

Early Childhood Education and Care – Evidence to the Children, Young People and Education Committee

Background

Our vision for Wales, as set out in *Prosperity for All*, is a country where every child has the best start in life. Our childhood experiences play a significant part in shaping our futures, and are critical to the chances of leading a healthy, prosperous and fulfilling life. This is why the early years is one of our priority areas.

Beyond the direct contribution the childcare and early years sector makes to the development of our children, it is also important to recognise the role they play in our wider economy. The sector is a significant employer, with over 17,000 employees across Wales. The care provided enables a large number of parents to work, and these parents go on to collectively generate an estimated £1.2 billion in income¹ per year, supporting economic growth and poverty reduction across Wales.

Striking a balance between providing high quality early childhood education and care which supports child development, and yet is flexible and accessible enough to enable parents to work, is a key challenge and one we must get right to deliver against our vision for the early years in Wales.

Early Childhood Education and Care

There is a wealth of research and evidence surrounding the benefits of an integrated Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system. This evidence shows that it is unhelpful to draw a distinction between early education and childcare, and the OECD define an ECEC system as

“programmes that, in addition to providing children with care, offer a structured and purposeful set of learning activities either in formal institutions (pre-primary) or as part of a non-formal child development programme”.

Countries that have the most progressive and integrated approaches to the early years are uncompromising on the quality of care and transparent in the principles and pedagogy² which apply to each and every setting delivering early education and childcare. This integrated ECEC approach allows parents to have trust in their child’s education and care and gives them the assurance needed to return to work.

The key is that provision for children should be delivered by practitioners who follow pedagogical principles which are aligned to well-established knowledge on what is most effective for child development. A focus on the pedagogy moves the debate on

¹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-07/180110-review-childcare-sector-en.pdf>

² Pedagogy relates to the practice of educating. It recognises that how children learn and develop at this stage is not just subject to *what is intended to be taught*, but it is also of particular importance *how it is facilitated*.

to what is proven to be beneficial for children. The Welsh Government is following this debate with interest, and considering what this means for the future of early years services across Wales.

Developments in the Welsh Early Years Landscape

The ECEC approach will build on a wide variety of programmes that are continually developing in order to support parents, families and children during the early years.

Flying Start

In 2012-13 the Flying Start programme was expanded to double the number of children under the age of four benefitting from 18,000 to 36,000. As part of the expansion local authorities were given a small element of 'Outreach' funding within their Flying Start grant to deliver elements of the programme to children across the wider local authority. They were able to use 2.5% of the 'uplift' to provide elements of the service to children with an identified need and those families most in need. This is known as Flying Start Outreach and guidance is in place to support this approach.

The objectives of Flying Start Outreach are to extend the reach of Flying Start to families with identified needs living in non-Flying Start areas and to provide continuity of support, where appropriate, to children and families moving out of those areas.

Since July 2018, local authorities have been given the ability to use up to 10% of their Flying Start revenue budget to fund Outreach. Local authorities determine the best way of offering this support within the funding provided and to have a set of specific criteria for determining which families it should support via Outreach. As such, the approach to Outreach varies across Wales by local authority.

In 2017-18 local authorities in Wales delivered Flying Start services to 603 families through the Outreach element of the programme. This increased to 780 families during 2018-19. As requested, an update on the actions contained in the Welsh Government Flying Start e-briefing (July 2018) is contained at Annex 1.

Childcare Offer for Wales

Our Childcare Offer (the Offer) is now available in all parts of Wales a year earlier than originally intended, with more than 15,000 children accessing funded childcare and over 3,000 childcare providers delivering it. Whilst this is impressive, we want to go further and a national communications campaign will be starting shortly, ensuring all eligible families know what they are entitled to and how to apply.

The evaluation of the first year of delivery³ found over 60% of parents reported the Offer had helped provide them with more flexibility in the types of jobs they do and the hours they work. Many parents felt they had more opportunities for training and 88 per cent reported having more disposable income. These are important findings given the evidence that well-paid work is the best route out of poverty⁴ and the

³ <https://gov.wales/evaluation-childcare-offer-wales-0>

⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2016) UK poverty: Causes, costs and solutions. Full report available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-causes-costs-and-solutions>

growing recognition of the risks and challenges associated with “in-work poverty”⁵. It is in this context that we are considering extending the Offer to include parents who are in training and education or on the cusp of returning to work. The review is due to report in early 2020.

To ensure people can access the Offer as easily as possible, our intention is to develop a single national approach to administering the Offer, managing both applications and payments. The Committee will recall we had been working with HMRC with a view to utilising their application and eligibility checking platform for a part of this service. The Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services confirmed in her letter of 13 August that after reviewing the position, we will be pausing the work with HMRC. Instead, the digital platform to support the Offer will be developed, hosted and supported by Welsh Government. Under this model, front line services will continue to be undertaken by the local authorities, who are supportive of this approach.

Both this decision and the review in respect of parents in education and training have implications for the legislation scrutinised by the Committee in 2018, and enacted within the Childcare Funding (Wales) Act 2019. Our intention was to bring forward regulations and an administrative scheme, this autumn. Rather than legislate now, knowing we may need to make changes shortly thereafter, we will await the findings of the review before taking this work forward.

Alongside this work, evaluation of the second year of delivery is drawing to a close. We will publish a report of the findings in December 2019, which will give an insight into some of the challenges faced by parents and providers as they seek to arrange wrap-around care and how the Capital Grant is supporting alignment of the early education and childcare elements of the Offer.

Supporting the Childcare Sector

Work to strengthen and support the ECEC sector and workforce is already underway as outlined in the 10 Year Childcare Play and Early Years workforce Plan⁶. The plan aims to professionalise the childcare workforce to become one recognised for its valuable role as an economic enabling sector, supporting parents and carers to access and remain in employment.

The professionalising agenda seeks to encourage employers and practitioners to up-skill to level 3 and beyond. New qualifications are being developed to support practitioners with their career development, and career progression and pathways across other parts of the sector. Levels 2 and 3 were introduced in September with levels 4 and 5 due in September 2020. The apprenticeship programme will continue to support employers and practitioners to access training to higher levels. Earlier this month, we announced our extended Progress for Success European Social Fund programme which supports practitioners working less than 16 hours to access apprenticeship training for the new qualifications, ensuring a whole sector approach.

⁵ MacInnes T, Aldridge H, Bushe S, Kenway P and Tinson A (2013) *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

⁶ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-07/early-years-workforce-plan.pdf>

Conscious of the need to support the sustainability of childcare providers, we provided the sector with 100% business rates relief for a period of 3 years and are working with Business Wales and CWLWM⁷ to improve support and advice available to both new start-ups and those looking to expand their services. Social Care Wales (SCW) has launched a three year recruitment and retention campaign aimed at raising the profile of a career in childcare and the importance of ensuring we are able to recruit the right individuals with right personal attributes into the sector. The campaign will run alongside the introduction of the new qualifications.

Foundation Phase Nursery Provision

Introduced in 2010, the Foundation Phase encourages children to be creative and imaginative, making learning more enjoyable and effective while addressing their developmental needs. Drawing on evidence from early years programmes in Scandinavia in particular, evidence indicated that experiential, play based approaches resulted in higher standards of attainment compared to adopting an overly formal curriculum. [Education in Wales: Our National Mission](#) committed to the continued development of the principles and ethos of the Foundation Phase, providing developmentally appropriate learning for 3-7 year olds.

A three-year evaluation of the Foundation Phase published in 2015 was overwhelmingly positive, showing that where the Foundation Phase was being implemented well it raised the attainment of all children, as well as improvements in overall school attendance, literacy, numeracy and learner well-being.

Take-up of universal early education is high with over 80% of all children in schools the term after their fourth birthday, and the majority of the remaining children attending childcare settings delivering the Foundation Phase. The 2017-18 Estyn annual report identified that nearly all local authorities fund part-time education for three-year-olds, and occasionally for four-year-olds, in non-maintained settings as well as in schools. The number of settings offering part-time education is around 600. Estyn reflected standards were good or better in nine-in-ten settings.

Curriculum for Wales 2022

It is important we do not look at the Foundation Phase in isolation to the broader reform of curriculum and assessment arrangements. Support for the Foundation Phase was emphasised by Professor Graham Donaldson in his curriculum and assessment review, which he identified as a key strength in education. While the new curriculum will remove phases and stages, meaning the term Foundation Phase will no longer be part of the new curriculum, the approach remains absolutely central.

The feedback period on Curriculum for Wales 2022 ended in July 2019 and has highlighted specific issues for the delivery of the new curriculum in non-maintained settings which deliver the Foundation Phase. Co-construction is continuing and the revised curriculum guidance will be made available in January 2020 for roll out in September 2022. We will be working with non-maintained stakeholders to ensure the

⁷ Cwlwm' is made up of five childcare organisations: Early Years Wales, Clybiau Plant Cymru Kids' Clubs, Mudiad Meithrin, National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA Cymru) and PACEY Cymru.

needs of the sector are taken into account in developing a curriculum which meets the needs of all learners.

Parents, Childcare and Employment (PaCE)

PaCE is a £21.5m programme, jointly funded by Welsh Government and the European Social Fund, aimed at economically inactive parents aged 25 and over and parents aged 16-24 who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). All parents enrolled onto PaCE will have childcare as their main barrier preventing them accessing employment or training opportunities. Funding for childcare is available so that parents can undertake voluntary work/work experience or attend training courses. It also enables parents to receive financial support to help with the transition of moving into work after being economically inactive/NEET previously.

By the end of August, PaCE had enrolled over 4,400 parents onto the project and over 1,600 parents have been supported into work. More than 1 in 3 parents who join PaCE are gaining employment through the tailored support offered to parents under the programme.

Early Years Integration Transformation programme

The Early Years Integration Transformation programme builds on the vision set out in Prosperity for The programme in particular considers what it will take “to create a truly joined-up, responsive system that puts the unique needs of each child at its heart”.

To effectively put the child at the heart of the system multi-agency working is required, to ensure families get the help they need, when they need it; and that those services being delivered to young children and their families are harnessed in a coherent and seamless system. This will mean strengthening local coordination and referral systems and the integration of health and local authority services.

Since December 2017, Welsh Government has been working with Cwm Taf PSB on an intensive co-construction project focussed on exploring how Early Years services may be reconfigured locally to ensure services are delivered in a more co-ordinated and joined up manner. Building on the approach undertaken in Cwm Taf, a further eight PSBs have formally signed up to the programme as pathfinders. Funding has been awarded to Pathfinders to enable them to focus on the coordination of services locally, their planning and commissioning and how best to identify and address needs.

Cymraeg 2050

The Welsh Government's vision is to see the Welsh language thrive, with an increase in the number of people who both speak and use the language in their daily lives. The early education and childcare sector has a significant role to play in this context, and Cymraeg 2050 states:

“The long-term aim for our early years provision is to reach a position where children under five have had sufficient contact with the Welsh language to be able to start on their journey towards fluency.”

This is a central tenet to our ECEC approach, which is fully aligned with Cymraeg 2050. We are investing £34m in capital funding in supporting Welsh-medium childcare settings across Wales. With 28% of children accessing our Childcare Offer doing so in either Welsh-medium or bilingual settings this investment is key to supporting and expanding the sector. Alongside this and as part of our commitment within Cymraeg 2050, we aim to expand Welsh-medium early years provision, opening 150 new nursery groups over the next decade to facilitate a seamless transition into Welsh-medium education. The first 12 of these have now been established and we are pressing ahead with our plans to continue with this programme of expansion.

In parallel with this, work is underway to support the commitments made in our 10 year workforce plan. This includes support for those working in Welsh-medium settings, as well as developing Welsh language skills across the childcare and play sector.

October 2019

Welsh Government Flying Start e-briefing July 2018 - Update on Actions

Background

The Welsh Government Flying Start e-briefing in July 2018, provided an update on Phase Two of the Flying Start Review. This e-briefing contained a number of actions relating to geographical targeting, outreach and childcare.

An update on the actions contained within the e-briefing is provided below:

- 1. The Welsh Government will provide the latest LSOA lists to LAs when available for them to consider appropriateness of current FS areas. Any potential significant changes to FS areas and any possible implications would need to be discussed, in detail, with the relevant Welsh Government Senior Account Manager.*
- 2. The Welsh Government will review, revise and reissue guidance on the flexibility to use local intelligence to LAs, taking into account current good practice, by December 2018.*

In December 2018, the Welsh Government provided the updated LSOA lists to local authorities, with a request for them to review the data. Account managers have been discussing the potential implications of the new list at account meetings and the national network group.

Relevant feedback has been received and analysed within Welsh Government. Welsh Government are currently working with local authorities and in particular the Flying Start network, on the best approach going forward following this exercise. Guidance will be issued once this work has been completed.

- 3. The Welsh Government will review, revise and reissue guidance on outreach flexibility to LAs by December 2018.*
- 4. The Welsh Government will allow up to 10% flexibility on outreach provision in line with the current flexibility around the CAP.*
- 5. The Welsh Government will ensure messaging around this increased flexibility is robust in explaining its limitations, i.e. in some cases this may mean no further increase or being able to reach only a small number of additional children.*

Since July 2018, local authorities have been able to use up to 10% of their revenue budget to fund Outreach within known limitations. Welsh Government officials provided AMs and MPs with a letter outlining what Outreach is intended to provide as well as its limitations.

Officials are currently working with the Flying Start network to better understand the opportunities and challenges regarding the use of Outreach, particularly in the context of the new Children Community Grant.

- 6. Local Authorities to provide data on numbers of children supported through outreach (as required from 2018-19). This will be monitored closely by the Welsh Government to understand the impact of this flexibility.*

In 2017-18 local authorities delivered Flying Start services to 603 families across Wales through the Outreach element of the programme. This increased to 780 families during 2018-19. Officials collect this data through the Flying Start quarterly returns.

- 7. The Welsh Government and partners to consider how Flying Start and other services can be better joined up as part of the Early Years integration programme and specifically to consider the learning from the co-construction project in Cwm Taf.*

Welsh Government has invested in a wide range of early years programmes. However, we need to ensure that all programmes and services for the early years come together seamlessly to get the best value for parents and children, from the limited resources available. Officials from across Welsh Government are developing a transformation programme to make the ambition for a joined up Early Years system a reality. We are exploring what it would take to create an Early Years' system, both locally and nationally.

A key component of this work is a co-construction programme with Cwm Taf Public Service Board (PSB) which has been exploring options for how early years services could be reconfigured locally since December 2017. Building on what we have learned so far, officials are now testing this approach more widely, working in partnership with eight pathfinder PSBs. We are working together to map and understand current services and to design and deliver a seamless early years system, for "children from all backgrounds to have the best start in life."

By the end of this administration we intend to roll out this partnership approach to all PSBs to enable them to develop local solutions and crucially to build relationships across key agencies, including between local authorities and health boards.

- 8. The Welsh Government will review, revise and reissue guidance on childcare to LAs by spring 2019. In advance of this, the Welsh Government will issue e-briefings to LAs on key areas and good practice around the delivery of the programme's childcare element including attendance management policies.*

Childcare guidance was issued for consultation in May 2019. This draft guidance was co-produced by Welsh Government and the Childcare working group made up of external stakeholders. The document included an Attendance Management chapter and the minimum requirements. Consultation responses have been analysed and the final version of the document is currently being prepared for publication.

9. Local Authorities will seek to reach the agreed targets for attendance by March 2019, depending on their current attendance levels. Targets will be agreed with and monitored by the relevant Senior Account Manager.

Targets were outlined within a Welsh Government e-briefing in July 2018 to improve attendance within Flying Start Childcare settings. Using the national average of 78% as a guide, agreement was made with the Flying Start Co-ordinators to set national targets for attendance at:

- 75% target minimum
- 80% target average
- 85% target top-end

Since July 2018 we have seen an overall reduction of 1% in the number of unauthorised absences. Officials continue to work closely with local authorities to monitor these targets, understand local challenges and provide support through the sharing of best practice.

The new Childcare guidance, due for publication later this year, will formalise and strengthen this approach.