Promoting Take-Up of Formal Childcare Among Low-Income Families

Message Testing Research

Andrew Irving Associates

department for
children, schools and families

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C O N T E N T S

Abbreviations used in this report

DCSF   Department for Children, Schools and Families

JCP   Jobcentre Plus

p/t   part-time

f/t   full-time

1.   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1   Summary

1.1.1   Background

Across this sample of parents from low income household there was a good spread of attitudes to work, from the more adamant 'stay at home' mums through to those who are more frustrated/bored or isolated who were keen to return to work or study. Likewise, there was a decent spread of attitudes to formal childcare from those who are far less trusting and sceptical of the benefits through to those who had already used it in the past for older children or who were keen to explore the options available to them.

Broadly speaking, the term 'formal childcare' was not very familiar. However, most parents were aware of the different forms of childcare that come under the Ofsted banner. What became apparent was that very detailed knowledge of what each option involved, where to find out about them and any financial help available was often lacking and depended largely on any previous experience of using or seeking information about childcare options.

1.1.2   Attitudes to Informal and Formal Childcare

Although all were not currently using formal childcare with their youngest child, past experiences and word of mouth impacted on current attitudes.

Childcare needs varied considerably, largely depending on working/studying status and whether the primary carer was able to rely on a partner to help. There were noticeable difference in need for and regularity of childcare options between:

- *those working / studying versus those not* - there were increased feelings of guilt for 'putting upon' family amongst those using their parents/siblings for childcare on a much more regular basis
- *lone parents versus couples* - couple families attempted to manage their schedules/time to ensure that one of them was usually able to look after the children; lone parents, however, were much more dependent on family and friends, and increasingly so if they were working.

The research highlighted that final decisions regarding childcare were often made by mothers. Although fathers were keen to be involved, they were likely to deflect the final decision making onto mothers. Therefore, it was clear that in the first instance it was important that messaging about formal childcare worked best for mothers as they were most likely to have the final say (with the possible exception of ethnic minority households).

Despite parent(s) being primarily responsibility for everyday childcare, immediate family (usually parents, but also siblings) were frequently the first port of call for any childcare needs. This was because family was seen as: 'trusted' / reliable; convenient / close by; keen to help; flexible - able to help in emergencies / at short notice; providing attentive care (one-to-one); knew what the child wanted/liked and was familiar with child's routine. Another quiet admission from parents was that informal care was also free, unlike help outside the 'trusted circle' of family and close friends.

In the **ethnic minority groups**, Pakistani women's families were abroad so their access to childcare via family was limited. Bangladeshi mothers seemed to be living a more traditional lifestyle - relying more heavily on their family for childcare needs - and seemed relatively less well off. In both groups, the need for childcare tended to be ad hoc/sporadic, and was met by family (mothers/sisters) or friends. Most of their children were also attending religious classes at the mosque between about 5pm and 7pm most weekday evenings and the need for childcare was as such more limited.

1.1.3 Barriers to Formal Childcare

In exploring the barriers to using formal childcare, amongst those *more open to the idea of working* the major barriers were a perception that it might be complicated to sort out and, to a lesser extent, concerns about the quality of care. Amongst those *more open to the take up of formal childcare*, there were concerns about cost and uncertainty about whether the childcare available would be flexible enough to meet their requirements.

Amongst those *less open to the idea of either working or formal childcare*, the main 'top of mind' barriers were lack of need and a sense of guilt if they were to take up childcare at the expense of their family's offer to help.

Overall, the **rational** barriers which could be addressed more readily included:

- concerns about cost: *'childcare is expensive', 'I'd only be working to pay for childcare'*
- lack of awareness of options: *'I don't know where to get information about childcare'*
- concerns about juggling work and caring for their children: *'the childcare available isn't flexible enough'*
- lack of convenient availability: '*I have kids of different ages - it's too complicated to sort out'*
- lack of need: *'I'll be worse off if I work / I'll lose out on benefits'*.

The **emotional** barriers tended to reflect a resistance to change and included:

- concerns about the quality of care: *'I don't trust anyone outside the family to look after my children'*
- guilt for using childcare and thus not being a good mother: '*the best place for the child is with me', 'I don't want to miss out on my child growing up'*
- lack of need: *'going back to work is too daunting', 'I want to stay at home with my kids'*.

Lack of trust in those providing formal childcare (*'How will I know if childcare is safe for my child'*) operated as a barrier on both a rational and emotional level and spontaneously was the most consistent barrier raised with regard using formal childcare provision.

Our view is that the priority should be to address the barriers that those more open to work and/or take up of formal childcare identify with as they should be the easiest to 'convert'. In this respect, addressing concerns about expense, safety and a lack of information are key.

1.1.4 Reaction to Motivation Messages

Across the sample, the key message categories with more universal resonance included:

- **Kids Get the Best Start** - emotional messaging was hard for even the most resistant parents to ignore. Particularly effective buzz words included: *'meeting new friends', 'learning new things', 'developing new skills'* and *'being better prepared'* for school.

- **Affordability -** rational messaging with a quantifiable, tangible benefit, inviting and inclusive for low income parents. Positioned correctly these were messages encouraging positive action (and dispelling a key concern about the cost of childcare).

- **A Safe, Secure Environment** - rational, but fairly dry messaging although the mention of Ofsted succeeded partly in injecting some objectivity into respondents' reasoning, allaying certain fears and apprehensions.

Reaction to other messages depended on factors such as working or family status as well as attitudes to and/or readiness to consider work. Other important messages with greater overall appeal included:

- **Benefits to mum working** (*'making new friends'; 'bringing in extra money'; 'teaching children the value of work'*) were important reminders for both mothers and fathers alike - particularly resonating with those recently returned to work/closer to thinking about taking the initial steps (e.g. seeking and/or started part time work or study)

- **Alongside the family** - parents appreciated the empathetic nature of the statement that is seen as recognising the value of time spent with the family and helped lend credibility to the overall campaign (implying a degree of empathy).

- **Spelling out their options -** though something of a 'hygiene factor' and not a headline message, it was important that the childcare options were known and understood - particularly as current awareness about what each option entailed was, at best, patchy.

However, across the sample there were differences to note in terms of the most effective message mix (section 3.9) depending on various key dimensions. To summarise:

- **Working status:** - those *working **full-time*** were particularly motivated by messages recognising the difficulty of juggling work and the importance of their current informal childcare set-up. In addition, messages explaining the potential costs they could get back resonated most with the full-time workers; ***part-time*** *workers* were motivated by more emotional messages - about the benefits to children or the benefits to mums of working - particularly if they had recently returned to work they were keen on justifications for their decision; for those ***not working*** core motivating messages varied according to their attitude towards work and how open they were to the possibility of a more imminent return to work. e.g. those keener on a return to work after many years were more motivated by messages that explored their sense of social isolation or a lack of confidence/self-esteem. Stand-out messages regarding child development tended to reflect concerns about their children lacking confidence and / or becoming too socially isolated at home with mum - particularly if they had an only child;

- **Family status: -** *lone parents* were more focused on the benefits of working and broadly were more open to childcare too, especially after school clubs through the schools (greater trust of the schools as their children were already left there without their supervision); ***couple families*** broadly were more focused on the emotional and developmental benefits of their children rather than the benefits of return to work;

- **Age of youngest child:** - messages about child development were more potent at younger ages. It was also apparent that the potency of messaging about 'upskilling' reduces with the age of the parent, reflecting either the fact that they were already back in work or conversely their lack of self-belief and/or direction in returning to work after years of unemployment.

Overall, the reasons why other messages / categories had less appeal included:

- *Too demanding* - tonality was important; the more demanding or nagging the messaging the more likely it was to rile many parents (e.g. *'your family don't have to do it all'* or *'ask your employer about childcare vouchers'*)

- *Too long-winded* - e.g. the Suits Your Needs category suffered from trying to spell out the options too methodically. Many parents had either fairly short attention spans and/or lower levels of overall literacy and thus these messages were seen as somewhat challenging to take on board
- *Too generalised* - phrases such as *'research shows'* and absolute terms such as *'will do better'* were seen as catch-all statements that did not account for individual circumstances
- *Easy to misinterpret* - phrases such as *'early learning'* or *'quality childcare'* were sometimes misconstrued by parents as care they can and do provide - i.e. not differentiating informal from formal care options.

1.2   Conclusions

This research shows that those **more open to childcare** tend to have more rational concerns/barriers to formal childcare. Key concerns reflect:

- affordability *("it's too expensive")*
- safety of child *("I don't know the people who are in charge")*
- inflexibility of current options *("I couldn't get it for the odd day I needed it, I'd have had to pay for 5 days")*
- not knowing details about their local options *("I know I could use pre-school, but I don't know what options I have or how good they are")*

In contrast, those **least open to childcare** tend to have more ingrained/harder to penetrate emotional barriers:

- guilt about using formal childcare - *"I should bring up my children"; "I don't want to miss my child growing up"*
- a perceived lack of need - *"I don't want to / need to work at the moment"; "I'm concerned that working will effect benefits".*

In this context it may make sense to focus communications in the first instance on addressing the fears and concerns of those more willing to consider childcare options. This is particularly because their remaining concerns and barriers ought to be easier to challenge / overcome.

This research also identifies that **different messages work with different target audiences**. For example, differences in message mix for those already working versus those non-working; those with pre-school age children and those with school age children. In this context it may be difficult to generate a leaflet that has sufficiently compelling messages for all of the different target audiences. Although a selection of messages address successfully many of the target audiences concerns, many messages seeking to address all circumstances can lack impact and motivating ability.

If practical, it might be worth considering generating different leaflets for different audiences to avoid accusations of not seeking to address individual circumstances - i.e. working versus non-working, pre-school versus school age children, lone parents versus couple families.

1.3   Key Recommendations

Going forward, consideration might be given to the following general guidelines for developing a communications campaign:

Do:

- seek to make the process of taking up childcare seem straightforward/achievable (consider a 'step by step guide' for parents to work their way through)
- reassure parents that they are doing the best thing for their child
- use a more empathetic tone as opposed to more direct - parents do not respond well to being made to feel guilty
- where possible, provide multiple positives in messages (e.g. 'learning new things in a safe, fun environment - 'win-win' messaging
- make calls to action for more information clear, accessible and relevant - *'for more information about what's available **in your local area** call free on… or go to website…'*
- consider using language more readily accepted by those more open to childcare such as:
    - 'childcare' (but not <u>formal</u> childcare), although 'help alongside the family' and 'structured play' are also popular phrases used by parents
    - 'like' or 'need' as opposed to 'fancy'
    - Ofsted (as opposed to just 'registered')
    - 'children' rather than 'kids'.

Do not:

- assume that saying it is affordable is enough - there is still concern that claiming money back will be difficult (and it needs to *feel* straightforward)
- make people feel **guilty** for either wanting to stay at home looking after their (young) children or conversely, wanting to go back to work or get a bit of time out (e.g. *'your family don't have to do it all'*)
- make messages too long-winded - many of target audience will not have the patience and/or necessary levels of literacy to hold their attention
- use generalisations that are difficult to prove and only serve to irritate - e.g. *'will do better'*
- use vague terms such as *'highest quality', 'clear standards'* or *'early learning'* - they tend to be open to misinterpretation
- try *too* hard to speak their language - e.g. avoid *'fancy'* as generally too whimsical and inappropriate for the subject, and particularly amongst those most open to childcare and/or a return to work.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background & Purpose

In order to meet PSA targets aimed at reducing child poverty and inequalities between children from disadvantaged families and those of their peers, the government has an indicator to increase the number of children who take up formal childcare. The benefits of this are two-fold:

1. Quality formal learning environments have a positive impact on child development

2. The provision of formal childcare (see footnote on last page for definition) will assist parents in entering and remaining in work.

In 2007, the DCSF ran an integrated multi-media campaign promoting affordable childcare and free early learning. The campaign was targeted towards low-income parents, of children aged 2 to 14, with the objectives of raising awareness of the benefits and affordability of childcare, and driving them to take up formal childcare.

While this activity proved to be successful in opening the conversation with parents who are already considering childcare and prompting them to take the next step, analysis revealed that the campaign was less successful in driving action from those not already considering childcare. Specifically, copy was felt to be too long and the messaging not always relevant to the parents' individual circumstances.

Moving forward, the DCSF are considering communications options for the next phase. While the primary focus will remain on low-income families, the direct marketing campaign will target those age groups where evidence shows the impact will be highest - parents of children aged 2 to 4, 5 to 7, and to a lesser extent (for the direct marketing campaign) parents of children aged 8 to 11 years.

DCSF want to build on the success of last year's communications, and are keen for the core creative concept will be retained. However, there is a need to enhance messaging and tonality to better reflect parents' circumstances and current attitudes to childcare, and identify those messages that encourage consideration and take-up of formal childcare.

The research is to be used for:

- **the Core DM campaign -** to help creative development of a suite of communications to promote the benefits of childcare and stimulate uptake of childcare places

- **wider objective / audiences -** in the PR campaign and stakeholder communication strand.

2.2 Research Objectives

The overall purpose of this research was to identify the most potent message/mix of messages to maximise take-up of formal childcare, primarily amongst low-income families.

More broadly, the research was seeking:

1. To explore and establish amongst the difference audience groups the absolute and relative importance of the various motivations and barriers to take up of the offer of formal child care. Specifically, to establish to what degree finance is a barrier to the take up of formal childcare.

2. To obtain responses to and assess the effectiveness of alternative approaches in terms of:
   – overall appeal
   – take-out of key messages
   – relevance and credibility of messages to parents
   – hierarchy of importance
   – potential to prompt action.

3. To explore detailed responses to the communications in terms of:
   – clarity of content and ease of understanding
   – length of copy
   – appropriateness of language
   – suggested modifications/ improvements.

4. To explore relative impact and effectiveness of more **empathetic** versus more **direct** tonality.

5. To determine the most appropriate balance of informal/formal childcare in the messaging, while still promoting the benefits of formal childcare.

6. To explore and asses parents' likely and possible responses to the communications especially with regards to next steps.

2.3   Method & Sample

A multi-faceted qualitative approach was adopted for this exploratory research.

2.3.1   Depth Interviews

Given the feedback from the first stage of the campaign, we felt face-to-face one on one **depth interviews** were the best way to get a truer understanding how individuals' circumstances affect reactions to stimulus materials and messages. One to one interviews also gave the researcher the chance to focus on the individual and explore reasoning and reaction in greater depth.

Although mostly a female sample of 'primary carers', 3 fathers with at least joint responsibility were interviewed in the depth sample.

The full depth interview sample was:

24 Depths			Age of Youngest Child		
Relationship Circumstances	**Working Status**	**Total**	**Pre-School Age 2-4 y/o**	**School Age 5-7 y/o**	**School Age 8-11 y/o**
Lone Parent	Working p/t or f/t	4	2	1	1
	Not working	4	0	2	2
Couple Families	Both not working	4	2	1	1
	One working (p/t under 16 hours)	4	2	1	1
	One working f/t	4	2	1	1
	Both working (p/t or f/t)	4	2	1	1
	Total Depths	24	10	7	7

We split the school age sample to provide greater weight to the split of those whose youngest child is 5-7 and those whose youngest is 8-11 year old over the pre-school age youngest children (2-4 y/o).

We also ensured a spread / quotas of:

- attitudes towards formal childcare
- attitudes towards working (if not working) - mix of those keener to return to work versus 'stay home' parents
- black and other minority groups (except Pakistani / Bangladeshi parents)

All respondents were:

- from households with incomes under £20k p/a
- not currently using formal childcare
- open to returning to work in the longer term (if not working).

2.3.2 Group Discussions

We felt **group discussions** had a role to play in the research. In particular, we felt it was preferable to conduct qualitative research among **Pakistani and Bangladeshi parents** in group scenarios, where respondents are more comfortable sharing experiences and discussing current childcare behaviour with the support of others in a similar position from their community.

We conducted separate groups of Pakistani and Bangladeshi mums - focusing on those where the age of the youngest child is of school age 5-11 y/o (mix of youngest child age 5-7 and 8-11y/o in the group).

2 Groups			Age of Youngest Child
Relationship Circumstances	**Working Status**	**Total**	**School Age 5-11 y/o**
Pakistani Mums	Not working	**1**	1
Bangladeshi Mums	Not working	**1**	1
	Total Groups	**2**	**2**

For these groups we ensured all respondents were:

- from households with incomes under £20k p/a
- not currently using formal childcare - but a spread of claimed attitudes towards using formal childcare
- not currently working but were open to returning to work in the longer term

2.3.3 'Mr & Mrs' Interviews

Couple Paired Depths ('Mr & Mrs' Interviews) were conducted alongside the main depth interview sample to get to the truth behind couples' 'joint' decision making on childcare. This involves two moderators interviewing both partners within a relationship separately regarding reasons for not using formal childcare to understand how effectively messages work with each partner and better understand whose view predominates.

6 x Mr & Mrs Interviews			Age of Youngest Child		
Relationship Circumstances	**Working Status**	**Total**	**Pre-School Age 2-4 y/o**	**School Age 5-7 y/o**	**School Age 8-11 y/o**
Couple Families	Both not working	**3**	1	1	1
	One working (p/t or f/t)	**3**	1	1	1
	Total Mr and Mrs Interviews	**6**	**2**	**2**	**2**

2.3.4 Convergent Extended Workshop

Finally, a workshop session was conducted as **convergent groups** - where two audiences with potentially conflicting views are interviewed separately and then brought together to see how differences are resolved/opinions change.

For the purposes of this research we separately conducted 1 hour long groups with:

- low-income parents using formal childcare
- and low-income parents not using formal childcare

We then brought the groups together for another 1½ hour session to see how differences are resolved / opinions change. We felt this method would aid understanding of more / less viable messaging for the campaign in a more dynamic and creative group workshop environment.

All respondents were:

- from households with incomes under £20k p/a
- open to returning to work (if not working)
- female - for a more cohesive group dynamic.

We also ensured a mix of age of youngest child (2-4; 5-7 and 8-11)

2.3.5 Logistics

Depths and Mr & Mrs Interviews lasted 1¼ hours, group discussions lasted 1½ hours and the extended workshop lasted 2½ hours.

Interviews broadly followed the topic guides appended to this report and were audio recorded for subsequent reference and analysis.

All fieldwork was conducted between 2nd and 15th July 2008 in the following areas:

- **Inner City** (London, Birmingham, Leicester)

- **Urban / Suburban** ('Outer London' / Watford, Reading, Oldham)

- **Rural** (County Durham and Attenborough in East Anglia)

A verbal presentation of findings was given to COI and DCSF representatives at DCSF's offices on 22nd July 2008. Representatives from the design agency responsible for developing the DM campaign were also present.

3. MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 Background Observations on the sample

3.1.1 Broad Observations

Across the sample we encountered a broad mix of circumstances from those not very well off - household incomes under £10,000 per annum; one or two even getting visits from Social Services - through to those taking steps to get out of the low income bracket.

Number of children in the household ranged from one to ten (sometimes from multiple partners). Within this spectrum, children's ages ranged from twenty-something to those children who just had their second birthday.

There was a decent spread of attitudes to work, from the more adamant 'stay at home' mums through to those more frustrated/bored/isolated who appeared to be keen to return to work or embark on some form of study to enhance their employment chances. There were indications that a few in the depth sample were more 'aspirational' - particularly those studying/working part-time and claiming to want a 'career'. One or two respondents had given up working due to their own long-term illness or to become a full time carer for their partner.

> *"The benefits [of working] would be probably for me mentally as well, you know, when the twins start school they'll all be at school, I'll be at home on me own but I've worked with kids as well, that's what I've always done (I worked in foster homes and stuff like that), so I'd probably go back into that but it would have to be something within school hours and I've got to have me holidays … There's not many jobs out there like that is there!?"*
>
> *(Convergent Groups, non-users of childcare, Watford)*
>
> *"I've started studying now the children are both at school, I'd love a proper career. I'm a single mum, so it'd be great to be able to [the children] them the things they want."*
>
> *(Lone parent, not working, youngest 5-7, Birmingham)*

All lone parents in our sample were mothers of school age children and were either working part-time (up to 16 hours) or at least considering a return to work. They had more time to themselves in the day and were often looking for ways to fill their time productively, hence either finding some part-time work or looking to study. In some cases they were focusing on their own needs for the first time in many years.

> *"It's strange to have this time to myself"*
>
> *(Lone parent, not working, youngest 5-7, Oldham)*
>
> *"I've got some 'me time' now."*
>
> *(Lone parent, working p/t, youngest 5-7, Reading)*

Although all were not currently using formal childcare with their youngest child, some had used formal childcare options in the past for older children, including childminders, pre-schools and playgroups, and after school clubs. Unsurprisingly, these experiences impacted on parents current attitudes towards childcare from both a positive or more negative perspective.

Across the sample, awareness of what financial help with regard to childcare was available to low income families was sporadic and lacking clarity. Only a small number who were far more open to using childcare and had sought further information / had close friends or siblings in a similar position showed any awareness of the potential help available to pay for childcare.

Characteristic of the sample was that basic awareness of categories of childcare available was quite high (i.e. pre-school options and those for children of school age) and unsurprisingly was highest amongst those more open to considering childcare options or who had used in the past. However, very detailed knowledge about what each option involved and where to find out about them was frequently lacking.

> *"It's not about not knowing what the options are on paper, it's not knowing what they're like in this area. That's the concern."*
>
> *(Couple family, not working, youngest 5-7, East Anglia)*

It should be noted that literacy and numeracy levels ranged considerably - with an extreme case or two of people struggling to read the research materials.

3.1.2   Ethnic Minority Sample

In the ethnic minority groups, levels of education/fluency in English varied, although all were able to respond to the barriers/motivation messages shown.

Overall, **Pakistani** women were older and seemed more affluent than the Bangladeshi mothers. Most of their families were abroad so their access to childcare via family was limited. One respondent (with her family) was a recent immigrant to the UK; the others were UK born.

Bangladeshi mothers seemed to be living a more traditional lifestyle - a couple were cooking / cleaning for their own family and then going over to their in-laws to do the same. Overall, the Bengali mothers seemed relatively less well off. Their husbands were employed in minimum wage jobs (restaurants, factories), and one claimed the household income was just £8,000 p.a.

One or two claimed they wanted to work to bring in some extra income to the household. However, it was felt that any employment would have to be part time to fit in with their children's routine. There were indications that employment prospects were likely to be limited to fairly basic clerical work. In was apparent that some also doubted whether their husbands would be happy about their going to work.

For both groups, most were in arranged marriages and only a minority had chosen their husbands themselves. Amongst Bengali mothers, there were indications that some had married in order to bring the husband into the UK.

3.2 Current Childcare Preferences / Options

3.2.1 The role of the family / close friends (informal childcare)

Childcare needs varied considerably, largely depending on working/studying status and whether the primary carer was able to rely on a partner to help. There were noticeable difference in the need for and regularity of childcare options between:

- *those working / studying versus those not* - increased feelings of guilt for 'putting upon' family amongst those using their parents/siblings for childcare on a much more regular basis

- *lone parents versus couples* - couple families attempted to manage their schedules/time to ensure that one of them was usually able to look after the children; lone parents, however, were much more dependent on family and friends, and increasingly so if they were working.

> *"Mostly my partner. He is out of work at the minute so I am the sole bread winner. If he is unable to look after her for any reason them my mum or his mum take charge. I sort of turn to my family first."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 8-11, Birmingham)*

As with previous research, mothers emerge as the main carer, although a few fathers were taking at least joint responsibility for the caring role if currently out of work or working shifts whereby they were able to pick up children from school, etc.

Although the parent(s) were primarily responsible for childcare, immediate family (usually parents, but also siblings) were frequently the first port of call for any childcare needs. This was because family was seen as:

- *'Trusted' / reliable* - help from a known, trustworthy source with plenty of history with the child(ren); also parents know the caring capabilities of their own parents from their own childhoods

- *Convenient / close by* - frequently parents / siblings lived close by, especially in more urban/suburban locations - aligned with strong sense of 'traditional' family values and importance attached to being close to your family

- *Keen to help* - family actively seeking to get involved in helping out

- *Spontaneous / flexible* - able to help in emergencies/at short notice (especially if close by)

- *Attentive care (one-to-one)* - child received genuine love from relatives, and parents were confident that they would get the necessary levels of attention

- *Knowledgeable about child's preferences ('a happy child')* - familiar with child's routine and knew how to indulge them

- *Free* - although not positioned as a key benefit, the fact that family did not cost anything was undoubtedly an important and persuasive factor.

> *"The good thing is I know that they're safe and that they'll be looked after if anything does happen and my mum can get in touch with me and contact me straight away."*
>
> *(Lone parent, not working, youngest 5-7, Birmingham)*
>
> *"Trust. I know that they know him inside out so obviously they know what he does like, what he doesn't like. What he can have, what he can't have. They are both easily accessible because they are both semi-retired or retired. They can be called on at the last minute at the drop of a hat which makes it a hell of a lot easier."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working p/t, youngest 2-4, Oldham)*

On the occasions when family could not help, other trusted sources included close friends and especially those with children the same age and / or who lived near-by and who the children appeared to enjoy spending time with.

> *"[My child] loves staying with my friend Heather. Her son's the same age so they get on. She lives round the corner so it really helps."*
>
> *(Couple family, both not working, youngest 2-4, Reading)*

That said, for some parents neither family nor friends were as readily available. In particular, we found that a few of the inner city and more rurally located interviewees were less able to draw on the conveniently close-by traditional extended family in the manner of the low income families from more urban or suburban locations in the research. In this situation the parents appeared to feel more compromised in terms of their ability to work and / or seek any childcare (either informal or formal). The situation was exacerbated if the primary carer parent had no partner to rely on for help, occasionally resulting in them feeling trapped or isolated if children were of pre-school age. As observed in the convergent groups, those who had moved away from close family often had a more immediate need for alternative childcare arrangements.

Factors influencing parents' propensity to ask family to help with childcare and how they felt about family help included:

- *length of time / frequency of need* - the difference between working (i.e. regular need) versus 'popping to the shops' (spontaneous, potentially irregular)

- *expectations of the family* - many appeared to want to be involved in childcare and positively looked forward to be asked to help out versus those more reluctant for one reason of another (e.g. age / illness / frailness of grand-parents)

- *working status of other family members* - far easier to use/call upon family if they are retired/not working

- *proximity (i.e. convenience)* - to home and / or work

- *perceived ease of relationship with family* - perceived competency of parents own family (or that of in-laws) in handling children e.g. whether the child enjoys time with relatives, whether there are same age children or not, are they spoilt a bit too much?

- *whether they could cope with demands of younger children* - age / illness / frailty of grandparents weighed up versus the ability/competence of younger siblings (brothers / sisters)

- *reliability of any older children* - some were inclined to let older daughters (and to a lesser extent sons) look after the younger children in an emergency - although less likely to allow apparently less attentive teenage sons to remain in charge.

> *"My wife's mum is disabled so you have got to be careful about it because although she is good at caring and looking after him obviously he is all over the place and she doesn't have the physical ability to keep up with him and the father-in-law is a bit older still so he is not used to being around kids that much. My mum and dad are a bit younger in terms of grandparents but they are out and about and they are actually abroad quite a lot, but they do have him for stints at a time. Although he sort of stays a lot at the wife's mum and dad's house he won't stay on his own without us there. Whereas if he goes to my mum and dad's he will actually sleep up there because there is more activity going on to his pace so he can keep up with that."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working p/t, youngest 2-4, Oldham)*

3.2.2 The impact of gender on current childcare preferences

The 'Mr & Mrs' interviews and the few depths with fathers revealed that the final decision regarding childcare is often likely to be made by the mother. Fathers, whilst keen to be involved, are likely to deflect final decision making responsibility onto mothers. As evidence of this imbalance in the ultimate decision making, there are indications that the mother's parents/siblings are more frequently the first port of call for help, rather than the father's - reflecting their primary role in childcare decision making.

> *"I don't want to go back to work until [her partner] is definitely settled in his job. I don't feel happy about leaving my girl with him all the time. … I wouldn't trust him to pay attention, you know."*
>
> *(Mr & Mrs, mother, one parent working, youngest 2-4, Birmingham)*

> *"She's the boss really [when it comes to childcare]. That's why the kids usually stay with her sister or her mum if we're out or whatever. Mine [parents] are more a last resort, I reckon."*
>
> *(Mr & Mrs, father, both not working, youngest 5-7, Oldham)*

3.2.3 Ethnic minority childcare preferences

For both the Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups, childcare was not really an issue as the mothers were not working. The need for childcare tended to be ad hoc / sporadic, and was met by family (mothers/sisters) or friends.

There were widespread concerns voiced over the safety of children nowadays. Media reports of child abuse and paedophiles had raised levels of concern.

In this context, leaving children in the care of family and close friends was seen as a safe and sensible option.

*"We have family as well, so we're not reliant on child minders.
And I think family's a big thing as well, because with sort of in-
laws, they'll be like 'why are you sending my grandchild there
when I'm here?' or 'why should you work in the first place?',
you know. They wouldn't feel comfortable with it."*

(Bangladeshi mothers, not working, Leicester)

As an observation, Pakistani mothers claimed to worry about the safety of both sons and daughters whereas the Bengali mothers claimed to be more concerned about the safety of their daughters.

3.3 Attitudes to and Experience of Formal Childcare Options

3.3.1 Overview

Broadly speaking, the term 'formal childcare' was not very familiar. However, on further exploration, most parents were aware of the different forms of childcare that come under the Ofsted banner.

The most familiar forms, and ones mentioned spontaneously, were **childminders, day nurseries** and **pre-school nurseries**.

Awareness of **breakfast clubs, after school clubs** and **holiday clubs** was quite high amongst parents of school age children but more often were associated with the school directly rather than being considered as 'formal childcare'. Awareness of non-school clubs was patchier.

Playgroups were often seen as events attended by children with their mothers rather than formal childcare.

Awareness of **Sure Start Children's Centres** was more limited, with some believing the centres may be government run. Across the sample, one or two claimed to have tried but failed to get a place at them.
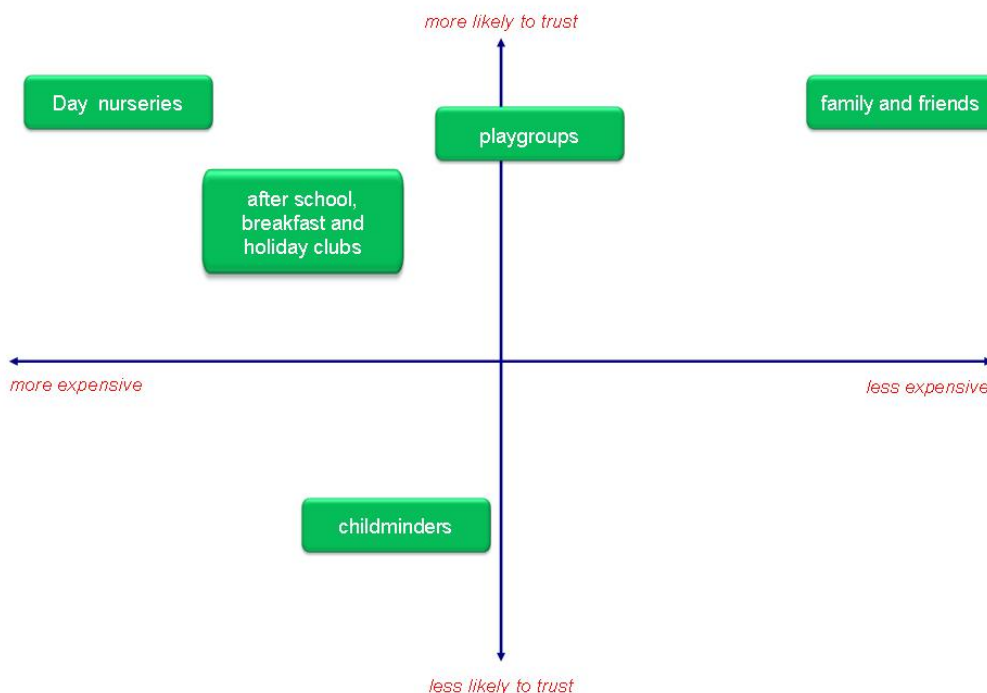
Fig 1: Mapping Attitudes to Different Forms of Childcare by Trust and Perceived Cost

Fig 1, above, maps how perceptions of trust and expense impact on attitudes to the various forms of formal and informal childcare.

Unsurprisingly, friends and family were seen as the least expensive and most trustworthy source. Interestingly, across the sample, only childminders were more consistently mistrusted, based mainly on negative word of mouth and media coverage. Barriers to other childcare options tended to be related to cost. Day nurseries were perceived to be an expensive and therefore inaccessible option for low income families. Although 'extended schools' (after school, breakfast and holiday clubs) were not seen as prohibitively expensive on a per hour basis, when factoring in number of hours and number of children, this could quickly become a costly option for some parents. Interestingly, non-school run clubs were perceived as more expensive and the lack of connection to the school (where families were more used to letting children 'out of their sight') meant the people running the clubs were less immediately trusted.

> *"I think I have phobia of child minders. I just have to see the word at that is it. No as I said, when I first started, I think it is just the stigma of not knowing the person, he or she is still a stranger and you never really know. They could have some hidden past that no one knows about so I am sceptical about that sort of area."*
>
> *(Mr & Mrs, female, one working p/t, youngest 2-4, Birmingham)*
>
> *"Activities - it costs; it's not for free. ... It's like a play scheme. Adventure and playing. If they go to ballet dance then you pay a fee and it's around £25 for 3 classes a week or something like that. If you've got 3 children it's a bit difficult! ... It's only for parents who are working."*
>
> *(Pakistani mothers, not working, Leicester)*

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> *"Last year I asked [about childminders] but it was very expensive. Half your wage would go to them! It's about £70 a week, I think."*

> *(Couple Family, one working f/t, youngest 2-4, County Durham)*

To summarise, the factors influencing attitudes to formal childcare included:

- *attitudes to work:* those who had returned to work or who were more open to returning to work were more inclined to look at alternative forms of childcare to help them achieve their goals.

  > *"I don't really need a childminder at the moment, and unless I went back to work, but I prefer to go back to work when she starts school, so September when she starts school, I prefer to start work then and try and see if I can get some hours around her at school, because then I know she's safe then, because I know who she's going to be with, unless I really know the person really well."*

  > *(Couple family, both not working, youngest 2-4, Reading)*

- *age of children:* those with children of school age were more likely to think about before and after-school options and were more inclined to trust these forms of childcare when they were associated with the school.

  > *"I think if you've got older children, they can tell you what's going on. They can sort of say, you know, 'I really like going to the child-minder, I really want to go there, there's nice children for me to play with and she's really kind to me.' But a young child, under the age of three and a half, how are they going to communicate with you? Before they really start being able to vocalise things. If I'd had to have the choice, I probably would have gone for a nursery rather than a child-minder. Because at least then I'd know there's other people about, keeping an eye."*

  > *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 2-4, East Anglia)*

- *number of children:* this is a complex area which influenced their attitudes in a number of ways:

  - if they had children at different stages the idea of juggling care for school age children and full-time care for younger children could be off-putting ('too much hassle')

  - parents of an only child were often concerned that they might become isolated at home and this could make formal childcare seem more appealing.

    > *"Most of the time my shifts - I do a lot of hours over the weekend because that is where the higher rate of pay is so most of my hours are crammed into a weekend and then shuffled around in the week so between us we can take her to school. That way, we don't need childminders, or whatever."*

    > *(Mr & Mrs, female, one working p/t, youngest 2-4, Birmingham)*

- *sociability of children:* parents were more reluctant to seek formal childcare, especially playgroups / nurseries, when their children were shy / less confident (which paradoxically may have been contributing to their children's lack of confidence).

> *"I just think a lot of it depends on the sort of child you've got, whether they're the shy and retiring home-loving type, or whether they're more gregarious and outgoing. You just have to judge it by your own child, really."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working p/t, youngest 2-4, London)*

- *negative media coverage* about childminders, children's homes seemed to have had a very negative impact about people's views on formal childcare in general

> *"I think it is like the scary stories that you come across of people going into the playgroups. And I think it sort of put me off in a way of like trusting a stranger to look after my child."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 8-11, Birmingham)*

> *"I wouldn't trust a child minder. No offence but I wouldn't use them as well. ... You hear all the stories. ... And it's the money you have to pay for a child minder as well."*
>
> *(Bangladeshi mothers, not working, Leicester)*

The other key factor influencing attitudes to childcare is the parents' own *previous experience* of using or having been placed in formal childcare:

- *own experience* of childcare could have a considerable impact – positive and negative (abuse) experiences in children's homes/foster care appeared to have had an impact on attitudes to formal childcare when they had become parents
- *previous experience of using formal childcare:* could likewise work in both a positive and negative way:

  - **negative:** *'it didn't meet my needs'* - parents who had tried it and found it either inflexible, unavailable, inaccessible, too expensive, or simply not constructive (child unhappy, neglected, bored); one parent had also experienced a childminder leaving their child behind on an excursion.

  - **positive**: witnessing the benefit to children (both in terms of the fun they had and also what they had learnt) at mother and toddler groups and after school clubs. This concurred with the view that childcare *could* contribute towards a good start to life for the children.

    > *"There is one [playgroup] he has been to in the past that I stopped him going to because I thought it was unsafe. Because actually I went over myself and had a look at it and I just didn't like the people."*
    >
    > *(Couple family, one working p/t, youngest 2-4, Oldham)*

"I do think they learn a lot, don't they, they're mixing, my daughter didn't know how to share, she wouldn't share but she did learn to share with other kids - it sort of gives them the opportunity to interact with other kids."

(Childcare Users, Convergent Group, Watford)

"I didn't really do anything with pre-schools, but playgroups, yeah, I think they're a brilliant idea, 'cause you get to meet lots of people of their own ages and we actually get to talk to other mums. While the kids are off playing, we actually get to have a cup of tea and talk to other mums and you think, 'Thank God it's time out!'"

(Couple family, both not working, youngest 2-4, Reading)

"I was kind of put off the experience of childminders through my sister really, because she had a bit of a bad experience, where she had a childminder who had four daughters, and sent her son along to her, and she was really overly religious, and she used to sort of make my sister's son sit at the table, and he wasn't allowed anything to eat until he said his grace, and she got really angry if he didn't say it."

(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 2-4, East Anglia)

3.3.2 Impact of gender on attitudes to formal childcare options

The Mr & Mrs interview technique showed how complex and emotionally fraught the subject of childcare and / or returning to work could be. For example, some fathers held quite traditional views about the mother's role in rearing their children and wanted their partners to stay at home and look after their children. Conversely, others were keen for their partners to go out and earn some extra money whilst the mother was reluctant to go back to work. At the same time, some mothers were keen to go back to work and/or study but felt unable to raise the issue with their partner, especially one who expected them to stay at home. Others preferred to stay at home despite the need for additional income.

"She wants to go back to work and I'm not stopping her. I just feel she should wait 'til [the child] is in school really."

(Mr & Mrs, father, both not working, youngest 2-4, Birmingham)

The technique also demonstrated that mothers and fathers had different preferences regarding motivating messages - fathers seemed especially concerned with more rational issues relating to cost and safety. Whilst these were important to mothers they also wanted to be reassured they were doing the best thing for their children so that they did not feel guilty about wanting to back to work or get a bit of time out. When assessing the benefits of different childcare options, mothers also admitted to going on their 'gut instinct' as much as anything else. Fathers seemed to need more tangible reassurances. In the first instance, however, it appears important that messaging works best for mothers as they are most likely to have the final say in childcare options.

3.3.3 Ethnic minority attitudes to formal childcare options

Ethnic minority parents were quite open to the idea of any clubs associated with the school. This type of childcare was often positioned as an additional learning opportunity rather than simply them being looked after.

Most of their children were also attending religious classes at the mosque between about 5pm and 7pm most weekday evenings and the need for childcare was as such limited. However, some in both groups did voice doubts about whether those running the medrassah had been properly [CRB] checked.

> *"With me, I wouldn't just give her to any mosque - the place she goes, the lady teaches her in her own house and I've got a lot of relatives that go there and that's what attracted me. I wouldn't just go into a mosque and say to my daughter 'this is the mosque you're going to', without knowing anybody that goes there."*
>
> *(Bangladeshi mothers, not working, Leicester)*

Key barriers to formal childcare were similar to the rest of the sample and were mainly linked to concerns about trust and cost.

> *"I've seen a few documentaries on Watchdog and the way kids are being treated in private nurseries, which has really put me off because you think that you can trust these people and leave your kids but if you're at work you get more tension because you're thinking about how your kids are being treated - so I'd find that more stressful - whereas if it's with a family member, you know what they're doing, you know that they're safe. I'm not blaming them all but you hear stories."*
>
> *(Pakistani mothers, not working, Leicester)*

3.4 Barriers to Formal Childcare

3.4.1 Overview

Amongst those *more open* to the idea of working the major barriers to formal childcare were a perception that it might be complicated to sort out and, to a lesser extent, concerns about the quality of care. Amongst those more open to the take up of formal childcare, there were concerns about cost and uncertainty about whether the childcare available would be flexible enough to meet their requirements.

Amongst those *less open* to the idea of formal childcare, the main 'top of mind' barriers were lack of need and a sense of guilt if they were to take up childcare.
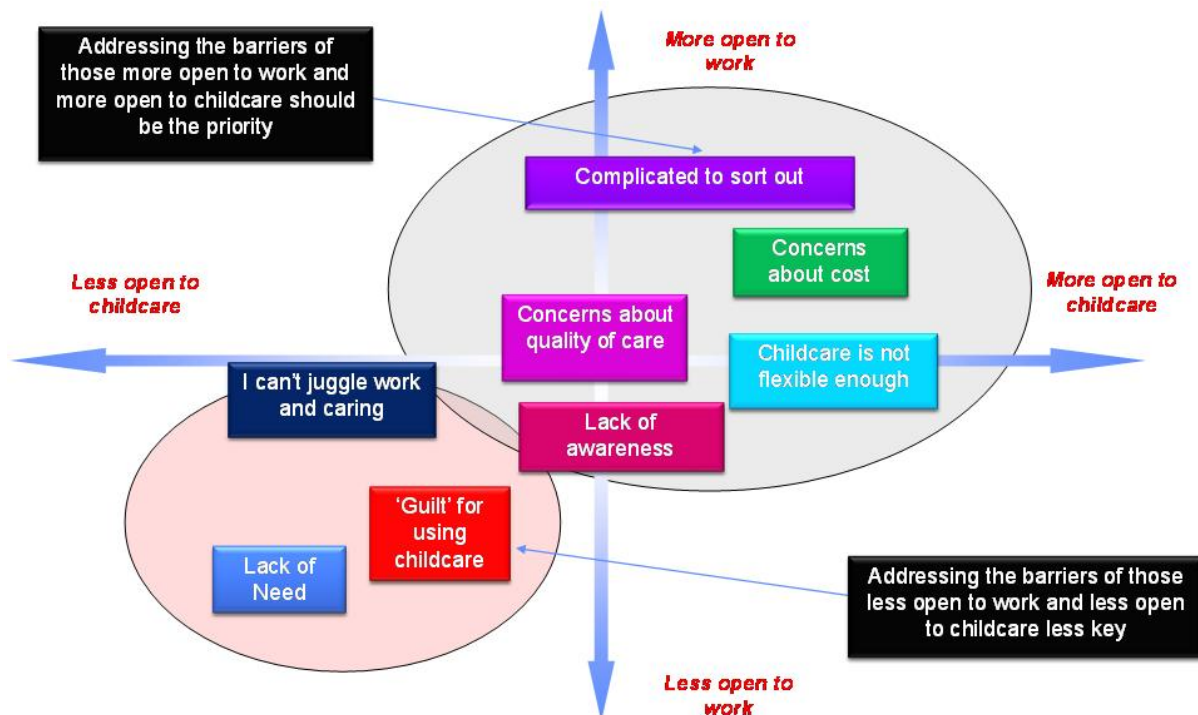
Fig. 2 above 'maps' the barriers against attitude. The diagram shows that addressing barriers relevant to those parents more open to work and childcare might be considered the priority, particularly those rational concerns that theoretically ought to be easier to tackle. In contrast, the more emotional barriers of those less open to childcare or a return to work (i.e. a lack of need, and guilt for using childcare) are likely to be harder to address but might also be considered less of a priority given the audience are unlikely to be as receptive to motivation messages.

3.4.2 Overall key barriers

The barriers fell into two broad categories: rational and emotional.

Across the sample there were a high number of rational (and more addressable) barriers spontaneously suggested by parents. **Rational** barriers which can be addressed more readily included:

- concerns about cost: *'childcare is expensive', 'I'd only be working to pay for childcare'*

- lack of awareness of options: *'I don't know where to get information about childcare'*
- concerns about juggling work and caring for their children: *'the childcare available isn't flexible enough'*

- lack of convenient availability: '*I have kids of different ages - it's too complicated to sort out*'

- lack of need: *'I'll be worse off if I work / I'll lose out on benefits'*.

*"It's expensive - one of my friends had put her daughter in a
nursery and she's paying like £100 a week. I think she's getting
vouchers or something but things like that put me off. I would
prefer my kids to stay with family rather than with outsiders or
at a nursery, especially if it's costing that sort of money."*

(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 5-7, London)

*"I'm thinking about going back to work but I need to find a job
that would allow me to go to work; drop the kids off, you know,
within the school hours and maybe within the hours of
breakfast club and after school club, to be able to go work and
be able to still get them but not every job is a 9-5 or even
shorter day or flexible enough to allow the childcare
arrangements to happen."*

(Lone parent, not working, youngest 8-11, County Durham)

The **emotional** barriers tended to reflect a resistance to change and included:

- guilt for using childcare and thus not being a good mother: '*the best place for the child
  is with me', 'I don't want to miss out on my child growing up*'

- lack of need: *'going back to work is too daunting', 'I want to stay at home with my
  kids'.*

  *"I think my mum would be a bit put out, to be fair. I think she
  would think she was doing something wrong or she hadn't done
  enough with her. I mean, she has done nursery rhymes right
  through to pre-school books with her so I think she would feel a
  bit put out."*

  *(Mr & Mrs, mother, both not working, youngest 2-4,
  Birmingham)*

  *"If I am having a late night or if she is at my mum's she would
  have had a bath, have her pyjamas on and she'll be ready for
  bed and fine. She has let everything out, she has had her time
  to wind down. But it would be a different story if I was collecting
  her from a child minder at that time and there were other kids
  there and they were still playing. I think her brain would still be
  buzzing."*

  (Lone parent, working, youngest child 2-4, County Durham)

Concerns about the quality of care and a 'fear of the unknown' ('*I don't trust anyone outside
the family to look after my children*') were voiced across the sample, irrespective of how open
they were to returning to work or aware of the potential *benefits* of childcare.

"Yeah, you've got to trust the people, because you've got a lot of people that come across really, really fantastic and yeah, you're brilliant with children and all the rest of it, and then you get some people you talk to, and then they say, oh yeah, but you think she's nice to your children but have they told you that she slaps them on the legs when they do wrong, and I'm thinking to myself, well no they haven't actually."

(Couple family, both not working, youngest 2-4, Reading)

Lack of trust in those providing formal childcare (*'How will I know if childcare is safe for my child'*) operated as a barrier on both a rational and emotional level.

"If you've got somebody who's willing to do childcare, they should be willing to let you go and spend an hour or so with them, with your children, in order to make sure that you're comfortable with them, the children are comfortable with them and so I know they're safe and happy. I don't want to just leave them with somebody and go out the door, and as soon as I've gone out the door, my daughter's crying her eyes out, sat in a corner, and no one's sorting her out because 'she's just a whinge bag basically'. No, 'cause all kids are different."

(Couple family, both not working, youngest 2-4, Reading)

i. Lack of need

Statements which prompted stronger identification were:

- I'll be worse off if I work / I'll lose out on benefits
- Going back to work is too daunting
- I want to stay at home with my kids

Statements which prompted little identification were:

- Childcare is for career women
- Work / a career isn't important to me.

Respondents who more readily identified with the statements in this 'Lack of Need' category were often the 'stay at home' mothers who tended to be least open to returning to/finding work or changing their childcare arrangements. *["I'll be worse off if I work / I'll lose out on benefits"]*. However, as the interview progressed it often transpired that they believed they would be worse off financially if they were to go back to work.

"If I went back to work my housing benefit gets cut so how would that help? It's too much of a headache to bother."

(Couple family, both not working, youngest 8-11, London)

"In one way yes [I'd like to go back to work] and in one way no. I wouldn't mind, but it is that expense thing. If I go back to work, I would have to get a job from ten until two, so that I have got the hour before to take them to school and the hour, and not many jobs are like that, you can't get them."

(Couple family, both not working, youngest 5-7, East Anglia)

For the long term unemployed, rejoining the workplace can be rather overwhelming which made the option of staying at home to look after the children an easier choice. *["Going back to work is too daunting"].*

Others had made an active choice to stay at home and look after their children while they were young. For them the statement *"I want to stay at home with my kids"* had more resonance.

There were indications that 'Lack of Need' barriers tied in more with traditional values of the man as breadwinner and the woman as housewife and mother. Furthermore, where the respondent's partner was earning enough to meet the household's needs there was a suggestion that they did not need to work as well.

Most respondents, however, baulked at identifying themselves as being *"happy on benefits"* or agreeing with *"My partner works so I don't need to"*. They saw these phrases as somewhat derogatory and implying that they were lazy. Indeed, they recognised that being in work had benefits other than financial, e.g. meeting new people, mental stimulation, and gaining confidence.

> *"There's a difference between wanting to see your kids grow up and be there for them and not working because you just can't be bothered. I don't know what I'd do for work, I admit that, but I don't think I would be so out of order as to say cos he works, I ain't."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working p/t, youngest 5-7, County Durham)*

Although many believed the expense of childcare made it somewhat inaccessible, few agreed that *"childcare is for career women"* only. The statement was seen as something of an over-generalisation.

> *"Career women sounds dead middle class. It's not really true. It isn't just for career women only, but having a bit of money does help I think. It's dead expensive."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working p/t, youngest 2-4, Oldham)*

ii. Guilt of using childcare and thus not being a good mother

The following statements in this group prompted generally widespread identification:

- I don't want to miss out on my child growing up
- the best place for the child is with me

However, *"My family expect me to look after my children"* met with little support.

Guilt was a strong emotional barrier for most respondents. However, as with 'Lack of Need', those most strongly identifying with 'Guilt' barriers tended to be those furthest away from returning to work or looking for alternative childcare options.

For some mothers, there was a strong desire/sense of duty that they should stay at home and not miss out on their child growing up, and some were adamant that their child was best off with them. This belief often came from negative experiences of childcare and/or word of mouth and media stories, which coloured their attitude to taking up childcare options for their children.

There was less support for the statement *"Helping out with kids is what families are for"*, It came across as somewhat too strong and too self-regarding to prompt much identification.

> *"Well, it's not their duty but it would be nice. That's quite a strong thing to say about your family though. You're taking it for granted that your family are there to look after your kids and, I don't know, I wouldn't like my sister dumping her kids on me!"*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 5-7, London)*

Few spontaneously suggested that their parent would be offended if not asked. Most thought their parents would be supportive of the decisions they made. However, when prompted, there was some acknowledgement that the statement was not unreasonable. In one or two cases, the child's grandmother had taken the primary childcare role for a few years; in these situations it was recognised that it could be difficult, even possibly hurtful, to take up formal childcare.

> *"I think, yes, she'd be very offended. Maybe not so much if I used a nursery, but she certainly would be if I used a child-minder, I think."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 2-4, East Anglia)*
>
> *"Well yes, my mother would wonder what she had done wrong after all these years."*
>
> *(Couple Family, one work p/t, youngest 2-4, Birmingham)*

Within the Muslim community, especially the Bangladeshis, where families tended to be more traditional and close-knit, there was some feeling that cultural expectations were more likely to require childcare to be kept within the family.

Whilst mothers were expected to be responsible for organising their children's care, most thought *"My family expect me to look after my children"* was too strong a statement.

> *"My family want what's best for me and my children, not for me to be chained to the house. I think that's a bit silly, that one."*
>
> *(Bangladeshi mothers, not working, Leicester)*

iii. Concerns about cost

Statements which prompted stronger identification were:

- Childcare is expensive
- It'll be a huge hassle if my benefits change
- I'd only be working to pay for childcare.

> *"Very expensive, yes. Ridiculously expensive. I've known friends of mine, who've had really good jobs, and they just give up, because they're just spending on child-care what they're earning. It's just pointless."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 2-4, East Anglia)*

> *"The horrendous cost of it. Anybody I know who's got under
> school-age children struggles. I think the child has to reach
> about three and a half, or something, before they'll offer the full
> funding, but people are still going to be struggling, even before
> that age. So why doesn't the government just offer funding right
> the way through for those people?"*
>
> *(Couple family, one working p/t, youngest 5-7, County Durham)*

There was an overwhelming perception that childcare **is** expensive and that the cost of childcare was a key barrier to take up. Importantly, it is a barrier even amongst those keener to return to work and those most open to using formal childcare. *"I'd only be working to pay for childcare"* particularly resonated amongst those who have looked at or considered childcare options. It also highlighted the fact that many felt it may not be financially or emotionally worthwhile going back to work.

> *"If I'm working to pay someone else's wages and I'm losing my
> benefits then what's the point? I'd rather bring my kids up
> myself."*
>
> *(Non-users of childcare, Convergent Group, Watford)*

Many respondents who were not working full-time readily identified with *"It'll be a huge hassle if my benefits change"*. However, some felt that the statement implied that they were being recalcitrant and work-shy.

Whilst respondents agreed in principle with *"My family is free / childcare isn't"* most were uncomfortable with the statement and saw it as rather callous and selfish.

Across the sample there was little clear knowledge of the tax credit system. Thus while *"Claiming help through tax credits is too complicated"* rang true only a small minority who have looked into it could relate to the statement and vouch for its accuracy.

iv. Concerns about the quality of childcare - resulting in lack of trust

Across the sample, concerns about safety and quality of care are the most front of mind barriers to formal childcare. These concerns and fears were sometimes reinforced by media stories and negative word of mouth. Thus, nearly all respondents picked out *"How will I know if childcare is safe for my child?"*.

Although there was some support for *"I don't trust anyone outside the family to look after my children"* there was some feeling that including close friends would be a more accurate reflection of their current 'circle of trust'. Parents were also more likely to trust childcare affiliated to schools.

> *"I would say that that is a bit strong, to not trust anyone. If that
> was my only option then maybe I would have to look into it but
> it wouldn't be my first option."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 8-11, Birmingham)*

There was some feeling that the 'quality of care' barriers omitted any recognition of the child being 'happy' or 'enjoying childcare'.

> *"Who's to guarantee that they would not be having fun if they're in childcare? - who says childcare's not going to be fun?"*
>
> *(Lone parent, working, youngest 2-4, London)*

The age of the child has some bearing on parents' concerns. Parents who have not used formal childcare were more apprehensive with regard to younger children who were less able to articulate their experiences. However, as children got older parental concerns abated somewhat.

> *"My children are very clingy and they're very shy and they're introverts almost. I had problems putting them in childcare when they were little (in nursery) and I decided not to put them through it because I couldn't leave them, they weren't happy, I think they were just very young but now they're fine in school, they're doing okay in school, it's easier to leave them with strangers now than it was before. To say there's nothing out there is a little bit blind."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 5-7, London)*

There was less identification with *"I don't believe there is any good quality childcare near me"*, which was felt to be an over-generalisation and somewhat extreme. Some also questioned whether they would be able to make such a judgement if they have never looked into what was available locally in terms of formal childcare.

> *"That's a little dramatic. You'd have to be fairly blinkered to think that."*
>
> *(Mr & Mrs, father, one working, youngest 5-7, County Durham)*

v. 'I can't juggle work and care for my kids'

There was strong identification with the 'catch all' statement, *"The childcare available isn't flexible enough"*, particularly amongst those who have tried it in the past or explored their options, and also amongst some who are considering returning to work. However, there were indications that mixing barriers to childcare and issues concerning return to work are potentially confusing.

The more emotional messages regarding 'being there' for the children *("I want to make sure my kids get to school", "I want to be there when my kids get home from school", and "How would I get them to school in the mornings and still get to work?")* resonated most with the 'stay at home' mothers, i.e. those who were not looking for work.

Statements attracting less support included:

- *"I would like a job that fits around the school day but I can't find one"* which some found contradictory - if they found such a job then would there be a need for childcare?;

- *"What would I do during the school holidays or when they are ill?"* - although this was not a front of mind barrier to childcare, there was some feeling that concerns about holidays and illness would still be there even if they did take up formal childcare.

> *"It's quite difficult to find a well paid part time job that fits in with school. So I appreciate that. But then again, that's cos I'm trying to avoid childcare costs?"*
>
> *(Convergent Groups, non-users of childcare, Watford)*

vi. Lack of convenient availability

There was fairly strong identification with the catch-all statement *"The childcare available doesn't meet my needs"*. However, it was fairly ambiguous and open to different interpretations, e.g.:

- I don't have a need [for childcare]
- childcare isn't flexible enough
- childcare costs too much.

> *"It doesn't work for me, no. Part of that is that I don't need it more than a couple of times a week, and they charge for a minimum number of sessions. Why can't it be pay as you go?"*
>
> *(Couple family, both working, youngest child 8-11, East Anglia)*

Those with children of different ages could empathise with *"I have kids of different ages – it's too complicated to sort out"* and recognised the potential childcare headache, especially when they were also juggling the requirements of a job. However, the statement assumed a fairly comprehensive awareness of the options available, e.g. before, during and after school hours.

The use of the word 'benefits' in *"The hassle of sorting out childcare outweighs the benefits"* confused those receiving welfare payments who assumed it referred to the impact of childcare costs on State benefits.

The final barrier in this group, *"12.5 hours a week free childcare is too little to do anything constructive"* was neither very salient nor top of mind as many were not aware that they could get this amount of free childcare.

vii. Lack of awareness of options and of the benefits to children

There was often little **detailed** knowledge about different childcare options, e.g. what the options involved (hours, activities, ages of children) and where to get local information.

There were high levels of identification with *"I don't know where to get information about childcare"* and *"I don't understand what childcare involves"*. Both these statements reflected parents' apprehensiveness about putting their children in places that they have not tried before or with people they did not know. Furthermore, many parents of younger children did not know where to start looking for information about childcare.

> *"Well, yeah, I don't know what is available or what they do as well. Do they just sit in your house with them all day or do they take them out?"*
>
> *(Mr & Mrs, father, one working p/t, youngest 2-4, Birmingham)*

Agreement with *"My child is too young to be put in to childcare"* lessened as the child got older; but the thought was quite salient with parents of 2-4 year olds. Some argued that the suitability of childcare rather depended on the character of the child rather than his/her age - it was felt that a robust and social child would probably do well in childcare.

Parents acknowledged that childcare could/should be fun for the child, so *"At this age they need to have fun and not be stuck in childcare"* struck a rather discordant note. 'Stuck in' was seen as too emotive a term (and often inaccurate). However, the thought resonated amongst mothers of younger children.

"I don't know what childcare is available" lacked credibility amongst this target audience. They felt they did know what the childcare options were, but wanted to know where to get more detailed local information.

viii.   *Prioritising addressing key barriers*

The priority should be to address the barriers that those who are more open to work and/or take up of formal childcare identify with. Figure 4 below sets this out. The barrier statements in the top right hand corner represent the more challengeable/addressable barriers of those more open to both messages about the benefits of both working and childcare. In this respect, issues with respect to flexibility/complications of sorting out childcare, its perceived expense, a lack of information and doubts about the quality of care are considered the priority areas to be addressed. In contrast, it may be more difficult to address concerns in the bottom left hand corner - those least open to childcare and the benefits of working - where emotional barriers are more entrenched (e.g. 'guilt' about using childcare, or a desire to be a 'stay at home' parent).
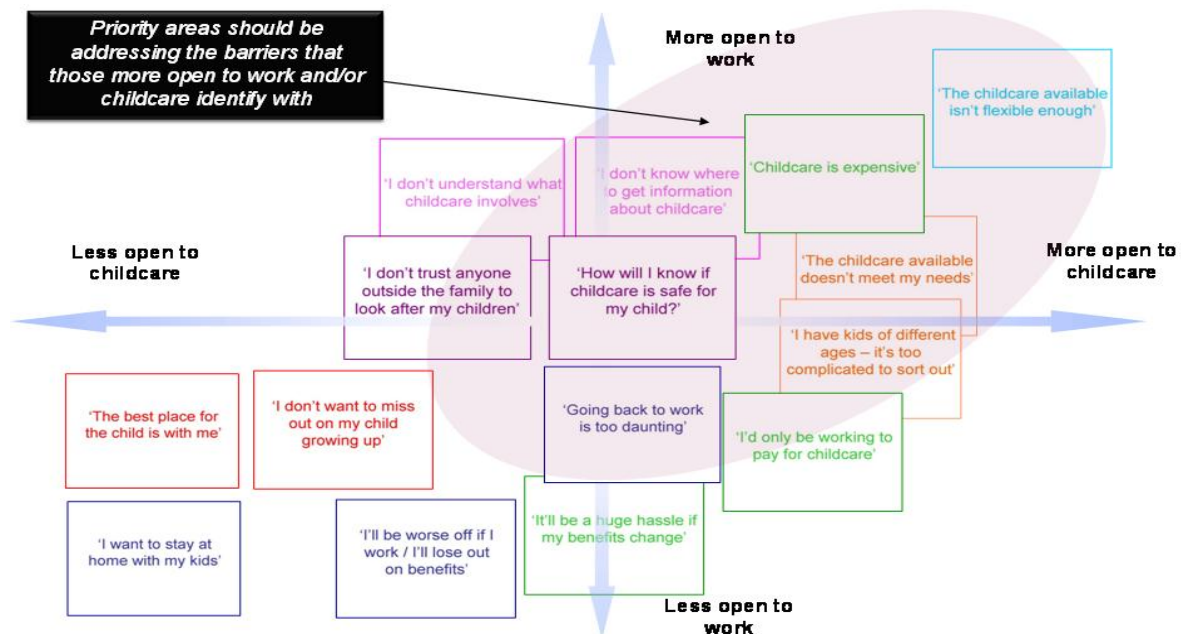
3.5   Childcare: The 'Perfect Set Up'

When asked to consider how childcare *could* be made to work for them in an ideal world, even the parents who were most closed to the possibilities of formal childcare were able to generate some potential attributes of a perfect set up that could make the idea work for them.
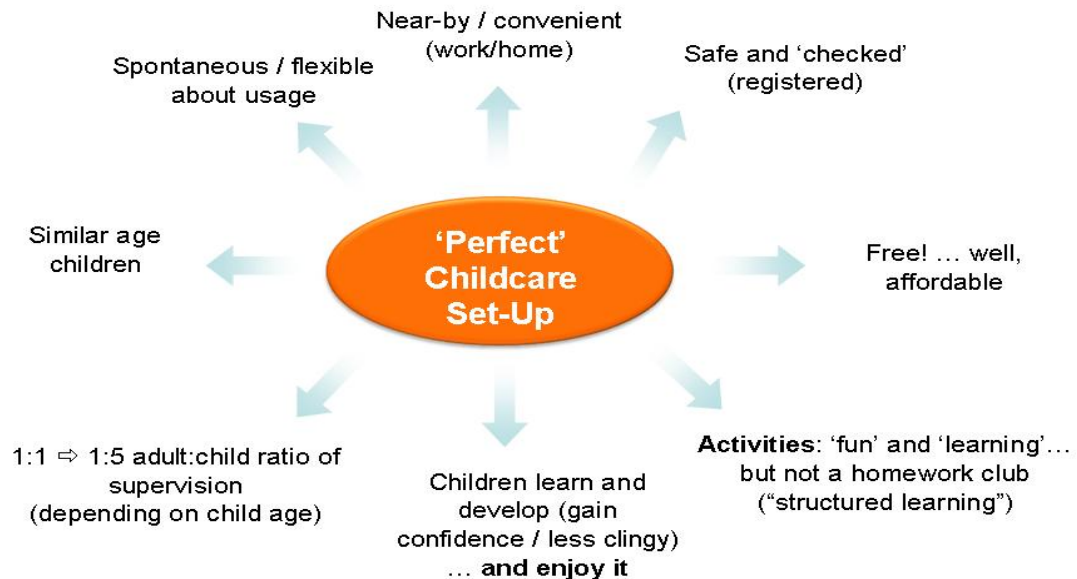
Fig 5: The 'Perfect' Childcare Set-Up

Particularly important attributes were:

- the desire for more flexibility with regard usage of and payment for formal childcare options (i.e. 'pay as you go' childcare)

- reassurance that 'what went on behind closed doors' was both safe and beneficial for children

- reinforcement that activities were fun but ideally helping develop children's skills/learning - though not a homework club (especially for those of school age)

- their children were getting sufficient attention, not lost in the midst of many children (although this requirement was age dependent - there was more desire for younger children to get nearer one-to-one supervision).

In the **convergent groups**, we explored what concerns and questions mothers who were non-users of formal childcare had for those who *were* using formal childcare options as a way of understanding what might reassure and challenge the perceptions of non-users. Concerns tended to fall under three key areas: trust/safety, cost and guilt for using childcare.

Table 1: Convergent Groups - What can non-users learn from the users ('the converted')

Concerns:	What challenged these perceptions?
Trust / Safety *"You can't trust those outside the family."* *"You don't know what goes on behind closed doors at a childminder's home."* *"They can't tell you if there's something wrong when they're under 3."*	• There are increasingly CCTV / webcams that parents can use online to see what is happening at nurseries, etc. • Ability to look through Key worker's journals and examine their credentials was also reassuring.
Cost *"It's expensive. You have to pay for school clubs termly and what if your child decides they don't like it?"* *'We'd only be working to pay for all day nurseries."*	• School clubs *can* be as cheap as £2 • Many of them can be paid for on a pay as you go basis rather than by the term

Guilt
 	
"Leaving under-3s at nurseries is just wrong! If you have children you're supposed to look after them - they're best off with me!"
"I want to see them grow up."
"My child is shy and clingy - I wouldn't want to put them through it."
	• You can start off being with your child at mother and toddler groups ease yourself and your child in gently
	• children get something out of it:
	  – constructive activities e.g. painting or learning the ABC
	  – playing with children their own age, learning to share
	  – building confidence, becoming 'less clingy'
	• Parents *also* get something out of it (particularly mother and children clubs):
	  – chance to meet other mums / expand social networks
	  – by extending WOM supervision / recommendation helping to make forms of childcare more accountable

3.6   Reaction to Possible Motivation Messages

3.6.1   Overview

Across the sample, the key message categories with more universal resonance included:

- **Kids Get the Best Start** - emotional messaging was hard for even the most resistant parents to ignore. Particularly effective buzz words included: *'meeting new friends'*, *'learning new things'*, *'developing new skills'* and *'being better prepared'* for school.

- **Affordability -** rational messaging with a quantifiable, tangible benefit, inviting and inclusive for low income parents. Positioned correctly these were messages encouraging positive action (and dispelling a key concern about the cost of childcare).

- **A Safe, Secure Environment** - rational, but fairly dry messaging although the mention of Ofsted succeeded partly in injecting some objectivity into respondents' reasoning, allaying certain fears and apprehensions. However, concerns about quality of care were not easy to overcome and Ofsted messaging will need to work in conjunction with other benefits to create a compelling message statement (e.g. 'kids get the best start', etc.).

Reaction to other messages depended on factors such as working or family status as well as attitudes to and/or readiness to consider work. Other important messages with greater overall appeal included:

- **Benefits to mum working** (*'making new friends'; 'bringing in extra money'; 'teaching children the value of work'*) were important reminders for both mothers and fathers alike - particularly resonating with those recently returned to work / closer to thinking about taking the initial steps (e.g. seeking and/or started part time work or study)

- **Alongside the family** - parents appreciated the empathetic nature of the statement that is seen as recognising the value of time spent with the family. That their position was understood helped lend credibility to the overall campaign (implying empathy).

- **Spelling out their options -** though something of a 'hygiene factor' and not a headline message, it is important that the childcare options are known and understood due to awareness about what each option entailed being patchy.

The reasons why other messages / categories had less appeal included:

- *Too demanding* - tonality was important; the more demanding or nagging the messaging the more likely it was to rile many parents (e.g. *'your family don't have to do it all'* or *'ask your employer about childcare vouchers'*).

- *Too long-winded* - e.g. the Suits Your Needs category tried to spell out the options too methodically. Many parents had either fairly short attention spans and/or lower levels of overall literacy and thus these messages were seen as somewhat challenging to take on board.

- *Too generalised* - phrases such as *'research shows'* and absolute terms such as *'will do better'* seen as catch-all statements that did not account for individual circumstances.

- *Easy to misinterpret* - phrases such as *'early learning'* or *'quality childcare'* sometimes misconstrued by parents as care they can and do provide - i.e. not differentiating informal from formal care options.

3.6.2 More Potent Messages (The messages with more universal appeal)

i. Popular Emotional Messages

Across the sample, messages about children's learning and development were popular and tapped into the desire to see their children enjoy themselves and mixing with other children their own age. In this respect it was widely accepted that children's development at an early age was important to help them bond with other children and become less clingy.

In this respect, three of the **'Kids Get the Best Start in Life'** messages stood out as key motivators for many parents.

Your children could be learning new things and developing new skills in a safe, fun environment.	How about giving your kids a chance to play with other children their own age and make new friends?	Research shows that good quality early learning gives children the best start in life and means they're better prepared for school.

'Your children could be learning new things and developing new skills in a safe, fun environment' - was a softer message resonating across all age groups, working status and gender. It was positioned as realistic, and not over-promising (*'could'* as opposed to *'will'*). The message also used a number of key phrases/words that parents strongly identified with, including:

- 'learning new things'
- 'developing new skills'
- 'safe'
- 'fun'

> *"I think that's the better statement, that one ['better prepared']. It's not actually saying, 'your child will do better when they start school'. I mean who the hell do they think they are saying that, you know? I think it's better to say they're 'better prepared' for school, it sounds right."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 2-4, East Anglia)*

The message also managed to incorporate two key positive motivating messages ('child learning' and 'safe environment') in a single, succinct statement.

> *"That [message] says it all. It's got all the things you want to hear."*

(Lone parent, working, youngest 5-7, Reading)

'How about giving your kids a chance to play with other children their own age and make new friends?' - was a popular sentiment across the sample, but a particularly important motivator with those not working. In particular, this alluded to parental fears of their children's isolation (especially if an only child), and if children were likely to be more clingy / less confident when starting school if they spent a lot of their pre-school life at home. There were indications that parents not working also recognised their own isolation in the sentiment, and subtly tapped into own fears of social isolation. Crucially, the softer tone was seen as gently encouraging rather than demanding of parents which helped them take the message on board rather than deflect.

> *"Because if they go to a club and that afterwards, they do actually get to mix in with more kids cause in their class they're only with the children that's in their class, whereas if they go to after school clubs, they're with other children from other schools and other groups, and they're actually making and creating new friends, so that's a good thing, yeah."*
>
> *(Couple family, both not working, youngest 2-4, Reading)*

'Research shows that good quality early learning gives children the best start in life and means they're better prepared for school' - particularly resonates with those with younger children. However, the idea that children will be *'better prepared for school'* strikes a chord across the sample and is much preferred to absolute terms such as *'will do better'*. The phrase *'Research shows'* was popular amongst a minority of more aspirational parents, but was far less popular with the majority of the low-income parents. The phrase was seen as slightly aggressive, too generic and lacking acknowledgement of their own or their children's individual circumstances.

> *"She actually went to the nursery all day instead of part time, cause all my other kids, I tried to get them in full time but they weren't willing, the others only done half a day, but she's actually my brightest one of them all, cause she actually done morning and afternoon, so she actually learnt it twice, so it went in quicker."*
>
> *(Couple family, both not working, youngest 2-4, Reading)*
>
> *"Where is the evidence of this research? It's too easy to say stuff like that, it doesn't mean anything."*
>
> *(Couple family, one parent working f/t, youngest 2-4, East Anglia)*

In addition, *'good quality early learning'* was seen as a slightly contentious phrase because it did not differentiate formal and informal childcare, and could imply that any 'early learning' at home was not likely to be good quality. A few parents also queried what defined 'good quality' childcare anyway and how exactly they or anyone else could judge this.

Other emotional messages with more widespread appeal included:

Alongside the valuable time they spend with the family, children can get a great deal out of early learning and after school clubs.	Like the chance to go back to work or do some studying? Getting some good, safe help in looking after your children could be the answer.	Going back to work brings in extra money and also helps your children understand how working benefits the whole family. To help you get there we've got lots of options for looking after your children.

'Alongside the valuable time they spend with the family, children can get a great deal out of early learning and after school clubs' (Alongside Family Help category) - appealed due to its empathetic, positive and well-balanced tone. It reassured parents that children could benefit from formal childcare whilst not devaluing the role of family and/or friends. Some references to the benefits of informal childcare were seen as adding a bit of credibility to the overall campaign, and helped off-set the otherwise singular focus on the benefits of formal childcare.

"… because now my children are at an age where they know what's right and wrong, and if anybody touches them or anybody says anything, they know it's wrong and by going to these clubs they will learn a lot and they will know how to interact with people and build relationships, friendships and all that and it's very important to them."

(Pakistani mothers, not working, Leicester)

'Like the chance to go back to work or do some studying? Getting some good, safe help in looking after your children could be the answer' (Giving Mums Options category) - was popular irrespective of the age of the youngest child, although unsurprisingly had most impact amongst those out of work or working part-time (under 16 hours p/w).

It was seen as a softer, more engaging message that positions a return to work / study as an option and their choice, rather than something that they *should* be doing. The message resonated most with those more actively seeking work / study but invited those slightly further out to at least ask the question of themselves.

"The other ones [are] just saying 'make free time for yourself' If you're wanting to go back to work or do some learning, at least you're doing something to forward yourself or, you know, better yourself should I say. And all the rest are just make time for yourself …"

(Lone parent, not working, youngest 5-7, Oldham)

"I miss work. I haven't worked now for 12 years, because I had to give up work; I worked full time from the day I left school and then I had to give up work because I'd become a single mum, and then I took a three year career break, in the meantime met my boyfriend and we're living together now, and I took on all the extra children overnight basically. But that [message] makes me think about it."

(Couple family, both not working, youngest 2-4, Reading)

Getting *'good, safe help in looking after your children'* also strikes a chord and has the advantage of addressing / acknowledging a key concern. The message therefore successfully addresses two issues simultaneously (gentle encouragement about considering return to work or study plus safe environment for children), without being excessively long-winded.

The one issue with the *'like the chance to go back to work or do some studying…'* message is that is does not acknowledge or engage those already back at work but still relying on family and / or friends for help.

'Going back to work brings in extra money and also helps your children understand how working benefits the whole family. To help you get there we've got loads of options for looking after your children' (Mums Benefit from Work category) - held fairly widespread appeal, and was particularly popular with those with younger children (pre-school age). The idea that they could benefit from work was both salient to those already working (and reinforced their choice to return to work) and those beginning to think about a return to work. *Bringing in extra money* was a key motivator for those more conscious of wanting to give their children things they both want and need. That said, a few not working queried whether going back to work would guarantee extra money and not simply impact on their benefits.

> *"I like the fact that it is talking about independence, building your own self-esteem. For me. ... Confidence as well; feeling good that you're working, you're earning as well. ... I think, knowing that you can spend more …you don't have to keep tapping your husband for money! More money for the family."*
>
> *(Bangladeshi mothers, not working, Leicester)*

The idea that working *'helps your children understand how working benefits the whole family'* had some resonance but mainly amongst either the more aspirational parents or those who want their children to have the chances they did not have: they were keen to send out the right messages to their children.

> *"I do realise that if neither of us work, my kids might not see work as worth doing. I don't like that at all, it's not right. So that message kind of reminds me about that."*
>
> *(Couple family, both not working, youngest 5-7, Oldham)*

> *"I like the bit where it says that it helps your children understand how working benefits the whole family. It's a good work ethic, isn't it, for the children, but it still doesn't say what the options are."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 2-4, East Anglia)*

> *"Yeah, because if you're actually working, your children come out of school and they want to go to work. With my daughter, it was, 'oh I ain't worried about getting a job, mum I'll just have a baby. You stayed at home looking after us.' No, that's not the right thing to do. I really don't want that, because I worked from the day I left school. My life only had to change because I become a single mum."*
>
> *(Couple family, both not working, youngest 2-4, Reading)*

Less positively, the tone of voice was possibly a bit patronising for a few and arguably required a stronger call to action to encourage parents to investigate exactly what 'lots of options' might mean. Interestingly, this statement was less popular with some of the fathers in our sample. There were indications that this reflected their more 'traditional' outlook and desire for their children's mothers to be staying at home bringing up the children.

> *"That's a bit of propaganda there. Not sure about that one, personally. Do kids really care about all that? I think they'd prefer to be loved and see their mum."*
>
> *(Mr & Mrs, father, both not working, youngest 5-7, Oldham)*

ii. Popular Rational Messages

The messages about **affordability** were widely regarded as informative, and presenting a quantifiable, tangible solution to one of the key barriers i.e. cost of childcare.

The following two messages in particular stood out:

<table>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about doing a course and developing your skills? If you have a household income of less than £20,000, you could get free childcare.</td>
<td>Struggling to pay for childcare? If you're working you could get up to 80% of the costs back when you use registered childcare through tax credits.</td>
</tr>
</table>

'Thinking about doing a course and developing your skills? …' was seen as a softer message particularly popular with those not working but thinking about a return to work. It successfully tapped into the desire to avoid "dead end" jobs (typically a concern for younger parents). The message also managed to inform about alternative or more gentle routes back into work for those seeking the social, positive benefits of 'learning', 'improving' and 'doing something for myself', whilst acknowledging that going directly back into the workplace was often 'too daunting' (typically concerns for older parents in the sample who had been out of work for sometimes in excess of 10 years).

The question format at the beginning of the message was seen as engaging and conversational rather than pushy or demanding. The latter sentence was seen as offering a tangible statement that was easy to identify with or not, whilst dangling the potential carrot of 'free' childcare.

> *"That's really interesting to me. That's where I'm at: studying."*
>
> *(Mr & Mrs, father, both not working, youngest 8-11, London)*
>
> *"Anything with free stands out, no doubt."*
>
> *(Couple family, both not working, youngest 2-4, Birmingham)*

'Struggling to pay for childcare? If you're working…' - was very motivating for those already in work. Again, it offered a tangible and credible benefit for using formal childcare and potentially a substantial saving on costs.

> *"If you're working, you could get up to 80% off the cost back when you use registered, yeah, that does, that appeals more because straightaway it's telling me they're registered and obviously they'd have been checked out and what have you, and they're going to help take 80% off of it straightaway, so I'm thinking, yeah, that's good."*
>
> *(Mr & Mrs, mother, one working f/t, youngest 8-11, Reading)*

However, its potential was limited somewhat by parents' interpretation of the phrase *'you could get up to 80% of the costs back'*. In particular:

- *'up to'* was met with cynicism from some parents regarding the statement's credibility - would it really be anywhere near 80%?

- *'80%'* was somewhat meaningless / difficult to translate according to personal circumstances and/or levels of numeracy
- *'of the costs back'* implied a need to pay money upfront and then claim for a refund - i.e. perceived as a hassle / complicated to arrange.
- *'registered childcare'* - a few wanted the reassurance that this was Ofsted registered.

> *"I don't know, you've got to pay and then claim back. Just sounds a headache."*
>
> *(Convergent Group, non-childcare users, Watford)*

The other key popular rational messages tackled parental concerns about their children's safety - **A Safe, Secure Environment.** Although delivery was frequently perceived as a little dry, the messages served to cover off this important 'hygiene factor'. Ofsted appeared to genuinely help to allay fears about safety, implying a stamp of authority and stringent regulation. For parents, it implied the facilities had been 'checked out' by more scrupulous, thorough and systematic means.

> *"It's like a Kite Mark for schools and clubs."*
>
> *(Lone Parent, working p/t, youngest 5-7, Reading)*

The two stand out messages in this regard were:

When clubs are Ofsted registered or offered through your school, you'll know they've met clear standards designed to provide a safe and secure environment for your children.	All Ofsted registered childcare has met clear standards designed to provide the highest quality environment for your child.
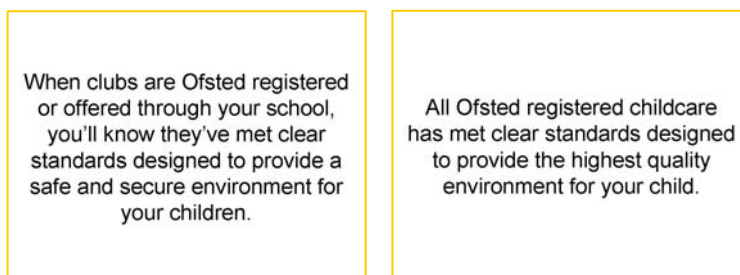
'When clubs are Ofsted registered or offered through your school…' - although currently only addressing children of school age, the tone and language was seen as the most effective in terms of allaying concerns. The message had appeal regardless of gender, working status and family status. Its style was perceived as conversational, and successfully engaged and provided reassurances about the standards as well as ticking boxes with regards reassurances about a 'safe and secure environment'.

> *"When you go through the school then you've got some reassurance that there's going to be some professional people there looking after your children."*
>
> *(Pakistani mothers, not working, Leicester)*

> *"I think I will go with that one 'when clubs are Ofsted registered or offered through your school'. Because the school wouldn't offer you something that they didn't recognize and know themselves and had not been used by others close by."*
>
> *(Lone parent, not working, youngest 5-7, Birmingham)*

> *"I'm a right big thing on like safety and what have you for children - I know they have to be, all the teachers are checked out and all the childcare - you know all of them are checked out and there is no loopholes, you can't get through them, they have to be checked out by the Police to make sure that they're not molesters or anything like that. So I would feel better if Joshua went to something where I knew he'd be alright."*

> *(Lone parent, not working, youngest 5-7, Oldham)*

The only confusion regarded some concerns that 'clear' standard did not necessarily equate to high standards.

> *"What's a clear standard? It might be a load of rubbish, but so long as it's clear it's okay?! I think high or rigorous or something would be better than clear."*

> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 5-7, London)*

'All Ofsted registered childcare has met clear standards…' was regarded as a clear and reassuring message, relevant to all age groups. It appealed regardless of age of children, working status and gender.

> *"Because you're using 'Ofsted' and that's a well known organisation and it vets the schools as well, doesn't it, which means 'clear standards'."*

> *(Mr & Mrs, father, one working p/t, youngest 2-4, Birmingham)*

> *"Ofsted works for me because, I've heard of it, the fact that it's offered through the school means I've got somewhere I can go back to, a point of contact and reference."*

> *(Mr & Mrs, father, working, youngest 8-11, Reading)*

However, the message was also seen as somewhat dry and matter of fact. The language was also seen as somewhat formal - in particular 'highest quality environment' was a bit educational and unapproachable. Parents were keener to know that their children were happy and safe as receiving 'highest quality' care (which was somewhat vague).

> *"That one says the highest quality, but their definition of highest quality might be very different to what yours is. So that's kind of building them up for a fall, that one."*

> *(Couple family, one working p/t, youngest 2-4, Oldham)*

3.6.3   Messages with Selective Appeal

A number of messages resonated with particular segments of the sample due to their working status, family status, age of the youngest child or even gender.

i. Emotional Messages with Selective Appeal

> Work gives you a great chance to meet new people and make new friends. And there are lots of options for looking after your children that may help you get back into employment.

'Work gives you a great chance to meet new people…' (Mums Benefit From Work category) - a key motivator for some mothers who felt more socially isolated and lacking in confidence with regards returning to work. The message helped make the idea of going back to work less daunting, especially for those who had been out of work for some time (often those whose youngest child was 8-11 year old). Although appealing to those out of work, those parents who had recently returned to work in some form (often 16 hours per week) endorsed the sentiment.

More popular with: parents not working; lone parents; those with children aged 8-11

> *"I want to go back to work, I don't want to sit at home,
> vegetating, watching Jeremy Kyle first thing in the morning
> forever, I want to do something. I want to expand my mind. This
> is just a positive statement because it does give you a great
> chance to meet new people and to make new friends and like I
> say, you can be yourself. But there again it doesn't give you
> the options, you know, cause it just says there are lots of
> options so it's like go and find them yourself."*
>
> *(Lone parent, not working, youngest 5-7, Oldham)*

> Want to make juggling work and kids easier? There are lots of breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday clubs that can help.

'Want to make juggling work and kids easier?...' (Giving Mums Options category) - appealed to those working (part or full time) and who recognised the challenge of balancing work and looking after their children. In particular, the term 'juggling' resonated with parents and spoke their language. It was argued that *'there's lots of options for children of all ages'* may have had more universal relevance and invited more interest from parents of children of pre-school age.

More popular with: working parents; those with school age children (5-11)

> *"Yeah, that's good because you don have to juggle. That's a*
> *better sentence because that's exactly what you do; you juggle*
> *your work with your children. Yeah, definitely."*
>
> *(Convergent Group, Childcare user, Watford)*

> Family and friends can be a
> big help in looking after your
> children. But there are lots of
> other options available which
> children really enjoy.

**'Family and friends can be a big help in looking after your children…' (Alongside
Family Help category) -** is a sentiment that parents are comfortable with and in particular
family being recognised as a 'big help' rang true for many. However, the motivating ability of
the message was limited by the lack of sufficient detail / information about the different
options that were available. Thus, at some level the message did not do enough to entice or
grab attention. Interestingly, the message was far more popular with mothers than fathers,
perhaps reflecting the dominance in many cases of the mother's side of the family as the first
port of call for childcare needs.

More popular with: parents not working; those with children aged 7 or under; females

> *"It's nice for the government of whoever to see it from our side.*
> *I like that. Yeah, family are a big help."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 2-4, County Durham)*

> *"... because it's true my family pulls together and helps me with*
> *Lauren but on the other hand there is a lot of options available.*
> *So it's not as if I would be stuck for another option to look into."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 8-11, Birmingham)*

> Research shows that older children
> love the independence that after
> school and holiday clubs give them.

**'Research shows that older children love the independence…' (Kids Get the Best Start
in Life category) -** appealed only to a minority of parents of 8-11 year olds who had previous
(positive) experience of using after school and/or holiday clubs and had witnessed the
enjoyment their children had. That said, for many parents the tone was somewhat aggressive
and authoritarian. It was also questionable whether *'independence'* was what parents did
want their children to have, especially if under 10 years old. This occasionally positioned the
statement as more relevant to pre-teens / early teenagers.

More popular with: (some) parents of 8-11 year olds

> *"I like that, and yeah they love doing these organised activities with their mates after school. … Just wish I could afford them."*
>
> *(Lone parent, not working, youngest 8-11, County Durham)*
>
> *"He's only 8 though, so I doubt we'd want him to be too independent just yet. I know what they mean, but I'm not sure it's quite right."*
>
> *(Mr & Mrs, father, one working f/t, youngest 8-11, Reading)*

i. Rational Messages with Selective Appeal

All early learning and childcare is Ofsted registered which means it's met clear standards designed to provide a safe and secure environment for your children.

'All early learning and childcare is Ofsted registered…' (A Safe, Secure Environment category) - had appeal across the board, but understandably resonated most directly with mothers of pre-school age children.

It should be noted that some parents miss the connection of 'early learning' to formal childcare. Often instinctively they see the term as relating to toys / books / equipment they had at home i.e. potentially purchased from the Early Learning Centre.

Interestingly, this message held little appeal with the small sample of fathers in our research - perhaps reflecting the protective nature of fathers with regards pre-school age children and their reluctance to endorse childcare for that age group.

More popular with: parents not working; those with children of pre-school age; females

All 3-4 year olds can get a minimum of 12.5 hours of free early learning a week. This is available from nurseries, playgroups, pre-schools or childminder.

All 3 and 4 year olds can get at least 12 and a half hours of free pre-school a week, for 38 weeks of the year

'All 3-4 year olds can get a minimum of 12.5 hours of free early learning…' & 'All 3 and 4 year olds can get at least 12 and a half hours…' (Free For 3-4 Year Olds category) - awareness that 3-4 year olds could get 12 and a half hours free childcare was limited. Therefore there was appreciation of being told about it and this could potentially be a motivator to investigate further for those with pre-school age children. *'All 3-4 year olds…'* helped to convey the idea that it was a universal benefit rather than means tested.

There was a marginal preference for *'12 and a half hours'* written out rather than 12.5 hours which seemed a bit clinical. The addition of *'for 38 weeks of the year'* seemed to confuse out-take and raised questions about how this would work. On reflection, it will be unnecessary to mention this at any initial communication stage. Both 'pre-school' and 'early learning' might benefit from having 'childcare' written after them to help differentiate from informal childcare.

Interestingly, fathers showed far greater preference for the message detailing the options in more detail - perhaps reflecting their desire for rational, informative messaging.

More popular with: working parents; those with children of pre-school age

> Looking for extra early learning
> or after school activities?
> There's loads of financial help
> available – from tax credits
> to childcare vouchers. Find out
> what help you can get.

'Looking for extra early learning or after school activities?...' (Affordable category) - fairly informative message ending with a strong, inviting call to action. The idea that there was *'loads of financial help available'* was also both motivating and reassuring. However, only listing two options for financial help was somewhat disappointing - particularly given that few knew much about the financial options available.

More popular with: working parents; those with children aged 8-11

> *"I don't really know what the child-care vouchers are. I don't think that really explains that. Are they child-care vouchers like the child trust vouchers that you put in children's bank accounts?"*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 2-4, East Anglia)*

> Fancy some help with looking after your children? You've got lots of choice - everything from pre-schools and play groups to nurseries and childminders. And when they start school, there are also breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday play schemes.

> Like a bit of help to look after your children around the school day? You've got lots of choice – from breakfast clubs to after school clubs and loads of holiday play schemes.

'Fancy some help with looking after your children? You've got lots of choice…' & 'Like a bit of help to look after your children around the school day?...' (Suits Your Needs category) - not a key motivator although the statements did at least answer information needs that parents had. Rather long-winded, the messages at least spelt out the options clearly enough. However, there were indications that many were unlikely to have the patience to take in this much information.

There was a preference for 'like a bit of help' over 'fancy some help'. The former was seen as quite a soft and engaging phrase, whereas the latter was sometimes perceived as overly casual / nonchalant.

More popular with: parents not working (but those not *really* considering a return); those with pre-school age children ('Fancy some help'); those with children aged 5-7 ('Like a bit of help')

'Help and advice is available - speak to your local Families Information Service…'
(Easy To Sort Out category) - came across as more affirming (help *is* available) and succinct. Parents of older children also recognised the role the school had in informing parents about what help was on offer (e.g. via school newsletters). However, there was a widespread unfamiliarity with the Families Information Service and how it could be contacted (was it at the Town Hall, the community centre, or doctor's surgeries?). Unfamiliarity with the service meant the message resonated less and off-set any call to action (especially for parents of pre-school age children with no school to visit).

More popular with: those with children aged 8-11; females

> *"The help and advice would be handy. At the minute I don't*
> *want to look for alternative childcare, we are quite happy with*
> *out set up at the moment, but who knows what is going to*
> *happen in five years down the line. So I would go for this one. It*
> *is more about the school as well."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 8-11, Birmingham)*
>
> *"It's not really giving you enough information about where it is.*
> *It's giving you the name, but not where it is or how you can*
> *contact this Family Information Service. And if you ask your*
> *local school, and they haven't heard of the Family Information*
> *Service, what do you do then? You give up."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 2-4, East Anglia)*

'Want to find out what help you can get looking after your children?...' (Easy To Sort
Out category) - though largely inconsequential to mothers in the sample, this message appealed to fathers' pragmatic, rational approach to childcare messaging: spelling out the help on offer.

More popular with: males

3.6.3 Messages with less appeal

A selection of potential motivating messages faired less well across the sample. We have sought to group these according to key themes.

i. 'Will do better' (absolute terms)

<table>
<tr>
<td>Research shows that children who go to after school and holiday clubs do better at school.</td>
<td>Learning through play at pre-school means your child will do better when they start school.</td>
</tr>
</table>

'Research shows that children who go to after school and holiday clubs do better' & 'Learning through play at pre-school means your child will do better…' (both Kids Get the Best Start in Life category) - had only some limited appeal amongst more competitive parents with stronger aspirations and ambitions for their children. Interestingly, the sentiment was fairly popular with Pakistani and Bangladeshi mothers keen that their children maximise their learning.

Few could identify with the idea that children *'will do better'* - it was dismissed as generic, too definite and ultimately not provable. The tone was perceived as aggressive and too catch-all, lacking regard for families' individual circumstances. It also irritated those who had kept their children at home implying that they would not do well at school.

> *"These are sort of edging towards if they are left with family members they are not going to be learning anything from them rather than going to a pre-school or after school club. I don't think there is any safer place really than with your family. So I disagree with these ones that are edging towards that fact."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 8-11, Birmingham)*
>
> *"That 'learning through play and … when they start school', it just sounds really cheesy that one. I can just see some really cheesy man saying that. And research - I hate the word research and all. Because what research?"*
>
> *(Lone parent, not working, youngest 5-7, Oldham)*
>
> *"You feel like saying, show me the research. Back up that statement."*
>
> *(Mr & Mrs, father, one working f/t, youngest 5-7, County Durham)*
>
> *"No I don't believe it, because I believe you can give them just as much at home yourself as what they do at after school clubs anyway, so I believe no, I wouldn't be saying they do better."*
>
> *(Couple family, both not working, youngest 2-4, Reading)*

ii. Guilt Trips ('selfish parents')

Your family and friends don't need to do it all – there are lots of options available to support your family.	Like some more time to yourself or to make your life a little less hectic? Getting good, safe help to look after your children may be just the thing.	Getting some free early learning for your 3 or 4 year old could mean you spend more quality time with your baby.

Any message that tried to empathise with the guilt parents felt regarding regularly putting upon their families / friends, wanting more free time and / or providing necessary attention to their youngest child were met with resistance. Few were happy to openly endorse any sentiment that put their own needs ahead of their children or family.

> *"That makes you feel selfish, and I don't want to feel like that."*
>
> *(Couple family, both working, youngest 2-4, Oldham)*

'Your family and friends don't need to do it all…' (Alongside Family Help category) - met with consistent resistance, and was seen as attempting to instil guilt in those parents who do rely on family/friends. Conversely, it was also seen as insensitive by those who wished they could rely more on family/friends. Some felt the message prompted negative feelings of desperation and failed to appreciate that using family/friends was often an active choice on behalf of the carers.

> *"I know they don't need to do it all, but they want to and I prefer that too."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working full time, youngest 2-4, Reading)*
>
> *"I think that word is a bit strong for the sentence [You're family and friends don't need to do it all]. It is sort of like saying you are imposing on them to look after your child when they are not, they are just supporting your needs."*
>
> *(Mr & Mrs, female, one working p/t, youngest 2-4, Birmingham)*

Amongst the parents who had looked into childcare options, there was also some resentment that the statement made childcare seem plentiful and straightforward - it needed to state what the options were.

> *"They make it sound so easy, but it's not like that."*
>
> *(Lone parent, working part-time, youngest 5-7, Reading)*

'Like some more time to yourself…' (Giving Mums Options category) - the idea of getting hildcare because *'life is a bit too hectic'* prompted high levels of disagreement. It was seen as over self-indulgent. Going back to work for extra income, combating boredom and social isolation and potential self-improvement were seen as far more salient motivators for considering childcare.

> *"I wouldn't get childcare just so I could sit on my arse all day!"*
>
> *(Couple Family, both not working, youngest 2-4, Birmingham)*

"I'd love time to myself, but no, that's not how you think. I gave birth to my kids to take care, I'd rather take care of my kids, cause then they grow up and I've got my time and my future."

(Couple family, both not working, youngest 2-4, Reading)

'Getting some free early learning for your 3 or 4 year old…' (Giving Mums Options category) - also seen as rather self-indulgent and parents were also wary of encouraging any perceived favouritism for the younger child whilst being seen to be neglecting the care needs of their 3-4 year old. 'Quality time' with their baby was also not speaking their language, being seen as somewhat formal phraseology.

iii. Not Ofsted registered?

Quality childcare provides a safe, secure environment in which your child can learn and develop.

Using registered childcare means you know your children are being well looked after in a safe place and are learning new things as they play.

'Quality childcare provides a safe secure environment…' & 'Using registered childcare means you know your children…' (A Safe Secure Environment) - by comparison with safety messages that stated the Ofsted name, messages without it lacked credibility and were open to misinterpretation. Objections included:

- How do you *know* the children are well looked after if the statement is not saying it is Ofsted registered?

- Can anyone register to provide childcare? i.e. what are the standards?

    "How do you know it's going to be good quality? Like I said earlier, not all nurseries give good quality child-care. Just because it's in a nice building, and looks pretty, doesn't mean to say that they're getting quality child-care."

    (Mr & Mrs, mother, both not working, youngest 2-4, East Anglia)

A lack of reference to any form of registration does not stand up to parental scrutiny, and *'quality childcare'* also fails to differentiate formal and informal methods.

iv. Too Vague… or Too Long-winded

<table>
<tr>
<td>There's lots of choice – you're bound to find something to suit you and your children.</td>
<td>Want a bit of help looking after your children? You've got loads of choice - everything from Nurseries, Pre-schools and Play groups to Breakfast clubs, After school clubs, Childminders and Holiday play schemes.</td>
</tr>
</table>

Although parents want to know the options available, these two statements represented the extremes of not quite achieving a balance of too much or too little information.

'There's lots of choice - you're bound to find something…' & 'Want a bit of help looking after your children…' (both Suits Your Needs category) - although the former statement was simple, and successfully conveyed the idea that there was lots of choice it also lacked any details and/or call to action, rendering the message too vague to stand out.

In contrast, the latter statement's long list of options was without any demarcation and thus not particularly helpful to anyone, causing many parents to switch off to the (potentially important) message.

v. 'Degrading'

<table>
<tr>
<td>If you're a lone parent, your Jobcentre Plus adviser can help you find affordable childcare so that you can get back to work.</td>
<td>If you or your partner are working, ask your employer about childcare vouchers.</td>
</tr>
</table>

"If you're a lone parent…' (Affordable category) - implied that all lone parents did not work and was seen as tonally pushy. The message also lacked credibility: those who had a Jobcentre Plus advisor claimed such help had never been offered to them. One or two also questioned what *'affordable'* childcare actually meant.

> *"Depends what they class as affordable really."*
>
> *(Pakistani mothers, not working, Leicester)*

'If you or your partner are working…' (Affordable category) - was disliked by all. Universally perceived as degrading, embarrassing and even a bit insulting to go 'cap in hand' to their employer. For a few, childcare vouchers were also seen as having a very negative connotation/association with Social Services and poverty.

> *"At the end of the day people might not have money, but they still have pride. You don't want to feel degraded."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 5-7, County Durham)*

"I don't know, not many employers bother about childcare or give you childcare - at the moment, restaurants don't know what childcare means probably."

(Couple Family, one working p/t, youngest 2-4, London)

vi. 'Fancy some work or childcare?'

Fancy going back to work and having the chance to bring in a bit more extra money? There are lots of options for looking after your children that may help you do just that.	Fancy getting back into work by starting part-time? There are lots of options for looking after your children that can help you do just that.

'Fancy going back to work and having the chance to bring in a bit more extra money?...' & 'Fancy getting back into work by starting part time?...' (both Mums Benefit From Work category) - use of the word fancy implied for many that working was choice or even a whim, whereas many had gone back to work out of necessity. Therefore the sentiment did not sit well with a lot of parents and served to irritate rather than engage. It was suggested that the messaging was trying *too* hard to speak their language in a manner that lacked credibility. In addition, *'a bit more extra money'* could undermine the potential financial gain and might imply it is not worthwhile.

"'Fancy' - no, I don't 'fancy' going back to work. I have to; it's a must."

(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 5-7, London)

"It says that if you want to go back in to work 'there's extra money which you can earn and there are lots of options for looking after your child that may' .. it shouldn't say 'may'. 'Would' help, I think is better, rather than say 'may help you do just that', isn't it .. 'may' just means possibly you'll get help but if it said you 'would' then you're reassured that there is help. Plus a bit more extra money doesn't sound like much. Is it worth it?"

(Bangladeshi mothers, not working, Leicester)

3.7   Role of Tone (empathetic vs. direct) and Language

3.7.1 Empathetic versus Direct Tone

Overall, parents tended to respond far more positively to a gently encouraging empathetic tone, as opposed to more direct language. Phrases such as *'how about'* and *'thinking about'* sat far better with this audience and invited them to consider the message in their own time.

It was clear that across the sample, parents resent being made to feel guilty for their choices with regards childcare and / or work and that nagging messaging/language was more likely to be deflected or discredited. In this respect phrases such as *'research shows … children will do better'* or *'your family don't need to do it all'* are seen as too generalised and too easily falling into the trap of not accounting for individual circumstances.

3.7.2 'Childcare' versus 'help looking after children'

The term **'childcare'** received a mixed reception. Amongst those least open to the idea of using formal childcare, the term 'formal childcare' was seen as somewhat authoritarian and off-putting. Childcare could be associated with childminders and thus viewed with suspicion.

Others parents were more accepting of the term childcare, particularly minus the 'formal' tag which could confuse and alienate. 'Childcare' was at least seen to be a clear term: 'does what it says on the tin'. 'Childcare' also sets formal, paid for childcare apart from other help they might be receiving.

> *"I would say childcare because help with looking after children says to me that you can't cope."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 8-11, Birmingham)*
>
> *"Childcare's what it is. I don't see what else you can call it. I get help looking after my children already, from my family."*
>
> *(Lone parent, working p/t, youngest 5-7, Reading)*

'Help looking after children' is often a preferable phrase to childcare in terms of a description of what they are seeking, but is also more readily associated with friends and family rather than paid for help. The addition of 'outside the family' on the end of the phrase does help to distinguish it from informal care, but also makes the phrase somewhat long-winded. Other more popular phrases included *'help outside the family'* and *'structured play'*.

3.7.3 'Kids' versus 'children'

On consideration, there was far greater preference for **'children'**. It was a universally accepted and understood word. In contrast, although **'kids'** was often how parents referred to their children, its popularity was more hit and miss and risked alienating some parents who resented the colloquial nature of the term: *'they're humans, they're not goats'.*

> *"I hate the word 'kids'. Because I just do. It's horrible. I think it's in the same league as 'brats', 'kids'. They're children, not kids. Kids are goats, aren't they? They're baby goats, kids."*
>
> *(Lone parent, not working, youngest 5-7, Oldham)*
>
> *"Personally, out of 'kids' and 'children', I prefer 'children', because I think it's treating them more as people. 'Kids' always sounds to me like people want to get rid of them, like they're some sort of ball and chain around your neck."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 2-4, East Anglia)*
>
> *"'Kid' seems to me to be a lazy, slang word for children. I think they're just trying to save or something."*
>
> *(Mr & Mrs, mother, one working p/t, youngest 2-4, Birmingham)*

3.7.4   Ofsted registered

Across the sample, use of the **Ofsted** name appeared to help lend gravitas to the claims about safe and secure environments for childcare. Ofsted was widely known and provided an authoritative stamp of approval (implying strict assessment, regulation and check-ups). When shown messages on safety without the Ofsted name, in comparison this left parents suspicious about the bone-fide nature of the care provider.

3.7.5   'Fancy' versus 'want' versus 'like' (versus 'need')

Whilst the term **'fancy'** was quite soft and engaging it did not describe accurately how parents felt about childcare. It was frequently seen as too whimsical, nonchalant implying they could take it or leave it - particularly to those more open to seriously considering childcare options.

> *"I fancy a sausage roll passing the bakers, it's not quite the same as leaving my child with a stranger."*
>
> *(Mr & Mrs, father, one parent working, youngest 8-11, Reading)*
>
> *"I think we would choose 'want' instead of 'fancy', it's a bit more serious than 'fancy'. 'Fancy' is not serious, is it. 'Fancy' is a bit nonchalant, take it or leave it. You can fancy going on holiday but you actually need a bit of help."*
>
> *(Pakistani mothers, not working, Leicester)*

'Want' was seen as a more direct way to address parents, although not usually seen as overly aggressive. However, there were indications that this tone was only sporadically perceived as the most appropriate and accessible.

> *"'Want' sounds a bit needy."*
>
> *(Lone parent, not working, youngest 5-7, Oldham)*

'Like' also had the potential to engage attention (without irritating). It was often used in a way that was regarded as fairly soft and engaging e.g. *'Like a bit of help to look after your children…'*

> *"It's not pushy… which I like. It's kind of talking to you, but not talking down."*
>
> *(Lone parent, not working, youngest 8-11, County Durham)*

However for those most open to formal childcare, the term **'need'** most accurately described their situation, particularly if they felt that they had to find extra income and/or help if studying. That said, a few parents did admit resenting the idea of being seen to 'need' help if this implied they were more desperate or unable to cope.

3.8   Possible Improvements to Messaging

In moving the messaging forward, there are some broad overarching observations that might be borne in mind for possible improvements and refinements.

Tonally, the emotive and softer language that gently encourages action with this audience tends to resonate far better than more demanding / pushy messaging which is often all too easily deflected or ignored. Hence there is a preference for 'could' over 'will' and 'thinking about' / 'like a bit of help' / 'how about…' in preference to 'want to…'

Likewise, messaging that seeks to empathise with parents' situations aids uptake of messaging and adds credibility to the campaign. In contrast, it attempts to make parents feel guilty for their current situation fall on deaf ears. e.g. they do not want to be made to feel bad for wanting to stay at home looking after their (young) children or conversely, wanting to go back to work or get a bit of time out (e.g. *'your family don't have to do it all'*).

General rules of thumb for enhancing potential impact of communications includes:

- provide multiple positive messages to increase the overall salience of the message e.g. *'learning new things in a safe, fun environment'* (provided this does not make messages too long winded):

- avoid using terms which are vulnerable to miscommunication, such as *'early learning'* and *'help looking after children'* which do not distinguish informal from formal childcare methods

- reinforcing the positive developmental benefits for children from *'learning new things', 'developing new skills'* to making reference to the emotional benefits to the child – that they are happy and enjoying it

- stating Ofsted (as opposed to just 'registered')

- refer to 'children' as opposed to 'kids'

- avoiding long-winded messages (bearing in mind that many of the target audience will not have the patience and/or necessary levels of literacy)

- avoiding using generalisations that serve to irritate e.g. 'research shows' and 'will do better'

- speaking their language, but not trying *too* hard e.g. 'fancy' is seen as too whimsical and inappropriate for the subject area.

Table 2: Key buzz words and **stumbling blocks** from the various message categories included:

Category	Key 'buzz words'	Stumbling Blocks
Kids Get the Best Start in Life	'better prepared'; 'learning new things'; 'fun'; 'developing new skills'; 'safe'; 'could'	'research shows'; 'good quality early learning'; 'will do better'; 'independence'
Affordable	'thinking about…?'; 'doing a course'; 'developing your skills'; 'get free childcare'; 'loads of financial help available'; 'find out what help you can get'	'ask your employer'; 'childcare vouchers'; 'registered childcare'; 'early learning'
A Safe, secure environment	'Ofsted registered'; 'safe and secure environment'; 'well looked after'; 'learning new things as they play'	Not stating Ofsted; 'clear standards' as opposed to 'high standards'; 'Quality childcare'; 'highest quality environment'
Alongside family help	'Valuable time with the family'; 'children can get a great deal out of / really enjoy'	'don't *need* to do it all'; 'there are loads of options' – but what are they?
Giving Mums Options	'chance'; 'good, safe help'; 'like'; 'could'	'early learning'
Mums benefit from work	'lots of options'; 'meet new people, make new friends'; 'help you'; 'extra money'	'fancy'
Free for 3-4 year olds	'12 and a half hours'; FREE; 'pre-school'; 'at least'; 'available from nurseries, play groups, pre-school or childminders'	'a minimum of 12.5 hours'; 'free early learning'
Suit your needs	'lots of choice'; 'like a bit of help'	'fancy some help'; 'want a bit of help'
Easy to sort out	'help and advice is available'; 'ask at your local school'; 'available near you'	'Families Information Service'

3.9   The Most Potent Message Mix

Fig 6: Overall Preferred messages

Rational	Emotional

Rational

"Thinking about doing a course and developing your skills? If you have a household income of less than £20,000 you could get free childcare."

"Struggling to pay for childcare? If you're working you could get up to 80% of the costs back when you use registered childcare through tax credits."

"When clubs are Ofsted registered or offered through your school, you'll know they've met clear standards designed to provide a safe and secure environment for your children."

"All early learning and childcare is Ofsted registered which means it's met clear standards designed to provide a safe and secure environment for your children."

Emotional

"How about giving your kids a chance to play with other children their own age and make new friends?"

"Your children could be learning new things and developing new skills in a safe, fun environment."

"Research shows that good quality early learning gives children the best start in life and means they're better prepared for school."

"Like the chance to go back to work or do some studying? Getting some good, safe help in looking after your children could be the answer."

"Going back to work brings in extra money and also helps your children understand how working benefits the whole family. To help you get there we've got lots of options for looking after your children."

"Alongside the valuable time they spend with the family, children can get a great deal out of early learning and after school clubs."

The above diagram demonstrates the most potent message mix across the sample. On a **rational** level, messages tackling perceptions of unaffordable childcare have stand-out potential - being tangible / clear-cut motivations. In addition, Ofsted is a reassuring and authoritative name and easy to put in messaging to reassure with regards safety.

> *"I think this gives us more reassurance - Ofsted - because it's sort of telling us and it's something that most people might not have been aware of because it's actually giving you a clear message there, isn't it."*
>
> *(Bangladeshi mothers, not working, Leicester)*

Messaging from the *Kids get the best start in life* category are key **emotional** pulls. Messages reinforce the fun children could be having alongside the potential developmental benefits. The empathetic and gently encouraging tone of other popular emotive messages help them to resonate across the sample.

However, across the sample there are difference to note in terms of the most effective message mix depending on the key dimensions such as working status, family status, and age of children.

3.9.1 Differences by Working Status

Fig 7: Most potent mix of messages by working status

Not working	Working
"Thinking about doing a course and developing your skills? If you have a household income of less than £20,000 you could get free childcare."	"Your children could be learning new things and developing new skills in a safe, fun environment." "Research shows that good quality early learning gives children the best start in life and means they're better prepared for school."
"Family and friends can be a big help in looking after your children. But there are lots of other options available which children really enjoy." "Alongside the valuable time they spend with the family, children can get a great deal out of early learning and after school clubs."	"Alongside the valuable time they spend with the family, children can get a great deal out of early learning and after school clubs."
"When clubs are Ofsted registered or offered through your school, you'll know they've met clear standards designed to provide a safe and secure environment for your children." "All early learning and childcare is Ofsted registered which means it's met clear standards designed to provide a safe and secure environment for your children."	"Struggling to pay for childcare? If you're working you could get up to 80% of the costs back when you use registered childcare through tax credits." "Looking for extra early learning or after school activities? There's loads of financial help available – from tax credits to childcare vouchers. Find out what help you can get."
"Like the chance to go back to work or do some studying? Getting some good, safe help in looking after your children could be the answer."	"Want to make juggling work and kids easier? There are lots of breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday clubs that can help."
"How about giving your kids a chance to play with other children their own age and make new friends?" "Your children could be learning new things and developing new skills in a safe, fun environment."	"When clubs are Ofsted registered or offered through your school, you'll know they've met clear standards designed to provide a safe and secure environment for your children."
"Going back to work brings in extra money and also helps your children understand how working benefits the whole family. To help you get there we've got lots of options for looking after your children." "Work gives you a great chance to meet new people and make new friends. And there are lots of options for looking after your children that may help you get back into employment."	"Going back to work brings in extra money and also helps your children understand how working benefits the whole family. To help you get there we've got lots of options for looking after your children."
"Fancy some help with looking after your children? You've got lots of choice - everything from pre-schools and play groups to nurseries and childminders. And when they start school, there are also breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday play schemes." "Like a bit of help to look after your children around the school day? You've got lots of choice – from breakfast clubs to after school clubs and loads of holiday play schemes."	"All 3-4 year olds can get a minimum of 12.5 hours of free early learning a week. This is available from nurseries, playgroups, pre-schools or childminder."

Those *working **full-time*** were particularly motivated by messages recognising the difficulty of juggling work and their current informal childcare set-up. In addition, messages explaining the potential costs they could get back resonated most with the full-time workers. Key motivating messages were:

- *'want to juggling work and kids easier…?'*
- *'Struggling to pay for childcare? If you're working you could get up to 80% of the costs back…'*
- *'All 3-4 year olds can get a minimum of 12.5 hours of early learning…'*

Those in **part-time** work were often motivated by a combination of more emotional messages - be it about the benefits to children or the benefits to mums of working. Often, having recently returned to work they were keen on justifications for their decision to go back to work and were also more interested in the developmental benefits of childcare for their children, assuming they could afford it and the facilities were safe. Key messages included:

- combination of 'Kids get the best start' messages - particularly *'better prepared for school'* and *'learning new things and developing new skills in a safe, fun environment'*
- *'going back to work brings in extra money and also helps your children understand how working benefits the whole family…'*
- *'when clubs are Ofsted registered or offered through your school, you'll know they've met clear standards…'*
- *'alongside the valuable time they spend with the family…'*

For those **not working** core motivating messages varied according to their attitude towards work and how open they were to the possibility of a more imminent return to work.

Those keener on a return to work were more motivated by messages that tapped into often buried emotions reflecting a sense of social isolation or a lack of confidence / self-esteem to seek a return to work. This tended to be more acutely felt if they had been out of work for longer periods. Concerning child development, stand-out messages tended to reflect concerns about their children lacking confidence and/or being too socially isolated - particularly if an only child. Overall, key messages therefore included:

- *'Thinking about doing a course…?'*
- *'Like the chance to go back to work…'*
- *'Work gives you a great chance to meet new people…'*
- *'How about giving your kids a chance…'*
- *'Alongside the valuable time they spend with their families…'.*

Those less interested in and / or ready to consider a return to work responded more readily to messages about child development, but also favoured justifications for their own childcare choices (*'family… a big help'*). Interestingly, those least interested in a return to work responded most positively to the 'suits your needs' category - including 'fancy some help' - arguably reflecting the fact the language was pitched right for the audience rather than the fact that formal childcare was a *real* consideration. Key messages included:

- *'Family and friends can be a big help*
- *'Fancy some help with looking after your children?'*
- *'Like a bit of help to look after your children around the school day…'*

The diagram overleaf summarises where motivation messages are more effective depending on attitudes to work - from those far less ready to consider a return through those more interested but lacking confidence, through to those who already had or were studying to achieve that end.

Fig 8: Diagram of popularity of messages by attitude to work

Less ready for work ← → More ready to work

"I don't really want to work (if I'm honest)"	"I would like to work but it's daunting"	"I want a career"
▪ **Reasons:** work not really on radar; 'stay at home' mum mentality; might adversely affect benefits ▪ **Current emotions:** proud mum, bit defensive over working status, but sometimes bored / isolated ▪ **Key questions:** why use childcare if I'm not working?	▪ **Reasons:** not worked for some time; want to bring in more money; kids at school now so time on hands ▪ **Current emotions:** lack confidence, self-esteem, feel bored at home, isolated ▪ **Key questions:** how do you get interviews? Can I get a job part-time (school hours)? Will work effect benefits?	▪ **Reasons:** already back in work or seeking return and/or studying ▪ **Current emotions:** more aspirational; take pride in earning or learning; sick of being on benefits ▪ **Key questions re-childcare:** How easy is it to get childcare? What will it cost? How flexible will it be?

Stand out messages?

"Your children could be learning new things …"
"How about giving your kids a chance…?"

"Friends and family can be a big help…"

Stand out messages?

"Alongside the valuable time they spend with their family…"

"Work give you a great chance to meet new people…"

"Like the chance to go back to work or do some studying?"

"Your children could be learning new things…"
"How about giving your kids a chance…?"

"Thinking about doing a course.. developing your skills?..."

Stand out messages?

"Struggling to pay for childcare… up to 80% back…"

"Want to make juggling work and kids easier?..."

"Going back to work brings in extra money…"

"Your children could be learning new things…"

"Research shows that good quality early learning…better prepared for school"

3.9.2   Differences by Family Status (Lone parents vs. couple families)

Fig 9: Most potent mix of messages by family status

Lone Parent	Couple Families
"When clubs are Ofsted registered or offered through your school, you'll know they've met clear standards designed to provide a safe and secure environment for your children." "All Ofsted registered childcare has met clear standards designed to provide the highest quality environment for your child"	"How about giving your kids a chance to play with other children their own age and make new friends?" "Your children could be learning new things and developing new skills in a safe, fun environment." "Research shows that good quality early learning gives children the best start in life and means they're better prepared for school."
"Going back to work brings in extra money and also helps your children understand how working benefits the whole family. To help you get there we've got lots of options for looking after your children." "Work gives you a great chance to meet new people and make new friends. And there are lots of options for looking after your children that may help you get back into employment."	"When clubs are Ofsted registered or offered through your school, you'll know they've met clear standards designed to provide a safe and secure environment for your children." "All early learning and childcare is Ofsted registered which means it's met clear standards designed to provide a safe and secure environment for your children."
"Like the chance to go back to work or do some studying? Getting some good, safe help in looking after your children could be the answer."	"Like the chance to go back to work or do some studying? Getting some good, safe help in looking after your children could be the answer."
"Your children could be learning new things and developing new skills in a safe, fun environment."	"All 3-4 year olds can get a minimum of 12.5 hours of free early learning a week. This is available from nurseries, playgroups, pre-schools or childminder."
"Struggling to pay for childcare? If you're working you could get up to 80% of the costs back when you use registered childcare through tax credits." "Thinking about doing a course and developing your skills? If you have a household income of less than £20,000 you could get free childcare."	"Struggling to pay for childcare? If you're working you could get up to 80% of the costs back when you use registered childcare through tax credits." "Thinking about doing a course and developing your skills? If you have a household income of less than £20,000 you could get free childcare."
"Family and friends can be a big help in looking after your children. But there are lots of other options available which children really enjoy."	"Family and friends can be a big help in looking after your children. But there are lots of other options available which children really enjoy." "Alongside the valuable time they spend with the family, children can get a great deal out of early learning and after school clubs."

Attitudinally, **lone parents** were more focused on the benefits of working and were more open to childcare too, especially after school clubs through the schools (greater trust of the schools - their children were already left there without their supervision). Key message mix for lone parents tended to focus on:

- benefits of work (for both themselves and for the children) - arguably more than the overall sample lone parents were focused on benefits for themselves in work and/or childcare as much as for their children
- reassurance that after school clubs were Ofsted registered
- indications that childcare should be more affordable than previously believed

- children benefiting from after school activities (especially as it fitted in with any work / study plans too).

In contrast, **couple families** were more focused on the emotional and developmental benefits of their children rather than the benefits of return to work (although *'like the chance to go back to work…'* stood out as a popular work-motivation sentiment). There was also more solace taken from recognition of the help family can provide - justifying their current behaviour and choices. The key message mix for couple families tended to be a mix of:

- children benefiting from 'the best start in life'
- reassurance that after school clubs were Ofsted registered
- affordability of childcare options for those working or not (including some free early learning for 3-4 year olds)
- alongside family help - lending credibility to the campaign by acknowledging informal childcare's role.

3.9.3 Differences by Age of Children (pre-school vs. school age)

Fig 10: Most potent mix of messages by age of youngest child

Pre-school	School Age (younger)	School Age (older)
"All early learning and childcare is Ofsted registered which means it's met clear standards designed to provide a safe and secure environment for your children."	"When clubs are Ofsted registered or offered through your school, you'll know they've met clear standards designed to provide a safe and secure environment for your children."	"When clubs are Ofsted registered or offered through your school, you'll know they've met clear standards designed to provide a safe and secure environment for your children."
"All Ofsted registered childcare has met clear standards designed to provide the highest quality environment for your child"	"All Ofsted registered childcare has met clear standards designed to provide the highest quality environment for your child"	"Work gives you a great chance to meet new people and make new friends. And there are lots of options for looking after your children that may help you get back into employment."
"Research shows that good quality early learning gives children the best start in life and means they're better prepared for school."	"How about giving your kids a chance to play with other children their own age and make new friends?"	"Looking for extra early learning or after school activities? There's loads of financial help available – from tax credits to childcare vouchers. Find out what help you can get.
"Like the chance to go back to work or do some studying? Getting some good, safe help in looking after your children could be the answer."	"Your children could be learning new things and developing new skills in a safe, fun environment."	"Alongside the valuable time they spend with the family, children can get a great deal out of early learning and after school clubs."
"Want to make juggling work and kids easier? There are lots of breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday clubs that can help."	"Family and friends can be a big help in looking after your children. But there are lots of other options available which children really enjoy."	"Like the chance to go back to work or do some studying? Getting some good, safe help in looking after your children could be the answer."
"Thinking about doing a course and developing your skills? If you have a household income of less than £20,000 you could get free childcare."	"Struggling to pay for childcare? If you're working you could get up to 80% of the costs back when you use registered childcare through tax credits."	"Want to make juggling work and kids easier? There are lots of breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday clubs that can help."
"Family and friends can be a big help in looking after your children. But there are lots of other options available which children really enjoy."	"Like the chance to go back to work or do some studying? Getting some good, safe help in looking after your children could be the answer."	
"Alongside the valuable time they spend with the family, children can get a great deal out of early learning and after school clubs."	"Want to make juggling work and kids easier? There are lots of breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday clubs that can help."	
"Going back to work brings in extra money and also helps your children understand how working benefits the whole family. To help you get there we've got lots of options for looking after your children."	"Like a bit of help to look after your children around the school day? You've got lots of choice – from breakfast clubs to after school clubs and loads of holiday play schemes."	
"All 3-4 year olds can get a minimum of 12.5 hours of free early learning a week. This is available from nurseries, playgroups, pre-schools or childminder."		

Looking at the pattern of popular messages, figure 10 indicates that messages about child development are more potent at younger ages. Unsurprisingly, messages about safe and secure environments that were targeting particular age groups resonated accordingly e.g. *'when clubs are Ofsted registered…'* was popular with parents of school age children. It is also apparent that the potency of messaging about 'upskilling' reduces with age of the parent, reflecting the fact that they were already back in work or conversely reflecting their lack of self-belief and/or direction in returning to work if they had been out of work for a long time.

Popular messages across the sample irrespective of children's ages included:

- *'Your children could be learning new things…'*
- *'Want to make juggling work and kids easier?…'*
- *'Like the chance to go back to work or do some studying?...'*

Particularly popular with parents whose **youngest child was 2-4** were the following messages directly targeting the pre-school ages:

- children using childcare from a young age are *'better prepared for school'*
- *'All early learning and childcare is Ofsted registered...'*
- any messages regarding <u>free</u> childcare for 3-4 year olds.

Particularly popular with parents whose **youngest child was 5-7** were the following messages

- *'Like a bit of help to look after your children around the school day…'* - reflecting the inclination of some mothers to start exploring working options once children were in school.
- *'Struggling to pay for childcare? If you're working you could get 80% of the costs back…'* amongst parents who had either started working part-time / shifts or were looking into this and were beginning to think about what help with costs was available for after school hours to help increase the flexibility of their working options.

Particularly popular with parents whose **youngest child was 8-11** were the following messages:

- *'Work gives you a great chance to meet new people and make new friends'* - reflecting the lack of confidence of social isolation of some of those mothers who had been out of work for a long time.
- *'Looking for extra after school activities? There's lots of financial help available...'* - directly targeting the childcare needs (after school) of their youngest child whilst raising (and *partially* addressing) their financial concerns.

3.10   Reaction to Previous Communications / Potential Next Steps

Reactions to previous communications materials were broadly positive, although only directly relevant to those with pre-school age children. Universally, the cartoon imagery was deemed appropriate for the target age, and gave the leaflet an approachable and engaging quality. Opinion about the level of text was more mixed, with those less literate and/or less open to childcare often claiming they may not have the patience to read all the information provided.

> *"I like it [the leaflet], it reminds me of the 1970s Mary, Mungo, and Midge hour and the, you know, the road safety one? 'Charlie says you must never play with matches', that's what they remind me of."*
>
> *(Couple family, one working f/t, youngest 2-4, East Anglia)*

*"It's [the leaflet] a bit more informal than they've had before,
and some more illustrations, which make it more interesting.
You've got the formality there, haven't you, because you've got
the telephone numbers, you've got the government thing there.
But I think the drawings are a nice touch, and the colours. And
also I like the captions that they've used. Yes, I like it."*

(Lone parent, working p/t, youngest 5-7, Reading)

The reaction of parents to both the messages and previous communications materials suggests it will be difficult to generate a leaflet that has sufficiently compelling messages for all the different target audiences. Messages which seek to address all circumstances run the risk of over-explaining the options and becoming too long-winded or conversely too vague / open to misinterpretation (thus lacking impact and motivating ability). If practical, it would be preferable to have leaflets targeting different circumstances (working / not-working; lone or couple parents; pre-school age or school age children, etc.)

In addition, parents need the process of taking up childcare to seem straightforward / achievable. Currently, although messaging dispels some of the beliefs that childcare is unobtainable for low income families, simply letting parents know its affordable is not necessarily going to be enough to change behaviour. There are still concerns that claiming money back will be difficult. Likewise, calls for action for more information need to be clear, accessible and relevant. *e.g. 'for more information about what's available in **your local area** call free on… or go to website…'*

*"What you really want is to make you feel like you can call a number
and be put through to the right people locally. That would be the big
thing. Make a huge difference."*

(Couple family, both working, youngest 5-7, Oldham)

*"I want to use this [childcare]. I have for some time, but I don't know
where to start. I want them to take me through it really straightforward.
… That's how most people get scared off. The cost, and not knowing
how to get the right help and advice."*

(Couple family, both working, youngest 8-11, East Anglia)

In this respect, a **'step-by-step'** guide should help make the process of seeking information and finding solutions that work for parents according to their circumstances more achievable.

A P P E N D I C E S

1. Recruitment Questionnaires

2. Topic Guide

South	1
Midlands	2
North	3

Respondent's Name: _____

Male	1
Female	2

Address: _____

_____

_____   Post Code: _____   Int. Date ……………………

Telephone: _____   Int. Time ……………………

Good morning / afternoon. I am from Andrew Irving Associates and we are conducting some research in this area amongst parents to find out their views about issues facing parents nowadays. Could you help us, please? Thank you very much, but first of all can I ask a few questions to make sure that we talk to the right cross-section of people.

Q1.   Do you or any members of your immediate family work in/for …
READ OUT / SHOW CARD A

Market research or marketing	1	
Advertising	2	
Public Relations or Journalism	3	
Television	4	
Design	5	*Close*
Citizens Advice Bureau	6	
Civil Service / Government	7	

None of the above	8	*Q2*

Q2.   Are you or any members of your immediate family working in/for or closely involved with the following groups:
SHOW CARD B

One Parent Families	1	
Gingerbread	2	
Families Need Fathers	3	*Close*
Fathers Direct	4	
Fathers for Justice	5	

None of the above	6	*Q3a*

Q3a.	Do you have any children?	Yes	1	*Q3b*

No   2   *Close*

Q3b. And what is the age of your **youngest** child?
SHOW CARD C

under 2 years	1	*Close*

2-4 years	2	
5-7 years	3	** see*
8-11 years	4	

---

12 years or older	5	*Close*

     *   CHECK QUOTA FOR WHICH YOU ARE RECRUITING. THEN Q4a

Q4a. Which of the following statements most accurately describes your current relationship with your youngest child's other parent?
SHOW CARD D

We are married and live together	1	
We are co-habiting	2	*Q4b*

We are no longer living together	3	*Q4c*

Q4b (ASK ONLY THOSE STILL LIVING AS A COUPLE)

Q4b   Which of the following best describes you and your partner's current working status:

SHOW CARD E Both me and my partner work either full- or part-time	1	
I work full-time but my partner does not work	2	** see*
I work part-time but my partner does not work	3	

I do not work but my partner works full time	4	
I do not work but my partner works part time	5	** see*
Both me and my partner are not currently working	6	

* If CODE 1 - consider for COUPLE FAMILIES - BOTH PARENTS WORKING quota
If CODE 2 or 4 - consider for COUPLE FAMILIES - ONE PARENT WORKING FULL-TIME quota
If CODE 3 or 5 - consider for COUPLE FAMILIES - ONE PARENT WORKING PART-TIME quota
If CODE 6 - consider for COUPLE FAMILIES - BOTH PARENTS NOT WORKING quota

     CHECK QUOTAS, THEN:
- **IF CODED 1, 2, or 3** (i.e. the potential respondent WORKS) go to **Q6a**
- **IF CODED 4, 5 or 6** (i.e. the potential respondent DOES NOT WORK) go to **Q5**

Q4c (ASK ONLY LONE PARENTS)

Q4c   Can you tell me, please, if you are currently …
SHOW CARD F

Working full-time	1	
Working part-time (not on benefits)	2	** see*
Working part time (on benefits)	3	

Not working (on benefits)	4	** see*

Not working (not on benefits)	5	

Close

** If **CODE 1, 2 or 3** - consider for LONE PARENT - WORKING FULL OR PART TIME quota **THEN Q6a***
*If **CODE 4** - consider for LONE PARENT - NOT WORKING quota **THEN Q5***

Q5. How much do you agree with the following statements about **working:**
SHOW CARD G

	Agree Strongly	Agree slightly	Disagree slightly	Disagree strongly
I would think about going back to work if I could get someone I trust to help look after my children	1	1	2	2
I would think about going back to work to increase our household income	1	1	2	2
I would think about going back to work but I have no idea where to start looking	1	1	2	2
I would think about going back to work because it would give me a boost	1	1	2	2
I would not go back to work until my children are older	2	2	1	1
I don't think about returning to work because I've no idea what I'd do for a job	2	2	1	1
I don't think about returning to work because there's enough money coming in	2	2	1	1
I don't think about returning to work because being a parent is a full time job	2	2	1	1
I would never consider going back to work	**CLOSE**	**CLOSE**		

* NB: Mostly ticks in **green** boxes (5 or more) - consider for **more keen to return to work** quota
Mostly ticks in **red** boxes (5 or more) - consider for **less keen on returning to work** quota
Broad mix of **green** and **red** boxes (no more than 4 ticks in either red or green boxes) - consider for
undecided attitude to returning to work

CHECK QUOTAS - THEN Q6a

Q6a. What is your occupation/the occupation of the chief wage earner in your household?
WRITE IN BELOW AND CODE OPPOSITE

A   1
B   2   *Close*
C1   3

C2   4
D   5   *Q6b*
E   6

_____

Q6b. In which bracket does your total household income fall (before tax)?

Over £20,000 a year   1   *Close*

Under £20,000 a year   2   *Q7*

Q7. Which of the following statements best applies to your youngest child?
SHOW CARD H

I am take primary responsibility for looking after my youngest child   1
My (ex-)partner and I take equal responsibility for looking after our youngest child 2   *Q8*

My (ex-)partner mostly looks after our youngest child   3   *Close*

Q8. Thinking about **getting help with looking after your children other than from family or close friends**, do you use any of the following: *SHOW CARD I*

Pre-schools and play groups	1
Nursery schools and classes	2
Day nurseries	3
Sure Start Children's Centres	4
close	
Childminders	5
Extended schools - breakfast clubs, after school clubs / holiday clubs	6
Only family and/or trusted friends	7 *Q9*

Q9. How much do you agree with the following statements about getting help with looking after your children other than from family or close friends: *SHOW CARD J*

	Agree Strongly	Agree slightly	Disagree slightly	Disagree strongly
It means children learn to be more independent / less clingy	green	green	red	red
It is good for children to go somewhere they can learn and make new friends	green	green	red	red
It means getting help from trustworthy people	green	green	red	red
It would be good if it meant I could go back to work and bring in some money myself	green	green	red	red
It's my job to look after the children but some other help would take the pressure off	green	green	red	red
If it's free then it's worth taking up	green	green	red	red
I've just never really considered it	red	red	green	green
It's just extra stress and hassle - I haven't got time for it	red	red	green	green
It's expensive and I would worry how it affects other benefits	red	red	green	green
It's my job to mind the children - they should be with their mum	red	red	green	green
I will not have strangers looking after my children	red	red	green	green

* NB: Mostly ticks in **green** boxes (7 or more) - consider for **'more open attitude' to formal childcare** quota
Mostly ticks in **red** boxes (7 or more) - consider for **'less open attitude' to formal childcare** quota
Broad mix of **green** and **red** boxes (no more than 6 ticks in either red or green boxes) - consider for **undecided attitude to formal childcare**
CHECK QUOTAS - THEN Q10

Q10.	Finally, have you taken part in any market research group discussion in the last six months?	Yes	1	*Close*
		---	---	---
		No	2	

Recruit

If respondent fits quota, send him/her an invitation card confirming date, time and location of the interview. Make sure that respondent's name, address and telephone number, and the date and time of the interview is clearly recorded on the front of the questionnaire so that you can telephone him/her with a reminder to attend.

I hereby declare this questionnaire has been completed according to the instructions and the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct, and that the respondent was unknown to me at the time of recruitment.

RECRUITER'S NAME: _____

SIGNED: _____   *DATE:* _____

Andrew Irving Associates
Lloyds Bank Buildings
Muswell Hill Broadway
London N10 3RZ
Tel. 020 8444 5678

JN2535
Recruitment Questionnaire
ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS
May 2008

Respondent's Name: _____   Leicester   1

Address: _____

Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	2

Post Code: _____   Int. Date ………………………

Telephone: _____   Int. Time ………………………

Good morning / afternoon. I am from Andrew Irving Associates and we are conducting some research in this area amongst parents to find out their views about issues facing parents nowadays. Could you help us, please? Thank you very much, but first of all can I ask a few questions to make sure that we talk to the right cross-section of people.

Q1.   Do you or any members of your immediate family work in/for …
       READ OUT / SHOW CARD A

Market research or marketing	1
Advertising	2
Public Relations or Journalism	3
Television	4
Design	5
Close	
Citizens Advice Bureau	6
Civil Service / Government	7

None of the above	8 *Q2*

Q2a.   Do you have any children?   Yes   1
    Q2b

          No   2
          Close

Q2b.   And what is the age of your **youngest** child?
       SHOW CARD C

Under 2 years	1	
2-4 years	2	*Close*
5-7 years	3	** see*
8-11 years	4	
---		
12 years or older	5	
Close		

       *   CHECK QUOTAS – HALF GROUP TO CODE 3 AND HALF TO CODE 4. THEN Q3a*

Q3a.   Which of the following statements most accurately describes your current relationship with your youngest child's other parent?
SHOW CARD D

We are married and live together	1	
We are co-habiting	2	*Q3b*

We are no longer living together	3	*close*

Q3b   Which of the following best describes you and your partner's current working status:
SHOW CARD E

Both me and my partner work either full- or part-time	1	
I work but my partner does not work	2	*close*

I do not work but my partner works	3	* *see*
Both me and my partner are not currently working	4	

*   IDEALLY CODE 3 BUT WILL ALLOW MAXIMUM OF 2 RESPONDENTS TO CODE 4 PER GROUP. CHECK QUOTAS THEN Q4

---

4   How much do you agree with the following statements about **working:**
SHOW CARD G

	Agree Strongly	Agree slightly	Disagree slightly	Disagree strongly
I would think about going back to work if I could get someone I trust to help look after my children	1	1	2	2
I would think about going back to work to increase our household income	1	1	2	2
I would think about going back to work but I have no idea where to start looking	1	1	2	2
I would think about going back to work because it would give me a boost	1	1	2	2
I would not go back to work until my children are older	2	2	1	1
I don't think about returning to work because I've no idea what I'd do for a job	2	2	1	1
I don't think about returning to work because there's enough money coming in	2	2	1	1
I don't think about returning to work because being a parent is a full time job	2	2	1	1
I would never consider going back to work	**CLOSE**	**CLOSE**		

* NB: Mostly ticks in **green** boxes (5 or more) - consider for **more keen to return to work** quota
        Mostly ticks in **red** boxes (5 or more) - consider for **less keen on returning to work** quota
        Broad mix of **green** and **red** boxes (no more than 4 ticks in either red or green boxes) - consider for **undecided attitude to returning to work**

   CHECK QUOTAS - at least 2 respondents to mostly tick green - THEN Q5a

Q5a.   What is your occupation/the occupation of the   A   1
       chief wage earner in your household?   B   2   *Close*
       WRITE IN BELOW AND CODE OPPOSITE   C1   3

                                                               C2   4
       _____   D   5   *Q5b*
                                                               E   6

Q5b.   In which bracket does your total household income fall (before tax)?

                                           Over £20,000 a year   1   *Close*

                                           Under £20,000 a year   2   *Q6*

Q6. Which of the following statements best applies to your youngest child?
     SHOW CARD H

       I take primary responsibility for looking after my youngest child   1
       My (ex-)partner and I take equal responsibility for looking after our youngest child   2   *Q7*

       My (ex-)partner mostly looks after our youngest child   3   *Close*

Q7.   Thinking about **getting help with looking after your children other than from family or close
       friends**, do you use any of the following: *SHOW CARD I*

                                           Pre-schools and play groups   1
                                           Nursery schools and classes   2
                                           Day nurseries   3
                                           Sure Start Children's Centres   4
                                           close
                                           Childminders   5
                                           Extended schools - breakfast clubs,
                                            after school clubs / holiday clubs   6

                                           Only family and / or trusted friends   7   *Q8*

Q8.   Finally, have you taken part in any market   Yes   1   *Close*
       research group discussion in the last six   ---------------------------------------
       months?   No   2   *Recruit*

*If respondent fits quota, send him/her an invitation card confirming date, time and location of the
interview. Make sure that respondent's name, address and telephone number, and the date and
time of the interview is clearly recorded on the front of the questionnaire so that you can telephone
him/her with a reminder to attend.*

*I hereby declare this questionnaire has been completed according to the instructions and the Market
Research Society's Code of Conduct, and that the respondent was unknown to me at the time of
recruitment.*

RECRUITER'S NAME: _____

SIGNED: _____   *DATE:* _____

Respondent's Name: _____   South   1

Address: _____   All female   1

_____

_____   Post Code: _____   Int. Date ……………………

Telephone: _____   Int. Time ……………………

Good morning/afternoon. I am from Andrew Irving Associates and we are conducting some research in this area amongst parents to find out their views about issues facing parents nowadays. Could you help us, please? Thank you very much, but first of all can I ask a few questions to make sure that we talk to the right cross-section of people.

Q1.   Do you or any members of your immediate family work in/for …
        READ OUT / SHOW CARD A

Market research or marketing	1
Advertising	2
Public Relations or Journalism	3
Television	4
Design	5
Close	
Citizens Advice Bureau	6
Civil Service / Government	7

None of the above	8 *Q2*

Q2.   Are you or any members of your immediate family working in/for or closely involved with the following groups:
        SHOW CARD B

One Parent Families	1
Gingerbread	2
Families Need Fathers	3
Close	
Fathers Direct	4
Fathers for Justice	5

None of the above	6 *Q3a*

3a.	Do you have any children?	Yes	1	*Q3b*

3a. Do you have any children?   Yes   1   *Q3b*

                                                        No   2   *Close*

Q3b. And what is the age of your **youngest** child?   Under 2 years   1   *Close*
     SHOW CARD C

                                                        2-4 years   2
                                                        5-7 years   3   ** see*
                                                        8-11 years   4
----
                                                        12 years or older 5   *Close*

> *   *IN BOTH GROUPS LOOKING FOR BALANCE -*
> *2 x aged 2-4; 2 x aged 5-7; 1 x aged 8-11*. *CHECK QUOTA THEN Q4a*

Q4a. Which of the following statements most accurately describes your current relationship with your youngest child's other parent?
SHOW CARD D

          We are married and live together   1
          We are co-habiting   2   *Q4b*

          We are no longer living together   3   *close*

Q4b Which of the following best describes you and your partner's current working status:
SHOW CARD E

          Both me and my partner work either full- or part-time   1
          I work full-time but my partner does not work   2   ** see*
          I work part-time but my partner does not work   3

          I do not work but my partner works full time   4
          I do not work but my partner works part time   5   ** see*
          Both me and my partner are not currently working   6

> *   *Aim for mix of those coding 1-3 (approximately ½ group) and those coding 4-6 (approximately ½ group)*

CHECK QUOTAS, THEN:

- **IF CODED 1- 3** (i.e. the potential respondent WORKS) go to **Q6a**
- **IF CODED 4- 6** (i.e. the potential respondent DOES NOT WORK) go to **Q5**

Q5 (ASK THOSE WHO ARE NOT WORKING ONLY)

Q5. How much do you agree with the following statements about **working:**
SHOW CARD G

	Agree Strongly	Agree slightly	Disagree slightly	Disagree strongly
I would think about going back to work if I could get someone I trust to help look after my children	1	1	2	2
I would think about going back to work to increase our household income	1	1	2	2
I would think about going back to work but I have no idea where to start looking	1	1	2	2
I would think about going back to work because it would give me a boost	1	1	2	2
I would not go back to work until my children are older	2	2	1	1
I don't think about returning to work because I've no idea what I'd do for a job	2	2	1	1
I don't think about returning to work because there's enough money coming in	2	2	1	1
I don't think about returning to work because being a parent is a full time job	2	2	1	1
I would never consider going back to work	**CLOSE**	**CLOSE**		

* NB: Mostly ticks in **green** boxes (5 or more) - consider for **more keen to return to work** quota
Mostly ticks in **red** boxes (5 or more) - consider for **less keen on returning to work** quota
Broad mix of **green** and **red** boxes (no more than 4 ticks in either red or green boxes) - consider for **undecided attitude to returning to work**

CHECK QUOTAS - THEN Q6a

Q6-8 (ASK EVERYONE)

Q6a.   What is your occupation/the occupation of the chief wage earner in your household?
WRITE IN BELOW AND CODE OPPOSITE

A   1
B   2   *Close*
C1   3

C2   4
D   5   *Q6b*
E   6

_____

Q6b.   In which bracket does your total household income fall (before tax)?

Over £20,000 a year   1   *Close*

Under £20,000 a year   2   *Q7*

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Q7. Which of the following statements best applies to your youngest child?
SHOW CARD H

I take primary responsibility for looking after my youngest child	1
My (ex-) partner and I take equal responsibility for looking after our youngest child	2 *Q8*

My (ex-) partner mostly looks after our youngest child	3

Close

Q8. Thinking about **getting help with looking after your children other than from family or close friends**, do you use any of the following: *SHOW CARD I*

Pre-schools and play groups	1
Nursery schools and classes	2
Day nurseries	3
Sure Start Children's Centres	4 ** see*
Childminders	5
Extended schools - breakfast clubs, after school clubs / holiday clubs	6

Only family and / or trusted friends	7 ** see*

* If **Code 1-6** consider for **PARENTS TAKEN UP CHILDCARE** group. Aim for spread of codes in group - then Q10
If **Code 7** consider for **PARENTS NOT TAKEN UP CHILDCARE** group. Then Q9

Q9 (ASK PARENTS NOT TAKEN UP CHILDCARE ONLY)

Q9. How much do you agree with the following statements about getting help with looking after your children other than from family or close friends: *SHOW CARD J*

	Agree Strongly	Agree slightly	Disagree slightly	Disagree strongly
It means children learn to be more independent / less clingy				
It is good for children to go somewhere they can learn and make new friends				
It means getting help from trustworthy people				
It would be good if it meant I could go back to work and bring in some money myself				
It's my job to look after the children but some other help would take the pressure off				
If it's free then it's worth taking up				
I've just never really considered it				
It's just extra stress and hassle - I haven't got time for it				
It's expensive and I would worry how it affects other benefits				
It's my job to mind the children - they should be with their mum				
I will not have strangers looking after my children				

* NB: Mostly ticks in **green** boxes (7 or more) - consider for **'more open attitude' to formal childcare** quota
Mostly ticks in **red** boxes (7 or more) - consider for **'less open attitude' to formal childcare** quota
Broad mix of **green** and **red** boxes (no more than 6 ticks in either red or green boxes) - consider for **undecided attitude to formal childcare**

Q10.	Finally, have you taken part in any market research group discussion in the last six months?	Yes	1	*Close*	
		No	2	*Recruit*	

If respondent fits quota, send him/her an invitation card confirming date, time and location of the interview. Make sure that respondent's name, address and telephone number, and the date and time of the interview is clearly recorded on the front of the questionnaire so that you can telephone him/her with a reminder to attend.

I hereby declare this questionnaire has been completed according to the instructions and the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct, and that the respondent was unknown to me at the time of recruitment.

RECRUITER'S NAME: _____

SIGNED: _____   *DATE:* _____

TOPIC GUIDE v.3 (Depths / Focus Groups)

1. Warm up

- Explain purpose of the interview and reassure about confidentiality, recording, etc.
- Establish respondent's current circumstances: age and number of children, working status of them and their partner.

2. Current Behaviours re: help with looking after children

- Explore what options they feel they have nowadays for seeking help with looking after their children? Who do they turn to most? Why? *(differentiate references to more informal vs. more formal methods)*
- Who do they feel takes the lead role in deciding what childcare arrangements to make - them or their partner? Why?
- Occasions for help: when might this be? For how long?
    - Does the helper depend on time of day / week?
    - What sort of activities do helpers get up to with the children? What do they like more / less?
    - What role do they feel their children have in shaping the kind of care they get?
- Overall, what are the good things and bad things about the options they feel are open to them at the moment? (*try to generate list, and for them to prioritise*)

3. Feelings about 'other options' for help looking after children

- Have they ever considered any other forms of help? Show cards one by one of various childcare options relevant to their children's age groups.
- Explore reasons given for interest in each:
    - (Spontaneous motivators / barriers) - *again prioritise*
    - What would be reasons to use these? Does it appeal to them? If so, in what ways?
    - What are they things that hold them back?
      As they spontaneously identify key barriers - place these on table

- Explore their key barriers further **(using identified barrier statements) - why do they feel this is a barrier?**:
    - As identify related statements in our packs, place on table
    - *Rank these*

    Continue process for each of the key barriers identified - why do they feel this is a barrier and identify related statements in pack and rank.

- If they did want to use outside help, how would they go about accessing this?
    - What would they do first? What sources (e.g. internet?)? Who would they ask?
    - What questions / concerns would they have?

- In an ideal world, what would be the **'perfect' set-up** for looking after their children other than family/friends?
    - Explore: where would it be? Size (no. of children)? Activities they could do? Types of people involved in care? Time of day / week and for how long? Etc.

4. Relative Importance of Working

- Focusing on the issue of using these services to go back to work. How important is this? Do they see any benefits to being in work at the moment?
- If so what are they? What about the following: *To earn? Personal development? Variety?*
- If they don't work, why is this?
- Are they happy to go to work and let someone else look after their children?
- Is this related to the age of their children? Can you see a time when you might want to return to work? When might this be?

5. Reactions to Messaging

Rotate messaging across interviews

- Explore their responses to the messages overall and on dimensions such as:
    - overall appeal
    - take-out of key thoughts
    - relevance and credibility of message to their circumstances
    - tone / language
    - potential to prompt action (motivating ability)
    - any other good or bad points about it?
    - what, if anything would improve the message?

    - What are the perfect combination of messages?
    - What messages are superfluous?

REPEAT PROCESS FOR ALL MESSAGES

Within the messages explore use of LANGUAGE. Specifically:
- How do they feel about the term **'childcare'**? What does this mean to them?
- Explore thoughts around **'childcare'** vs. **'help looking after children'** - what does the latter mean / imply? Does it sound more 'informal' (does it lose the learning connotations?)
- Explore preferences for **'kids'** or **'children'**
- In terms of appropriate tone, explore **'like'/'want'/'need'/fancy help/a bit of help**.

- Is it important that messaging talks about friends and family (informal methods of) help as well as these other options (i.e. formal methods)? Explain reasons for answer.

- Which messages make care options seem more appealing?
- Could this kind of message cause them to think about changing their current arrangements? Why / Why not?

6. In Context

- What would they do if they received DM with this messaging? Keep? Bin? Find out more?
- What would they do if they wanted to find out more information?

SHOW DM IN CONTEXT (old leaflet)
- Overall comment on style/tone
- Where expect to see this leaflet?
- What would they do if they received this?

7. Summary

- Ask respondent to sum up their feelings on statements and messaging and give reasons for doing so - list top 3 most likely messages to change their current stance
- What is the single most important factor that is preventing them taking up these options?

    THANK & END

DRAFT TOPIC GUIDE v3

MR & MRS

Each parent is initially interviewed separately, with each interview following the subsequent format:

1. **Warm up**

- Explain purpose of the interview and reassure about confidentiality, recording, etc.
- Establish respondent's current circumstances: age and number of children, working status of them and their partner.

2. **Current Behaviours re: help with looking after children**

- Explore what options they feel they have nowadays for seeking help with looking after their children? Who do they turn to most? Why? *(differentiate references to more informal vs. more formal methods)*
- Who do they feel takes the lead role in deciding what childcare arrangements to make - them or their partner? Why?
- Occasions for help: when might this be? For how long?
    - Does the helper depend on time of day / week?
    - What sort of activities do helpers get up to with the children? What do they like more / less?
    - What role do they feel their children have in shaping the kind of care they get?
- Overall, what are the good things and bad things about the options they feel are open to them at the moment? (*try to generate list, and for them to prioritise*)

3. **Feelings about 'other options' for help looking after children**

- Have they ever considered any other forms of help? Show cards one by one of various childcare options relevant to their children's age groups.
- Explore reasons given for interest in each:
    - (Spontaneous motivators/barriers) - *again prioritise*
    - What would be reasons to use these? Does it appeal to them? If so, in what ways?
    - What are they things that hold them back?
    As they spontaneously identify key primary or secondary barriers - place these on table
- Explore their key barriers further **(using identified barrier statements) - why do they feel this is a barrier?**
    - As identify related statements in our packs, place on table
    - *Rank these*

    Continue process for each of the key barriers identified - why do they feel this is a barrier and identify related statements in pack and rank.

- If they did want to use outside help, how would they go about accessing this?

    - What would they do first? What sources (e.g. internet?)? Who would they ask?
    - What questions / concerns would they have?

- In an ideal world, what would be the **'perfect' set-up** for looking after their children other than family / friends?

    - Explore: where would it be? Size (no. of children)? Activities they could do? Types of people involved in care? Time of day / week and for how long? Etc.

4. Relative Importance of Working

- Focusing on the issue of using these services to go back to work. How important is this? Do they see any benefits to being in work at the moment?
- If so what are they? What about the following: *To earn? Personal development? Variety?*
- If they don't work, why is this?
- Are they happy to go to work and let someone else look after their children?
- Is this related to the age of their children? Can you see a time when you might want to return to work? When might this be?

5. Reactions to Messaging

Rotate messaging across interviews

- Explore their responses to the messages overall and on dimensions such as:

    - overall appeal
    - take-out of key thoughts
    - relevance and credibility of message to their circumstances
    - tone / language
    - potential to prompt action (motivating ability)
    - any other good or bad points about it?
    - what, if anything would improve the message?
    - What are the perfect combination of messages?
    - What messages are superfluous?

REPEAT PROCESS FOR ALL MESSAGES

Within the messages explore use of LANGUAGE. Specifically:
- How do they feel about the term **'childcare'**? What does this mean to them?
- Explore thoughts around **'childcare'** vs. **'help looking after children'** - what does the latter mean / imply? Does it sound more 'informal' (does it lose the learning connotations?)
- Explore preferences for **'kids'** or **'children'**
- In terms of appropriate tone, explore **'like'/'want'/'need'/fancy help/a bit of help**.
- Is it important that messaging talks about friends and family (informal methods of) help as well as these other options (i.e. formal methods)? Explain reasons for answer.
- Which messages make care options seem more appealing?

- Could this kind of message cause them to think about changing their current arrangements? Why / Why not?

6. In Context

- What would they do if they received DM with this messaging? Keep? Bin? Find out more?
- What would they do if they wanted to find out more information?

SHOW DM IN CONTEXT (old leaflet)
- Overall comment on style/tone
- Where expect to see this leaflet?
- What would they do if they received this?

7. Summary

- Ask respondent to sum up their feelings on statements and messaging and give reasons for doing so - list top 3 most likely messages to change their current stance
- What is the single most important factor that is preventing them taking up these options?

*At this point both parents are brought together, with the interview continuing briefly (10-15 minutes) putting questions to the couple to answer **jointly**:*

- Having both seen the reasons for and against childcare options, what do they feel are the main motivators in taking up other (formal) kinds of child care? *See if they can agree on a list largest-smallest (how important is work vs. Child learning?)*
- What do they feel are the biggest barriers to taking up other (formal) kinds of child care? *See if they can agree on a list largest-smallest*
- Do they think they will take up other childcare options? Why / why not? *Is one more persuaded than the other?*
- Who do they feel takes the lead role in deciding what arrangements to make when you need help looking after the children?
- Do they make joint-decisions or does one have more say than the other? Why is this?

THANK AND CLOSE THE INTERVIEW

JN2535

TOPIC GUIDE - Convergent Groups

Childcare Non-Users

1. Warm up

- Explain purpose of the interview and reassure about confidentiality, recording, etc.
- Establish respondent's current circumstances: age and number of children, working status of them and their partner.

2. Current Behaviours re: help with looking after children

- Explore what options they feel they have nowadays for seeking help with looking after their children? Who do they turn to most? Why? *(differentiate references to more informal vs. more formal methods)*
- Who do they feel takes the lead role in deciding what childcare arrangements to make - hem or their partner? Why?
- Occasions for help: when might this be? For how long?
    - Does the helper depend on time of day / week?
    - What sort of activities do helpers get up to with the children? What do they like more / less?
    - What role do they feel their children have in shaping the kind of care they get?
- Overall, what are the good things and bad things about the options they feel are open to them at the moment? (*try to generate list, and for them to prioritise*)

3. Feelings about 'other options' for help looking after children

- Have they ever considered any other forms of help? Show cards one by one of various childcare options relevant to their children's age groups.
- Explore reasons given for interest in each:
    - (Spontaneous motivators/barriers) - *again prioritise*
    - What would be reasons to use these? Does it appeal to them? If so, in what ways?
- If they did want to use outside help, how would they go about accessing this?
    - What would they do first? What sources (e.g. internet?)? Who would they ask?
    - What questions/concerns would they have?

4. Key Barriers to Childcare

- Explore their key barriers: what are they things that hold them back?
    - as they spontaneously identify key barriers - place these on table
    - why do they feel this is a barrier?:
    - as identify related statements in our packs, place on table Rank these

    Continue process for each of the key barriers identified - why do they feel this is a barrier and identify related statements in pack and rank.

JN2535

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TOPIC GUIDE - Convergent Groups

Childcare Users

</div>

1. Warm up

- Explain purpose of the interview and reassure about confidentiality, recording, etc.
- Establish respondent's current circumstances: age and number of children, working status of them and their partner.

2. Current Behaviours re: help with looking after children

- Explore what options they feel they have nowadays for seeking help with looking after their children? Who do they turn to most? Why? *(differentiate references to more informal vs. more formal methods)*
- Who do they feel takes the lead role in deciding what childcare arrangements to make - them or their partner? Why?
- Occasions for help: when might this be? For how long?
    - Does the helper depend on time of day / week?
    - What sort of activities do helpers get up to with the children? What do they like more / less?
    - What role do they feel their children have in shaping the kind of care they get?
- Overall, what are the good things and bad things about the options they feel are open to them at the moment? (*try to generate list, and for them to prioritise*)

3. Feelings about 'other options' for help looking after children

- What other forms of help have they/do they use?
  Show cards one by one of various childcare options relevant to their children's age groups.
- Explore reasons given for interest in each:
    - What would be reasons to use these? Does it appeal to them? If so, in what ways?
    - What are the things that hold them back from using others?
- How did they go about accessing this?
    - What would they do first? What sources (e.g. internet?)? Who did they ask?
    - What questions/concerns would they have?

4. Key Motivations for Using Childcare

- Explore key motivations for using childcare:
    - Spontaneous first (write down)
    - Probe: role of child development, role of work, relative importance of these
    - What's the really positive aspects? Generate list (rank)
    - What were their concerns / questions, how were these overcome?
      (use barriers generated as cue cards)
    - What are the biggest concerns and why? - rank these

TOPIC GUIDE

Convergent Groups - 2ⁿᵈ Session

5. Introductions - scene setting

Explain where each 'group' is coming from and purpose of second session - to find the positive statements / motivating messages that work for people

- Quick intros - first name, number of kids (and ages), whether they're working…
  - Get Group 1 to write down their individual **top three barriers** to using childcare
  - Get Group 2 to write down their individual **top three motivations** to using childcare

- Gather up and discuss ANONYMOUSLY what their choices are and why.

- Explore the salience of the 'other' group's barriers/motivations with opposite group.

6. Spontaneous - key reasons for believing in Childcare: 'The Perfect Set-Up'

- In an ideal world, what would be the **'perfect' set-up** for looking after their children other than family / friends?
  - explore: where would it be? Size (no. of children)? Activities they could do? Types of people involved in care? Time of day / week and for how long? Etc.

7. Reactions to Messaging

- Explore their responses to the messages overall and on dimensions such as:
  - overall appeal
  - take-out of key thoughts
  - relevance and credibility of message to their circumstances
  - tone / language
  - potential to prompt action (motivating ability)
  - any other good or bad points about it?
  - what, if anything would improve the message?

  - What are the perfect combination of messages?
  - What messages are superfluous?

REPEAT PROCESS FOR ALL MESSAGES

Within the messages explore use of LANGUAGE. Specifically:
- How do they feel about the term **'childcare'**? What does this mean to them?
- Explore thoughts around **'childcare'** vs. **'help looking after children'** - what does the latter mean / imply? Does it sound more 'informal' (does it lose the learning connotations?)
- Explore preferences for **'kids'** or **'children'**
- In terms of appropriate tone, explore **'like' / 'want' / 'need' / fancy help / a bit of help**.

- Is it important that messaging talks about friends and family (informal methods of) help as well as these other options (i.e. formal methods)? Explain reasons for answer.
- Which messages make care options seem more appealing? Which are likeliest to make you sit up and take notice?:
    - what resonates most with users
    - what might cause non-users to think about changing their current arrangements?
    - why / why not? Can they agree on 'key messaging'

8. In Context

- What would they do if they received DM with this messaging? Keep? Bin? Find out more?
- What would they do if they wanted to find out more information?

SHOW DM IN CONTEXT (old leaflet)
- Overall comment on style/tone
- Where expect to see this leaflet?
- What would they do if they received this?

9. Summary

- Ask respondent to sum up their feelings on statements and messaging and give reasons for doing so
- What is the single most important factor that is preventing them taking up these options?

THANK & END

department for
children, schools and families