Aiden (2), in a deprived, rural area. Eric worked fulltime, six days a week, in the family business, and Julie worked three days a week, 5am till 2pm, in a petrol station. Alfie was at primary school and Leah, Millie and Aiden all attended the same local authority nursery. Julie paid for a childminder for six hours every Saturday while both she and Eric were working.

*Leah had attended the nursery since she was 3 years old and Julie was impressed with the service it provided. She felt the facilities and quality of staff were excellent, and had noticed **improvements in Leah's speech, learning, and social skills since she started.***

The 2 year olds twins, Millie and Aiden, attended the same nursery as Leah. They received nursery places, funded by their local authority, when Millie was identified as having additional support needs in terms of her speech and language. Julie and Eric were very grateful to be receiving these funded places as they had previously been paying almost £20 an hour to send them to a private nursery, a 45-minute drive away from home.

Millie's speech wasn't too good, Aiden spoke on her behalf, and [our health visitor] said "I'm not happy about her speech" and sent her to the speech and language centre who said she needs more childcare, more interaction with children her own age... So they referred me to a department within the Council and we got two slots allocated within the two year old room [at Leah's nursery]... That meant no more being out of pocket [by having to pay for private childcare], actually working and having something leftover at the end of it.

Julie also spoke positively about the flexibility of provision offered by the nursery – when Leah started she was given a choice of mornings, afternoons or full days and the option to change her pattern of attendance throughout the term. The nursery also offered affordable ‘top-up’ hours (£3 per hour per child) that Julie and Eric used for all three children on the days Julie worked.

The flexibility offered by the nursery had helped Julie to stay in work and to take on more work.

Now that the twins are [at the nursery] I don't need to work evenings to do paperwork [for the family business], I can do that in the mornings... And I can take on more work at [the petrol station] if I want. I couldn't do that before [the funded hours]. It's freed up my time to take on more work and actually make money.

While paying for the extra hours was still a significant financial outlay, it was more affordable than it would have otherwise been. Julie felt it was worth it in the long term as she very much enjoyed her job and thought it would be difficult to find the same quality of work again if she stopped working:

People say, 'You must be working for nothing', but if I have to give my job up and my kids don't go to school until 2019, how easy is it going to be to get a job when you say you've been a 'stay at home mum' for three years?

Though overall Julie and Eric were delighted with their childcare provision, they would have welcomed funded provision over the summer school holidays. They could not rely on informal support during this time and Julie had to use most of her annual leave during the summer holidays, meaning she was unable to take much time off at any other time of the year.

Case study 16 – an example of the benefits of flexible provision



Parents Lynsey and Steve lived in the suburbs of a city. They had two children, Ross (3) and Noah (1). Steve worked fulltime as an engineer and Lynsey worked in a call-centre four evenings a week. Ross attended a local authority nursery. His funded hours covered five morning sessions and Lynsey and Steve paid for him to attend one additional afternoon session per week.

As Steve worked during the day and Lynsey worked evenings, they would be able to manage without any childcare. However, they were very keen for Ross to go to nursery as they thought he would really enjoy it. They were very satisfied with their current childcare arrangements – Ross's counting had improved and he has learnt things like days of the weeks and months of the year, he had made lots of friends, Lynsey was able to spend more time with Noah and the extra session allowed her a bit more time to get chores done.

Case study 17 – an example of the benefits of flexible provision



Parents Kelly and Mike lived in a deprived area of a city with their 3 children Katie (10), Daniel (7) and Logan (4). Mike was a waiter and worked different shifts each week and Kelly worked in a shop Monday - Thursday from 9am-1.30pm. Katie and Daniel attended the local primary school and Logan attended a local authority nursery from 8.45am – 1.45pm on the four days Kelly worked and from 8.45am-11.45am on the Friday. Kelly and Mike paid for additional hours on top of his funded hours.

Although Logan's nursery was run by the local authority, it took children from 0-5 and offered year-round rather than term time only provision. Logan had been attending since he was 10 months old, with Kelly and Mike paying for all of his hours up until he was 3. Kelly described the nursery as 'giving priority to working parents' and felt that the cost of childcare there was affordable. This had enabled her to work even before Logan was eligible for funded hours.

I dinnae think I could work if it wisnae for the nursery. Even a private nursery is far far too much money.

Kelly spoke in very positive terms about the nursery – they were very flexible in terms of the hours they offered, the year round care was 'invaluable' and she was very happy with the quality of the care and education. She felt that Logan had benefitted socially through interaction with other children.

Kelly was very satisfied with her current childcare arrangements. However, she would ideally like to work three slightly longer days rather than four short ones but she did not think the nursery would be able to change Logan's hours to accommodate this.

Case study 18 – an example of the benefits of flexible provision



Joanne and Sean lived in a remote rural area with their 3 year old daughter Layla. Joanne worked part time, 25 hours a week, in a shop and Sean worked full time in a factory. Layla attended a local nursery five mornings a week. Joanne's mother or sister provided childcare at other times during the week when Joanne was working.

Layla started at the nursery when she was 2. She received a local authority funded place, aged 2, after she was identified as having a speech and language delay. Since turning 3, she had received the Scottish Government

funded hours. Joanne was pleased with the flexibility offered by the nursery. She could change the days and times Layla was at nursery at fairly short notice if required, which allowed her to fit the childcare around her working patterns:

They're easie oasie up there so I can change my hours [at short notice]... You can just pay for extra hours. [The nursery's] open all day, I can just tell them how long I want Layla to be there for. You need to pay £2 an hour, so it's quite cheap.

The nursery also offered very affordable 'top-up' provision (£2-3 per hour) which she could use if her mother and sister were unavailable. In addition, the nursery was open all year round, meaning Joanne did not have to look for alternative childcare arrangement during school holidays. The funded hours meant that Joanne was able to work longer hours and was less reliant on her family to provide childcare.

Case study 19 – an example of the benefits of flexible provision



Ashley lived in a deprived, rural area with her partner Greg and her children Caitlin (6) and Rhys (4). Ashley worked 30 hours a week in a shop. She worked different shifts each week, generally between 8am to 8pm, Thursday to Sunday. Greg worked fulltime in a factory, Wednesday – Friday, 8pm to 8am. Caitlin was at primary school and Rhys attended a local authority nursery from 8.30-11.30am five days a week. Ashley could rely on family members to provide informal childcare in the afternoons when she and Greg were unable to look after the children.

Ashley believed that, since she lived in a local authority classed as 'deprived', additional funding was made available to childcare providers. As a result, she felt the availability and quality of childcare in her area was excellent. The nursery was within walking distance of her home and, since attending, she had noticed Rhys come on 'leaps and bounds' in terms of his confidence and social skills. Although Ashley was usually able to rely on informal childcare, she did say that the cost of purchasing additional hours at the nursery was very cheap (£2 per hour), which she could use if family were unavailable to provide childcare in the afternoon.

The funded provision allowed Greg to sleep in the mornings after he had finished a night shift. Ashley felt that, without the funded ELC provision, she would have been unable to work as childcare costs would have been too expensive. She also felt that it was important for the children to see her working:

[The funded hours] lets me work. It teaches your children that you need to work to get things in life. You can't just get everything for nothing.

The family in case study 20 used a nursery which offered flexible provision. However, as neither parent was working, they did not need to take advantage of any of the flexibility offered.

Case study 20 – an example of parents being very satisfied with current arrangements



Parents Kirsten and Gareth lived in a deprived, rural area with their daughter Molly (3) and Gareth's two sons Liam (12) and Fraser (15). Kirsten was a fulltime carer for Gareth, who was disabled and unable to work. Liam and Fraser were at secondary school and Molly went to a local authority nursery in the afternoons, five days a week. Kirsten and Gareth had no informal childcare available to them.

Kirsten chose Molly's nursery because it was close to home and recommended by friends in the area. Kirsten was happy with the nursery and felt it had improved Molly's confidence around other people, and provided her with a routine which would help prepare her for going to school, when the time came. Despite being eligible, Kirsten had not used the childcare provision for 2 year olds as she had been unaware of it at the time.

The funded provision gave Kirsten a break from her childcare duties and allowed her to spend more time caring for Gareth. The provision was also going to provide her with the opportunity to start an Open University course in the coming months as she would not otherwise have had the time to study in peace and quiet.

Case study 21 – an example of parents being very satisfied with current arrangements



Vicky lived with her partner Gary, daughter Amelie (4) and son Finlay (10 months) in an urban area. Vicky was not currently in paid work and Gary worked fulltime for a construction company. Amelie attended a local authority nursery four days a week.

Vicky had Amelie when she was 16 years old and still at school. She had received funded provision, initially from her local authority, from when Amelie was 6 months old, as both Vicky and her partner were still at school at the time. She was delighted with the provision, as she would have been unable to afford childcare otherwise, and it had given her the opportunity to finish school and, latterly, go to college:

[The funded hours allowed] me to get qualifications that I wouldn't have otherwise got. So looking for a job might be a wee bit easier because I've got qualifications, it's gave me skills. It makes me feel more useful, like I can actually do something... It gives you confidence.

Vicky did not have any friends or family with children the same age as Amelie so welcomed the opportunity nursery gave Amelie to spend time with other children. Further, Vicky felt going to nursery had helped develop Amelie's social skills, improved her language and learning, and made her more independent.

Vicky was pleased that the nursery Amelie attended offered flexible hours to fit around her college schedule - allowing her to choose the days of attendance and either mornings, afternoons or full days. Vicky thought that this flexibility would be important in the future, when Finlay was older, since Vicky intended to look for work as soon as she could. Ideally, she felt that childcare should allow parents to fit their childcare around their work, rather than the other way around.

Desire for a greater number of funded hours and/or greater flexibility

The families described in case studies 22-24 had been offered, and had made use of, flexible provision, However, for them to be able to achieve their desired working patterns, they felt that there needed to be a greater number of funded hours available and/or a greater level of flexibility, including the ability to purchase additional hours at local authority nurseries for an affordable rate.

Case study 22 – an example of a parent who thinks working parents need the provision to be even more flexible



Suzanne lived in a deprived area of a city with her three children – Megan (16), Aaron (4) and Harrison (9 months). Suzanne had been working before she had Harrison but had decided not to return to her previous job and was looking for a new one. Aaron had just finished his pre-school year at a local authority nursery. Megan was able to look after Aaron and Harrison occasionally but that was the only informal childcare Suzanne had.

Suzanne returned to work when Aaron was 1. He attended a private nursery until he was 4. Suzanne had heard about the funded provision for eligible 2 year olds through word of mouth and had looked into it when he was 2. However, she didn't use it as the closest provider was too far away from her home. Suzanne knew that she was going to be on maternity leave with Harrison for Aaron's preschool year. She applied for a place for him at a local authority nursery close to her home as she thought the quality of care and education would be better than at the private nursery he had been attending. The nursery offered Suzanne four different options in terms of how the hours were distributed, ranging from two full days to five mornings. She applied for five mornings as she is a 'morning person' but was given four afternoons and this worked well. She was extremely satisfied with the nursery, particularly the quality of the staff (there were six or seven qualified teachers) and felt that Aaron came on 'leaps and bounds' in terms of his speech and his confidence.

I think it's almost like preschool, the education part of it. They always give you reports. they're always learning, they're always doing stuff. You just feel safer and better (than a private nursery). Well I did personally. There's a lot of teachers at his nursery – about 7 or 8.

He's come on leaps and bounds. Like Arron never really spoke for years. Arron was very lazy at speaking. They say boys are like that, he walked at 9 months but he never spoke. Even at the private nursery he still never really come on much, he was still really shy but since he's went to nursery, he's just flourished. he's come right out of his shell. You can take him anywhere now, he's not a shy child.

The funded hours had also enabled her to spend more time with Harrison and to spend the money she was saving on family trips and activities for Aaron.

We've starting going on trips, we went to a farm park, because now you feel you've got this big chunk of savings. I've spent it mostly on doing stuff with the kids.

Even though the nursery Aaron attended offered flexible ways of using the funded hours, Suzanne didn't know what she would have done had she been working – and didn't know what she would when Harrison turned 3 (she hoped to be working then). Most of the jobs she had seen asked for a minimum of four days a week. She would like Harrison to attend a local authority nursery but she would have to find some other childcare to cover the remaining hours and she was particularly concerned about childcare during the school holidays. Ideally, she would find a job that allowed her to work three days a week and Harrison would be able to attend a local authority nursery for three full days, including school holidays.

Case study 23 – an example of a parent who thinks working parents need the provision to be even more flexible



Parents Dannii and Kevin lived in a deprived area of a city with their two children Elliott (5) and Jake (3). Dannii was a self-employed beautician and worked around 14 hours a week and Kevin worked fulltime at a leisure centre. Elliott was in Primary 1 and Jake attended a local authority nursery Monday to Thursday, from 8:30am - 12:30pm. The children's grandparents and aunt were able to help out in the school holidays, when Dannii was working.

Elliott had attended the same nursery as Jake when he was 3 and 4. While not the closest nursery to their home, Dannii and Kevin chose it as it had been recommended to Dannii by her health visitor and friends as providing excellent care and having modern facilities. They felt that the nursery had helped Elliott and Jake to become more independent by spending time with other children and adults and being encouraged to do things by themselves.

Prior to having Elliott, Dannii worked seven-hour shifts in a salon. She was not able to return to this job as she could not afford childcare to fit around these shifts:

One of the reasons I stopped working in the salon, was the [funded] nursery hours just weren't flexible enough.

She now had to fit her work around Kevin's shifts, which changed from week to week. This usually meant working in the evenings since she could not afford to pay for additional formal childcare or rely on informal childcare during the day (the children's grandparents still worked fulltime). She didn't feel the nursery sessions were long enough for her to easily fit her work in while Jake was there.

Ideally, Dannii would like funded hours that would allow Jake to attend nursery for up to 30 hours a week. This would enable Dannii to increase her working hours and return to working in a salon with guaranteed, fixed hours each week, rather than working for herself. This would have financial benefits for the family, along with the social benefits of enabling Dannii to spend time with adults.

Case study 24 – an example of a parent who thinks working parents need the provision to be even more flexible



Parents Keira and Richie, lived with their daughters Abbie (7) and Lois (3) in a deprived, rural area. Keira worked three night shifts a week as an auxiliary in a hospital and Richie had recently left a fulltime job to go to college. Abbie was at primary school and Lois attended a local authority nursery in the mornings, five days a week. They had no informal childcare available to them.

While she was happy with the nursery, Keira thought more funding was required to allow it to upgrade its building and facilities, as they were starting to look a bit run down. Despite this, she welcomed the opportunities it provided Lois to use different toys, books and outdoor equipment, as Keira and Richie struggled to afford to provide her with these opportunities themselves. They also felt that, since attending nursery, Lois had become more independent and confident.

The nursery offered parents the choice of morning or afternoon sessions and Keira and Richie had opted for mornings to allow Keira to sleep after working nightshift. Keira would ideally like to work fulltime Monday to Friday during the day. However, in order to be able to afford to do this, she would need there to be a greater number of funded hours or the option to purchase additional hours at the local authority nursery at an affordable rate. Alternatively, she would have liked to have employed a childminder to look after Lois in the afternoons at home, to enable her to work fulltime during the day. However, this would not be viable given the cost of childminders in the local area.

6. Provision for eligible 2 year olds

Since 2015, 2 year olds who are looked after and those whose families meet the eligibility criteria for free school meals have been eligible for 600 hours of funded ELC. However, take up of the provision has been lower than anticipated. While the Scottish Government estimates that around 27% of 2 year olds are eligible, only 9.3% of 2 year olds were registered, according to the latest figures⁶.

Recent research conducted for the Scottish Government on the drivers and barriers to uptake of ELC among eligible 2 year olds⁷ found that the main barrier to uptake was a lack of awareness – rather than opposition to the concept, problems with the application process or dissatisfaction with the nature of the provision. For the purpose of the current study, where the focus was on the impact of the funded hours, there was felt to be little value in including parents of eligible 2 year olds who were not aware that the provision existed (any discussion about impacts would be hypothetical). Rather, the aim was to interview parents who had used the provision for eligible 2 year olds and those who knew about it but had opted not to use it.

However, it proved very difficult to identify parents who knew about the provision but chose not to use it⁸ – backing up the findings of the previous study that, if parents know about it, they are generally keen to use it – and only one such parent took part in the research (case study 25).

This parent knew that her daughter was eligible for the funded hours but was not happy with any of the providers that were within walking distance of her home. Although she hadn't visited any of them, she didn't want her daughter to go as she said she '*knew the types of parents whose kids went there*', due to having grown up in the area, and held negative views about them. In particular, she mentioned the use of 'bad' language and did not think the behaviour of the children would be good.

Case study 25 – an example of a parent of an eligible 2 year old who has chosen not to take up funded ELC



Lisa lived with her 2 year old daughter Lily in a deprived area of a city. Lisa was not currently working and Lily did not attend any ELC.

Lisa had heard about the free childcare for eligible 2 year olds through a relative who lived in England. She initially thought it must be something that was only available in England but looked into it and found out that it

⁶ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/12/9271/0>

⁷ <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/02/4813>

⁸ Third sector organisations working with families of eligible 2 year olds offered to assist with the identification of these parents, However, they found that the families they were in contact with were using the funded hours

was available in Scotland and that she would be eligible. While she was pleased that she was eligible, she completely disagreed with the principle of it only being available to parents who were not working⁹ as she thought it removed the incentive to work. Indeed, Lisa would, herself like to work but feels she can't due to a lack of affordable childcare. She was surprised that she hadn't been told about it by any professionals and thought it was 'wrong' that staff she had spoken to at Jobcentre Plus, who advise parents about getting back into work, did not know anything about it.

I only had contact with my health visitor when Lily was wee. I don't think there's enough information out there, I've had to find it all out myself...

Even places like the Job Centre don't know, they've no got a clue, they do not know. I had to tell her [job centre employee]. She just listened to me and had to take my word for gospel. They should know because they're hassling you to go out to work but you cannae because you cannae get a placement for your 2 year old.

Lisa was keen for Lily to use the funded hours as she thought she would benefit from spending time with other children as she was mostly in adult company. She contacted the council to find out where she could use the funded hours but she was not happy with any of the options that were close to her home. She had negative perceptions of the behaviour of the children who attended these nurseries which she said stemmed from having lived in the area all her life and knowing their parents.

Lisa had made the decision not to send Lily to nursery until she was 3 and she was, on the whole happy with this. She enjoyed looking after her and was not concerned about her falling behind educationally as she did drawing, reading, writing and counting with her at home. At the same time, she would be happy for her to go to nursery if there was a nursery close by that she felt was suitable.

Three interviews were undertaken with parents of eligible 2 year olds who had taken up the provision. The parents spoke very positively about the impacts of the provision for them and their children (case studies 26 - 28).

Case Study 26 – An example of the provision for eligible 2 year olds having a positive impact on the whole family.



Parents Heather and Davie lived in a rural area. They had two children Jasmine (2) and Kian (5 months). Neither parent was currently working. Davie had a long-term physical health condition. Jasmine was eligible for the funded provision for 2 year olds and attended the local authority nursery.

⁹ While this was her perception, it is not strictly correct as some working parents will be eligible

Around Jasmine's 2nd birthday, Heather was pregnant with the couple's second child. She was suffering from severe morning sickness and was conscious that she was not able to provide Jasmine with the attention and stimulation she needed at this critical point in her development. Heather asked her health visitor if there were any local play groups or nurseries that she might be able to attend. Her health visitor contacted someone at the local authority Early Years' service, who suggested that Jasmine might be eligible for the funded provision for 2 year olds. Jasmine was indeed eligible and started attending the local authority nursery from 12.50pm to 4pm, Monday to Friday.

Heather was very positive about the provision and felt Jasmine had benefitted from it hugely.

She did start speaking just before she went to nursery and since then it's come on leaps and bounds...more articulate, new words [...] socialising, social skills – obviously it's helped there [...] the fact she's getting out to play, has brought on her running and jumping skills, her motor skills [...] there's loads of things, honestly, things I don't have time to sit and do with her on a regular basis [...] it's given her a whole world of opportunity [...] it's just given her so much more to challenge her and get her head round.

Heather herself had benefitted from having more time to get on with household chores or just to have a rest. Kian benefitted from more one-on-one time with his parents.

The hours offered suited the family very well. They had been given a choice of morning or afternoon provision and chose afternoons. Davie took Jasmine to and from the nursery. Sometimes Davie did not sleep well because of his illness, so afternoon provision suited him much better – and gave him a chance to rest, if he needed.

Two of the parents (case studies 27 and 28), who both lived in the same city, reported that there were no providers for eligible 2 year olds within easy walking distance of their homes. They had only managed to use it as one had a car and the other had been offered free transport due to family circumstances.

Case study 27 – an example of a parent of an eligible 2 year old who is using funded ELC but had difficulty finding a provider close to home



Samantha and John lived with their 3 children Ryan (10), Ruby (5) and Sienna (2) in a deprived area of a city. Ryan and Ruby were at primary school and Sienna used her funded hours at a local authority provider. Neither Samantha nor John were currently working.

Samantha had heard about the funded hours for 2 year olds through a friend who was using it. She wanted to use it for Sienna but, when she looked into it, found out that the closest provider was too far away from her home - it would take two buses to get there and this would not be possible as they also had to take their other

children to school. Samantha and John were disappointed not to be able to use the funded ELC as they thought it would be good for Sienna's development but they couldn't see a way around it:

Well I actually knew through a friend that she was eligible but the closest one to us – there's only certain ones who offer it - was [name of nursery]. It's two busses away and I have to drop my older kids off at [a school in a different direction]. We only managed the other one because they offered us the bus that dropped her off.

A few months after they had originally applied for the funded ELC, Samantha and John had to spend some time in hospital with Ryan after he became unwell. The social worker at the hospital realised that they were under a lot of stress and arranged for Sienna to attend funded ELC and for a bus to take her and collect her from the nursery. Samantha and John were really pleased about this as it made things a lot easier for them and allowed them to focus on Ryan and to get things like chores and shopping done.

They had also seen benefits for Sienna. They felt that both her language and social skills had improved since she started and commented that she had come on much quicker than either her brother or sister, who did not attend any childcare at the age of 2:

'It brought her on massively with her speech. She came on much quicker than [older children].

They would have preferred the nursery to be in walking distance of their home but were otherwise very happy with the provision.

Case study 28 – an example of a parent of an eligible 2 year old who is using funded ELC but had difficulty finding a provider close to home



Jenny lived in an urban area with her three children Josh (4), Mason (2), and Rosie (10 months). Jenny was not currently in paid employment. Josh and Mason both attended local authority nurseries in the afternoon, for 16 hours per week.

Jenny's mother had told her about the funded provision for 2 year olds and she was delighted when she found out about it as she as was pregnant with Rosie at the time:

When Josh was two I found out about it online. My mum had mentioned it to me so I looked it up. I had never realised that you could get it... After I saw it online, I went into the nursery and spoke to them, and they gave me a tour and got me to fill in some forms... It was easy.

She was happy with the 16 hours' provision as she felt any longer would be too long for a 2 year old and that it was important for children to spend time with parents at that age:

I don't just want to cart them off to nursery all day, every day because I'd miss them.

Josh and Mason attended different nurseries as the nursery Josh attended did not offer provision for 2 year olds. While Josh's nursery was only a five-minute walk from their home, Jenny had to drive 15 minutes to Mason's nursery. This was the closest childcare provider to Jenny's home which offered funded places to 2 year olds. Jenny would have struggled to take Mason to nursery had she not had a car as it was too far to walk.

Since attending nursery Jenny had noticed improvements in Mason's speech, social skills, toilet training and (healthy) eating habits. She also valued the time the funded provision afforded her in the afternoons to spend with Rosie and to catch up on household chores.

Jenny's only problem with her current childcare arrangements was the lack of nurseries in her area offering funded provision for two year olds. Ideally she would have liked Mason to attend the same nursery as Josh as she felt this had better facilities and outdoor space for the children, and was only a five-minute walk from her home. Her current arrangements meant she was spending over an hour travelling every day to take Josh and Mason to their respective nurseries.

Jenny was happy not working at the moment as she had 3 young children. However, she felt it would be difficult to find work that would fit around the nursery hours, should she want to in the future:

The three hours every afternoon, that's not enough to find a job, because I don't know what you could do in that time. But if I could get two full days, you could maybe get something part time.

7. Appendix 1: discussion guides

ELC SERVICES discussion guide – parents who have taken up provision

INTRODUCTION (5 MINS)

- Introduce self, Ipsos MORI
- Thanks for taking part
- Duration of interview – around 45 minutes, no longer than one hour
- Explain that Ipsos MORI is an independent research company. We've been asked by Audit Scotland to speak to parents about their childcare arrangements and how they are finding them
- As with any research we do, everything you say will be completely confidential. We'll write a report for the Audit Scotland and, as part of that, we'll be writing up a summary of your experiences. However, we won't use your name or write anything that could identify you.
- Recording – will be transcribed for research team's use only, securely stored and deleted after project.
- CHECK CONSENT TO RECORD
- Any questions?

BACKGROUND ON PARTICIPANT'S CIRCUMSTANCES (10 MINS)

So to start with, I'd like to begin by learning a bit more about you and your family. Can you tell me a little bit about...

- **Who you currently live with?**
 - PROBE: Ages of all children in home
- **And are you working/studying/training at the moment? [IF YES: And how many hours do you work a week?] And how about your husband/wife/partner [IF APPLICABLE]**
- **We'd like to hear about a typical term time week for your family in terms of [work and] childcare arrangements for each member of the household. I've got a grid here that I'd like to complete if that's ok? [USE FAMILY WEEK GRID TO CAPTURE INFO FOR ALL FAMILY MEMBERS. INCLUDE OLDER CHILDREN TOO].**
- **And how long has [NAME OF CHILD/REN] been attending [CHILDCARE PROVIDER]?**
- **And what about during the holidays? How does a typical week differ?**

CHOOSING CHILDCARE (10 mins)

I'd now like to talk a bit more about the childcare you are currently using and your reasons for choosing it.

We're particularly interested in childcare for [2 –IF ELIGIBLE] 3 and 4 year olds so we'll mostly be taking about [CHILD'S/CHILDREN'S NAME/S]

I understand that at least some of the childcare you are using is funded through the Scottish Government's 600 funded hours. Is that right?

- **Thinking first about [NAME OF ELDEST CHILD ELIGIBLE FOR ELC]. Do you use the full 600 hours (16 hours a week)?**
- **REFER TO GRID - can you tell me which childcare is funded? [MARK THIS ON THE GRID].**
- **When did you become aware that they were eligible for funded childcare?**
 - [PROBE: how did you hear about it, what did you hear about it, what did you understand about the provision (hours, location etc.)]
- **What did you think about it when you first heard about it?**

- Did you think it sounded like something that you would want to use - why/why not? Any advantages / disadvantages for [CHILD'S NAME]? And for you? Any concerns about it? Was there anything else you wanted to know?
- **Did you try to find out any more about it?**
 - IF NO PROBE: Why was that? Would you know who to ask if you did want to find out more?
 - IF YES PROBE: what did you try to find out about – e.g. availability of places, how to apply; how did you find out more about it: was it easy or difficult to find more information; did you get the information you needed?
- **And what were some of the main reasons you took up the offer?**
 - PROMPT IF NECESSARY: Benefits for child (education, play, social); benefits for siblings; friends were doing it; to enable parents to work/work more hours; time off – e.g. to look for work; look for courses, training, education, look after other family; housework; meet friends/family; time for other support, e.g family, parenting, employment and training support; relax.
- **Did you consider other childcare options?**
 - PROMPT IF NECESSARY: e.g. looking after child/ren yourself, childminder, family looking after etc)
- **What were the main reasons you chose to use the funded offer rather than any of the other options you considered?**
- **IF USING FUNDED HOURS BUT FUNDED HOURS NOT MAIN PROVIDER. what were the main reasons you chose to use [OTHER PROVIDER] as your main for most of your childcare?**
- **[IF NOT PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED] And can you tell me how you went about finding and choosing a nursery/provider?**
 - PROBE: what sources of information did you use; how much choice was there; how did you decide which one to choose; did you ask anyone else for advice?
- **Was this one your first choice?**
- **IF YES: What were your reasons for choosing this one?**
 - PROBE FULLY: day/hours offered; flexibility; availability outwith term time; location; quality of care/facilities
- **And which of these would you say was the *main* deciding factor?**
- **IF NO: What was the problem with your first choice?**
 - PROMPT IF NECESSARY: no places day/hours offered unsuitable; the need to use additional childcare; lack of flexibility; lack of term time provision; location; transport costs; quality of care
- **(IF MORE THAN ONE) And which of these would you say was the *main* barrier?**
- **How did you find the process of applying for a place?**
 - PROBE: easy/difficult; did you have all the information you needed; did you need any support/help from anyone; would anything have made it easier; how helpful were any staff at the childcare facility that you dealt with?

REPEAT FOR EACH ELIGIBLE CHILD AGED 2, 3 OR 4 – PROBABLY WON'T NEED TO GO THROUGH ALL QUESTIONS AGAIN, JUST CHECKING IF ANYTHING DIFFERENT.

SATISFACTION WITH CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS (10 mins)

I'd now like to talk a bit more about how well you feel your current arrangements are working

- **So, overall, how well do you feel your current childcare arrangements for [NAME OF CHILD/REN] are working for you as a family?**
 - PROBE: What's working well? What could be better? What are the most difficult times of the week?

- **Thinking specifically now about the funded hours that you use for [NAME OF CHILD/REN]. Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the provision you're using?**
 - THEN PROBE FULLY ON:
 - day/hours offered
 - flexibility
 - year round versus term time
 - location
 - quality of care/early learning
 - child/ren being with other children they'll go to school with
 - location
- **What, if any, would you say have been the main benefits of using the funded provision? For your child/ren? For yourself? For your partner? For your other children? For others?**
- **I'm going to read out some things that people sometimes say are potential benefits of funded childcare – though this doesn't necessarily mean they are true or to apply for everyone. For each one, I'd like you to talk around whether you think the funded hours have made any difference in the case of your family.**

GO THROUGH CARDS, ONE AT A TIME, SHOWING AND READING OUT THE STATEMENT ON EACH CARD TO THE PARTICIPANT. DISCUSS EACH ONE IN TURN.

- *It can help young children improve their language and learning skills*
 - *It can help improve young children's social skills*
 - *It can help improve young children's behaviour*
 - *It helps better prepare young children for school, when the time comes*
 - *It gives young children the opportunity to use different toys, books and outdoor equipment*
 - *It gives young children the opportunity to try new activities and experiences*
 - *It allows parents to work, train or study*
 - *It allows parents to work more hours*
 - *It allows parents to get access to other support services, such as a parenting class*
 - *It allows parents to access support with finding a job or support to get on a course*
 - *It gives parents a break*
 - *It reduces the burden on other family members or friends who provide childcare*
 - *It gives parents a chance to meet other parents in the area*
 - *It gives parents the time to do household chores*
 - *It gives parents time to spend with their other children*
 - *The financial savings allow parents to spend money on other things*
 - *The financial savings help to prevent parents getting into debt*
- **Can you think of any other benefits? For [CHILD/REN'S NAME]? For you?**
 - **Could you select three cards where you think it's had the greatest impact?**
 - **And how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the other childcare (formal or informal) you are using?**
 - THEN PROBE FULLY ON:
 - day/hours offered
 - flexibility
 - cost
 - year round versus term time
 - location
 - quality of care/early learning
 - child/ren being with other children they'll go to school with
 - location

IDEAL CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS (10 MINS)

Finally, I'd like to talk about whether there are any changes to your current childcare arrangements for [NAMES OF ELIGIBLE CHILDREN] that you feel would benefit your family.

- **In an ideal world, what would your childcare arrangements be?**

- PROBE FULLY ON:
 - would they use a different provider/providers
 - more hours at current provider
 - change of day/hours at current provider
 - evening/weekend options
 - year round versus term time
 - location
 - quality of care/early learning
 - child/ren being with other children they'll go to school with
- **What difference would these ideal arrangements make to you and your family?**
 - PROBE FULLY ON:
 - benefits to children
 - opportunities to work/train/study
 - satisfaction with working pattern for them/partner
 - family finances
 - parental wellbeing
 - family life
 - benefits to siblings
 - benefits to others who provide childcare e.g. grandparents
 - time for chores
 - time to relax
- **IF NOT COVERED IN RESPONSE TO ABOVE TWO QUESTIONS: if you were able to get childcare that fitted around it, what would your ideal working pattern be? How many hours a week would you like to work/[study]? Over how many days? REFER TO GRID AND NOTE HOW DIFFERS FROM CURRENT**
- **And what would your husband/wife/partner's ideal working/[studying] pattern be? How many hours a week would they like to work/[study]? Over how many days? REFER TO GRID AND NOTE HOW DIFFERS FROM CURRENT**
- **So, finally, if you could only change one thing about your current childcare arrangements for [NAME OF ELIGIBLE CHILD/REN], what would it be?**

CLOSE

That's all of the questions I wanted to ask you today. Before we finish off, is there anything else you would like to say or ask that we haven't covered?
THANK AND CLOSE. HAND OUT INCENTIVES.

ELC SERVICES discussion guide – parents of 3 and 4 year olds who have not taken up provision

INTRODUCTION (5 MINS)

- Introduce self, Ipsos MORI
- Thanks for taking part
- Duration of interview – around 45, no longer than one hour
- Explain that Ipsos MORI is an independent research company. We've been asked by Audit Scotland to speak to parents about their childcare arrangements
- As with any research we do, everything you say will be completely confidential. We'll write a report for the Audit Scotland and, as part of that, we'll be writing up a summary of your experiences. However, we won't use your name or write anything that could identify you.
- Recording – will be transcribed for research team's use only, securely stored and deleted after project.
- CHECK CONSENT TO RECORD
- Any questions?

BACKGROUND ON PARTICIPANT'S CIRCUMSTANCES (10 MINS)

So to start with, I'd like to begin by learning a bit more about you and your family. Can you tell me a little bit about...

- Who you currently live with?
 - PROBE: Ages of all children in home
- And are you working/studying/training at the moment? [IF YES: And how many hours do you work a week?] And how about your husband/wife/partner [IF APPLICABLE]
- We'd like to hear about a typical term time week for your family in terms of work and childcare arrangements for each member of the household. I've got a grid here that I'd like to complete if that's ok? [USE FAMILY WEEK GRID TO CAPTURE INFO FOR ALL FAMILY MEMBERS. INCLUDE OLDER CHILDREN TOO].
- And how long has [NAME OF CHILD/REN] been attending [CHILDCARE PROVIDER]?
- And what about during the holidays? How does a typical week differ?

CHOOSING CHILDCARE (10 mins)

I'd now like to talk a bit more about the childcare you are currently using and your reasons for choosing it.

We're particularly interested in childcare for [2- IF ELIGIBLE] 3 and 4 year olds so we'll mostly be taking about [CHILD'S/CHILDREN'S NAME/S]

- I understand that you're aware that [NAME OF CHILD/CHILDREN] would be eligible for funded childcare but that you're not currently using it. Is that right?
- Thinking first about [NAME OF ELDEST CHILD ELIGIBLE FOR ELC]. When did you become aware that they were eligible?

- [PROBE: how did you hear about it, what did you hear about it, what did you understand about the provision (hours, location etc.)]
- **What did you think about it when you first heard about it?**
 - Did you think it sounded like something that you would want to use - why/why not? Any advantages / disadvantages for [CHILD'S NAME]? And for you? Any concerns about it? Was there anything else you wanted to know?
- **Did you try to find out any more about it?**
 - IF NO PROBE: Why was that? Would you know who to ask if you did want to find out more?
 - IF YES PROBE: what did you try to find out more about – e.g. availability of places, how to apply; how did you find out more about it - easy / difficult to find more information; did you get the information you needed?
- **And did you apply for a place?**
 - PROBE IF YES: how did you decide where to apply? how easy/difficult was application process; would anything have made it easier; did you have all the information you needed; how helpful were any staff at the childcare facility that you dealt with?
- **So, what were the main reasons you decided not to use it?**
 - PROMPT IF NECESSARY: availability of places; more flexible hours; more hours; location; better facilities, quality of care/provision; year round provision
- **Did you consider other childcare options?**
 - PROMPT IF NECESSARY: e.g. looking after child/ren yourself, childminder, family looking after etc)
- **What were the main reasons you chose to use the childcare you are using rather than any of the other options you considered?**
- **What, if anything, would have encouraged you to take up a place at a provider who could offer funded hours?**
 - PROBE IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED: availability of places; more flexible hours; more hours; location; better facilities, quality of provision; year round provision

REPEAT FOR EACH ELIGIBLE CHILD AGED 2, 3 OR 4 – PROBABLY WON'T NEED TO GO THROUGH ALL QUESTIONS AGAIN, JUST CHECKING IF ANYTHING DIFFERENT.

SATISFACTION WITH CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS (10 mins)

I'd now like to talk a bit more about how well you feel the current arrangements are working for you, as a family.

- **So, overall, how well do you feel your current childcare arrangements for [NAME OF CHILD/REN] are working for you as a family?**
 - PROBE: What's working well? What could be better? What are the most difficult times of the week?

- **How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the childcare you're using [one they use most if more than one type of childcare used]?**
 - THEN PROBE FULLY ON:
 - day/hours offered
 - flexibility
 - year round versus term time
 - location
 - quality of care/early learning
 - child/ren being with other children they'll go to school with
- **What, if any, would you say have been the main benefits of using the childcare you are using? For your child/ren? For yourself? For your partner? For your other children? For others?**
- **I'm going to read out some things that people sometimes say are potential benefits of childcare – though this doesn't necessarily mean they are true or to apply for everyone. For each one, I'd like you to talk around whether you think the childcare you are using has made any difference in the case of your family.**

GO THROUGH CARDS, ONE AT A TIME, SHOWING AND READING OUT THE STATEMENT ON EACH CARD TO THE PARTICIPANT. DISCUSS EACH ONE IN TURN.

- *It can help young children improve their language and learning skills*
 - *It can help improve young children's social skills*
 - *It can help improve young children's behaviour*
 - *It helps better prepare young children for school, when the time comes*
 - *It gives young children the opportunity to use different toys, books and outdoor equipment*
 - *It gives young children the opportunity to try new activities and experiences*
 - *It allows parents to work, train or study*
 - *It allows parents to work more hours*
 - *It allows parents to get access to other support services, such as a parenting class*
 - *It allows parents to access support with finding a job or support to get on a course*
 - *It gives parents a break*
 - *It reduces the burden on other family members or friends who may provide childcare*
 - *It gives parents a chance to meet other parents in the area*
 - *It gives parents the time to do household chores*
 - *It gives parents time to spend with their other children*
- **Can you think of any other benefits? For [CHILD/REN'S NAME]? For you?**
 - **Could you select three cards where you think it's had the greatest impact?**

IDEAL CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS (10 MINS)

Finally, I'd like to talk about whether there are any changes to your current childcare arrangements for [NAMES OF ELIGIBLE CHILDREN] that you feel would benefit your family.

- **In an ideal world, what would your childcare arrangements be?**
 - PROBE FULLY ON:
 - would they use a different provider/providers
 - more hours at current provider
 - change of day/hours at current provider
 - evening/weekend options
 - year round versus term time

- location
- quality of care/early learning
- child/ren being with other children they'll go to school with
- **What difference would the ideal arrangements you described make to you and your family?**
 - PROBE FULLY ON:
 - benefits to children
 - opportunities to work/train/study
 - satisfaction with working pattern for them/partner
 - family finances
 - parental wellbeing
 - family life
 - benefits to siblings
 - benefits to others who provide childcare e.g. grandparents
 - time for chores
 - time to relax
- **IF NOT COVERED IN RESPONSE TO ABOVE TWO QUESTIONS: if you were able to get childcare that fitted around it, what would your ideal working pattern be? what would your ideal working pattern be? How many hours a week would you like to work/[study]? Over how many days? REFER TO GRID AND NOTE HOW DIFFERS FROM CURRENT**
- **And what would your husband/wife/partner's ideal working/[studying] pattern be? How many hours a week would they like to work/[study]? Over how many days? REFER TO GRID AND NOTE HOW DIFFERS FROM CURRENT**
- **Realistically, do you think you will use a funded provider at all for [NAME OF CHILD/CHILDREN] before they go to school?**
- **What would be the main change that would enable you to use the funded hours?**
 - PROBE: more spaces; more/improved nurseries/facilities; more flexible times/hours; increased hours; provision in evenings and at weekends; provision outwith term time; improved application process
- **So, finally, if you could only change one thing about your current childcare arrangements for [NAME OF ELIGIBLE CHILD/REN], what would it be?**

CLOSE

That's all of the questions I wanted to ask you today. Before we finish off, is there anything else you would like to say or ask that we haven't covered?

THANK AND CLOSE. HAND OUT INCENTIVES.

ELC SERVICES discussion guide – parents of eligible 2 year olds not taking up funded ELC

INTRODUCTION (5 MINS)

- Introduce self, Ipsos MORI
- Thanks for taking part
- Duration of interview – it won't take any longer than one hour
- Explain that Ipsos MORI is an independent research company. We've been asked by Audit Scotland to speak to parents about their childcare arrangements.
- As with any research we do, everything you say will be completely confidential. We'll write a report for the Audit Scotland and, as part of that, we'll be writing up a summary of your experiences. However, we won't use your name or write anything that could identify you.
- Recording – will be transcribed for research team's use only, securely stored and deleted after project.
- CHECK CONSENT TO RECORD
- Any questions?

BACKGROUND ON PARTICIPANT'S CIRCUMSTANCES (5 MINS)

So to start with, I'd like to begin by learning a bit more about you and your family. Can you tell me a little bit about...

- **Who you currently live with?**
 - PROBE: Ages of all children in home
- **And are you working/studying/training at the moment? [IF YES: And how many hours do you work a week?] And how about your husband/wife/partner [IF APPLICABLE]**
- **We'd like to hear about a typical term time week for your family in terms of work and childcare arrangements for each member of the household. I've got a grid here that I'd like to complete if that's ok? [USE FAMILY WEEK GRID TO CAPTURE INFO FOR ALL FAMILY MEMBERS. INCLUDE OLDER CHILDREN TOO].**
- **And how long has [NAME OF CHILD/REN] been attending [CHILDCARE PROVIDER]?**
- **And what about during the holidays? How does a typical week differ?**
- **Over the next couple of years, as [CHILD'S NAME] gets older, how do you think your typical week will change? What will the main changes be?**

PROBE: any plans for / changes to childcare arrangements; finding work; living arrangements?

AWARENESS OF ELC ELIGIBILITY (10-15 MINS)

I'd now like to talk a bit about your thoughts on the types of childcare that are available for young children.

- **First of all, what do you know about the different types of childcare that are available in this area?**
 - PROBE: availability; easy/difficult to get a space; local authority or private nurseries, playgroups, childminders; cost
- **And are you aware of any free childcare that [CHILD'S NAME] would be able to go to?**

- [PROBE: what have you heard about it, how did you hear about it, what do you understand about the provision (hours, location etc.)]

SHOW PARTICIPANT SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT ELC POSTER AND BRIEFLY EXPLAIN PROVISION OF ELC FOR ELIGIBLE 2 YEAR OLDS

- **Have you seen this poster anywhere before? Where? Or have you heard about it from anyone else?**
 - PROBE: which aspects were you aware of / not aware of? What questions would you have after seeing poster? Who could you ask? Who do you think this would appeal to (if not them)?
- **What did you think about it when you first heard about it?**
 - Did you think it sounded like something that you would use - why/why not? Any advantages / disadvantages for [CHILD'S NAME]? Any concerns about it? Was there anything else you wanted to know?
- **When you heard about this provision of free childcare for two year olds, did you try to find out any more about it?**
 - IF NO PROBE: Why was that? Would you know who to ask if you did want to find out more?
 - IF YES PROBE: what did you try to find out more about – e.g. eligibility, availability of places, how to apply; how did you find out more about it - easy / difficult to find more information; did you get the information you needed?
- **And did you apply for a place?**
 - PROBE IF YES: how did you decide where to apply? how easy/difficult was application process; would anything have made it easier; did you have all the information you needed; how helpful were any staff at the childcare facility that you dealt with?
- **Many parents in Scotland have not taken up free childcare for 2 year olds, so we're interested to find out why that might be. Can you tell me some of the main reasons why you didn't take it up?**
 - IF SAY DON'T NEED IT, EXPLORE WHY NOT
 - PROBE FULLY: Any concerns about this - not suitable for child, too young for ELC, quality of childcare in local area; would rather look after child myself; don't know how to apply; available hours/time of day childcare offered not suitable; travel costs/difficulties; costs; type of childcare offered; offering of 600 hrs not enough?
- **What, if anything, would have encouraged you to take up the offer?**
 - PROBE IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED: More flexible hours; more hours; location; better facilities; easier to apply; more opportunities for me/partner to work / study / train'?
- **Do you think there would be any advantages / disadvantages for [CHILD'S NAME] if they attended the childcare?**
 - PROBE BRIEFLY: learning and social skills; spending time with other children; different environment, toys, play, care, practical help with feeding, toilet training, facilities etc.

- Will you be sending [CHILD'S NAME] to nursery or another type of childcare when they are three or four years old? Why? What's different?

PERCEPTIONS OF BENEFITS (10-15 MINS)

I now going to ask a few questions about the potential benefits of childcare.

- In general, what do you think the benefits of childcare are/might be?
 - UNPROMPTED AT START THEN PROBE ON GENERAL BENEFITS FOR: two year-olds, parents, siblings, is there anyone else who might benefit?
- IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED: **And what do you think the benefits are/might be for your two year-old? For yourself? For your partner? For your other children? For others?**
- I'm going to read out some things that people sometimes say are potential benefits of childcare for 2 year olds – though this doesn't necessarily mean they are true. Can you tell me which of these you think are the most important and those that are the least important to you:
 - *It can help young children improve their language and learning skills*
 - *It can help improve young children's social skills*
 - *It can help improve young children's behaviour*
 - *It allows young children to spend time with other children*
 - *It allows young children to spend time with other adults*
 - *It helps better prepare young children for school, when the time comes*
 - *It gives young children the opportunity to use different toys, books and outdoor equipment*
 - *It gives young children the opportunity to try new activities and experiences*
 - *It allows parents to work, train or study*
 - *It allows parents to work more hours*
 - *It allows parents to get access to other support services, such as a parenting class*
 - *It allows parents to access support with finding a job or support to get on a course*
 - *It gives parents a break*
 - *It reduces the burden on other family members or friends who may provide childcare*
 - *It gives parents a chance to meet other parents in the area*
 - *It gives parents the time to do household chores*
 - *It gives parents time to spend with their other children*
- - PROBE: why important/not important; would free ELC help achieve this in general/for you/your child
- Can you think of any other benefits of childcare: In general? For [CHILD'S NAME]? For you?

PERCEPTIONS OF DISADVANTAGES (10-15 MINS)

And now I'm going to ask some questions about the potential problems of childcare.

- So, in general, what do you think some of the problems of childcare are/might be?

- UNPROMPTED AT START THEN PROBE ON GENERAL PROBLEMS FOR: two year-olds, parents, siblings, others
- IF HAVE NOT ALREADY MENTIONED: **And what do you think the problems might be for your two year-old? For yourself? For your partner? For your other children? For others?**
- **So again, like we did for the benefits, I'm going to read out some things that people sometimes say are potential problems of childcare – though this doesn't necessarily mean they are true. Can you tell me which of these you think are the biggest problems and those that are less of a problem for you in your local area:**

READ OUT THE FOLLOWING CARDS AND SORT INTO THREE PILES – BIGGEST PROBLEMS, NOT A PROBLEM, NEITHER/NOR:

- *It can be too long a day/too tiring for 2 year olds*
- *It means young children spend too much time away from their parents/guardians*
- *Two year-olds are better cared for in a home environment*
- *The free hours offered are not long enough for parents/guardians to work*
- *The start/finish times of childcare are not flexible*
- *There is a lack of free childcare at different times of the day, at weekends or during school holidays*
- *The places that offer free childcare are too far away from me*
- *Travel costs are too expensive for me to take my child to childcare*
- *The quality of the staff or management at childcare facilities is poor*
- *It is confusing to know if my child qualifies for free childcare*
- PROBE: why a problem
- **What other concerns, if any, do you have about childcare: In general? For [CHILD'S NAME]? For you?**
- **What do you think about the fact that this free childcare is only available to some two year-olds?**
 - PROBE: why do you think this is; does it make you more or less likely to want to take it up; does it create any problems; do they think there would be any 'stigma' attached to going (because it is mainly available to people who are unemployed or on low incomes)

UPTAKE OF FREE ELC (5 MINS)

Finally, I'd like to ask you a few things about the uptake of free childcare for two year-olds in Scotland and how you think it could be improved, if at all.

- **So far the uptake of free childcare for two year olds in Scotland has been much lower than expected – why do you think this is?**
 - PROBE: lack of awareness; lack of nurseries/facilities; stigma; parents do not want to use childcare; inflexible times/hours; not enough hours
- **What do you think would encourage more parents and guardians to take up the free childcare entitlement of two year olds?**
 - PROBE: improved advertising; more/improved nurseries/facilities; more flexible times/hours; increased eligibility; increased hours; improve application process

- IF NOT TAKEN UP FREE ELC: **What would make the biggest difference to you, personally?**

CLOSE

That's all of the questions I wanted to ask you today. Before we finish off, is there anything else you would like to say or ask that we haven't covered?

THANK AND CLOSE. HAND OUT INCENTIVES.

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About Ipsos MORI Scotland

Ipsos MORI Scotland provides research focused on the distinct needs of policymakers and businesses in Scotland. We offer the full range of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies and have a detailed understanding of specific sectors in Scotland, their policy challenges and their research needs. The variety of research we conduct gives us a unique insight into many aspects of life in Scotland.