Childcare and Early Years Provision in Wales - A Study of Parents' Use, Views and Experiences
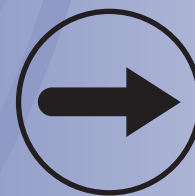
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Welsh Assembly Government

Title of Document:	Childcare and Early Years Provision in Wales: A study of Parents' Use, Views and Experiences
Audience:	Chief Executives of Local Authorities, Local Health Boards and NHS Trusts; Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships; Framework Co-ordinators; Children's Partnership Co-ordinators; Key Children's Voluntary Organisations; Directors of Education, Social Services and Public Health; Children's Information Services; Social Partner Contacts; County Librarians; Equal Opportunities Commission; Wales TUC Cymru; Welsh Local Government Association; Care Council for Wales; Jobcentre Plus; Community Voluntary Services; Children's Commissioner for Wales; Assembly Members.
Overview:	This study aims to provide salient, up-to-date information on parents' use, views and experiences of childcare and early years provision. The Welsh Assembly Government and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to carry out this study at the same time as the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned a study of childcare use in England.
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Childcare and Early Years Provision in Wales: a Study of Parents' Use, Views and Experiences

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NatCen
National Centre *for* Social Research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This study aims to provide salient, up-to-date information on parents' use, views and experiences of childcare and early years provision. Overarching this aim was a need for data to aid the evaluation of recent policy interventions in both early years education and other formal childcare provision in Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to carry out this study at the same time as the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) commissioned a study of childcare use in England.

561 parents in Wales were included in the study, and were interviewed between September 2004 and early January 2005. They were randomly selected from the Child Benefit records. All the parents selected had children aged 14 and under, to focus on the age group most often included within government policy on childcare. We obtained a broad picture about childcare and early years provision use and needs for all the children in the family, but then randomly selected one child (in families where there were two or more) about whom to ask a more detailed set of questions.

Following the model of the previous Childcare Surveys in England[1], the study used a very inclusive definition of 'childcare and early years provision'. Parents were asked to include any time that their child is not with resident parents (or their current partner) or at school. Hence this covered informal care, such as grandparents, as well as formal care; and covered times when the parents were working, as well as times when they were not (and thus children were being looked after for other reasons). However, by asking parents for the reasons why they used their childcare or early years provision, we are able to report separately on childcare used for economic reasons (for parents to work or study), for the child's educational development, or for other reasons.

Who uses what childcare and early years provision?

The data provide an overview of parents' use of childcare, over both the period of a year and of a week, and across different types of families (Chapter 2).

Over the last year…

Almost 96 per cent of families had used some form of childcare or early years provision – be it regular or ad hoc - within the last year. Over that period, a greater proportion of families (77 per cent) had used informal care than formal care (52 per cent). Of all providers, families were most likely to have used grandparents. Two thirds of families (62 per cent) had done so at some point in the last year. It is worth noting that the three most commonly used childcare providers – when looking over the last year – were all informal. As well as grandparents, around a fifth of families had used other relatives (22 per cent) and a sixth, friends or neighbours (15 per cent).

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[1] La Valle I, Finch S, Nove A, Lewin C (2000) *Baseline Survey of Parents' Demand for Childcare*, Research Report 176, London: DfEE and Woodland S, Miller M, Tipping S (2002) *Repeat Study of Parents' Demand for Childcare*, Research Report 348, London: DfES

Among the formal providers used in the last year, families were most likely to have used a breakfast or after school club. A sixth (16 per cent) of families had used one (either on or off a school site).

Grossing up to national estimates[2], these figures represent around 450 thousand families having used childcare in the last year. 185 thousand families had used formal childcare or early years provision, and 273 thousand families had used informal childcare.

Over the last week…

Two-thirds of families had used childcare in the last week (66 per cent): 38 per cent had used formal care, and 47 per cent had used informal care. As with use over the past year, out of all the childcare providers, families were most likely to have used a grandparent for childcare during the past week (36 per cent). Used by 10 per cent of families, out of school clubs (on or off school sites) were the most commonly used type of formal provision in the last week.

Looking across different family types, there were no significant differences in the levels of use of childcare and early years provision between lone parent and couple families.

Higher income families were more likely to have used childcare in the last week than lower income families. Three quarters (76 per cent) of families with a yearly income of £32,000 or more had used childcare in the last week, compared to two thirds (61 per cent) of families with a yearly income of under £10,000. Of course, this relationship will be associated with the relationship between use of childcare and whether the parents are working. The association between higher family income and greater use of childcare is accounted for largely (but not solely) by a greater use of particular types of formal provision by families with the highest incomes. For example, families with incomes of £32,000 or more were more likely than lower income parents to have used a day nursery (15 per cent, compared to 5 or 6 per cent).

Looking across the use of childcare for children of different ages, three and four year olds were the key age group for use of childcare and early years provision, with nine out of ten (87 per cent) having received childcare or early years provision in the last week. Combining the greater need for childcare for pre-school children with early years education for this group, this is as we would expect. Similarly, we are not surprised that children under three were the next most likely to have received childcare (69 per cent). Among school aged children, around a half of primary school children (54 per cent of five to 11 year olds) had received childcare compared to just under half (43 per cent) of secondary school children (12 to 14 year olds). Although there are some differences in use of informal care by the age of the child, the differences in levels of overall use are largely explained by differences in levels of use of formal childcare and early years provision.

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[2] National estimates are based on data of families with children aged 0-14 receiving child benefit as at 1st September 2004, DWP Information and Analysis Directorate, Information Centre.

Why do parents use childcare or early years provision?

Using data on *why* parents were using childcare and early years provision, we can explore how their levels of use vary according to their use for economic reasons (to work, jobseek or study) or for their children's educational development (Chapter 3). Whilst 66 per cent of families had used some childcare for *any* reason in the last week, only 40 per cent had used it for reasons which included economic activities and 25 per cent for reasons which included the children's education.

Of course, some parents used services for *both* economic *and* educational reasons. Among parents who had used childcare or early years provision in the last week, 43 per cent had done so for economic reasons, without referring to any educational needs for their children. 17 per cent of families using childcare and early years provision were doing so for both economic *and* educational reasons. 21 per cent were using it for educational – and not for any economic – reasons. In addition, around a fifth (20 per cent) of families using childcare in the last week were using their providers exclusively for reasons *other than* economic or educational purposes.

When we look solely at parents using childcare for economic reasons, a greater proportion uses informal than formal care. 15 per cent of parents had used formal childcare or early years provision for economic reasons in the last week, whilst 29 per cent of parents had used informal childcare for these reasons. By far the most commonly used providers for economic reasons were grandparents, used by 24 per cent of parents in the last week. The most commonly used formal provision for economic reasons were day nurseries (6 per cent of all parents), childminders (3 per cent) and out-of-school clubs on school sites (3 per cent).

As we would expect, childcare and early years provision used for educational reasons were predominantly from among the formal providers. A quarter (24 per cent) of parents had used formal providers for educational reasons in the last week, compared to only 2 per cent using informal care for these reasons. Most often used were reception classes (8 per cent of parents said this).

When do parents use or need childcare and early years provision?

A detailed look at *when* parents use childcare across the week is interesting from a policy perspective as it gives an insight into the following issues:

- The ways that early years education is used alongside formal and informal childcare;
- The relative use of childcare for economic, educational and other reasons;
- The use of different forms of childcare at different times of the day and week (e.g. at atypical working times).

We have explored how use of different providers pans out across the week in terms of the number of providers used, number of days, the timing of sessions, and wraparound care (Chapter 4).

Use of more than one childcare or early years provider was common: six in ten (59 per cent) of children had received childcare in the last week from only one provider, three in ten (28 per cent) had two providers, and one in ten (13 per cent) had three or more providers. However, if we split providers into 'early years education', 'other formal provision' and 'informal provision', it was unusual for children to have been looked after by more than one of each type, suggesting that different providers are used to fulfil different roles. Reflecting this, parents using

childcare or early years provision for economic reasons as well as for the child's educational development were more likely than others to use more than one provider.

We have split the weekday into five time periods, and separated out use of childcare at the weekend, to look at the times of day and week that childcare tends to be used more or less often[3]. Weekday daytime (9am to 3.29pm) and weekday late afternoon (3.30pm to 5.59pm) were the most common times for the use of childcare, with just under two-thirds of children who had used childcare in that week having used childcare during those periods. Weekday evening (6pm to 9.59pm) was the next most likely time for using childcare. Around a quarter (24 per cent) of children received childcare in a weekday early morning period (6am to 8.59am), and a third (31 per cent) received it in a weekend period. The least likely time to be using childcare was the weekday night period (10pm to 5.59am).

The timing of sessions does of course vary hugely by provider type. Reflecting the greater flexibility of informal care, children were much more likely to have received informal care than other types of care from late afternoon onwards and at the weekend.

Taking into account what the mother is doing during sessions, the early morning and late afternoon periods were associated more with economic activity than non-economic, with three times as many children having received early morning childcare during a period of economic activity as non-economic (18 per cent compared to 6 per cent), and almost twice as many in the late afternoon period (46 per cent compared to 25 per cent). In turn, evenings, nights and weekends were more associated with non-economic activities.

Wraparound care is an issue of particular interest in the context of patterns of use of childcare, in terms of the way parents cope with matching their childcare and early education needs and the availability of providers. If one provider is not available for the complete period of time for which the parent needs childcare – or the provider does not provide the correct mix of education and care - then not only is another provider needed, but accompanying the child on the journey from one provider to another also needs to be organised[4]. One in four children (26 per cent) who had received childcare in the last week had been taken or collected by their childcare provider.

The cost of childcare and early years provision

The cost of childcare and early years provision has been a key concern reflected in recent childcare policy. It is often discussed as a barrier to employment, especially for mothers, and the way the costs should be shared between parents and the government has been an issue of recent debate. It is also an area where there have been several recent policy developments, such as the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit, and free part-time nursery education places for three and four year olds. The cost of childcare is a complex issue to explore, and analysis relies on parents' awareness of any subsidies that they may be receiving. Nevertheless, a clear picture of the financial aspects of childcare for different types of families can be

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[3] These are not exclusive categories, and a single extended period of childcare might cover several of them.

[4] As well as childcare needs not matching the availability of childcare providers, there may be other reasons for use of more than one provider in succession, such as not wanting children to spend more than a certain amount of time with a particular provider.

drawn (Chapter 5).

The average weekly cost of childcare and early years provision (including the subsidies) was £14.17 (median). The average hourly cost of childcare (including subsidies, and whether for formal or informal care) was £0.72 (median).

Families were also asked about awareness of tax credits. Two thirds (68 per cent) of families who were not receiving the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit and who usually pay for childcare said they were aware of the childcare element.

There is room for improvement in terms of increasing parents' awareness of the financial help available. Knowledge of the types of childcare that are in general eligible for the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit is low. However, it is unclear to what degree this translates into families receiving less help than they are entitled to. Only 70 per cent of parents recognised a registered childminder as being eligible for the childcare element, and one-fifth thought a nanny or au pair was eligible (while in general this type of provider is not eligible).

What are the barriers to using childcare or early years provision?

Parents face a diverse range of potential barriers to using childcare and early years (Chapter 6). Currently, formal childcare and early years provision is affordable (though by no means usually easily affordable) to some, but less affordable – and sometimes a barrier to its use – for others. Lower income families found it harder, on average, to pay for their childcare and early years provision, than those in the highest income group (29 per cent compared to 47 per cent, respectively, said that affordability in the local area was 'very ' or 'fairly' good).

For significant minorities, lack of affordable childcare is cited as a reason for not working (10 per cent of those not working cited cost as a factor). We also found evidence of a perceived shortfall among many parents in the number of formal childcare places in their local area (45 per cent of parents said there were not enough places available). In terms of the extent to which a lack of available places was a barrier to parents using childcare or early years provision or to working, evidence is mixed. It was not often cited unprompted as a reason for not using childcare or not working. However, when asked whether they would work if they could arrange 'good quality childcare which was convenient, reliable and affordable', two thirds (68 per cent) of non-working lone parents, and half (43 per cent) of non-working parents in a couple, said that they would.

Parents – particularly parents who used some kind of formal or informal childcare and early years provision – are largely positive about the quality of their own provision and of that available in their local area. A fifth (21 per cent) of parents rated the quality as 'very good' and a third (37 per cent) rated it as 'fairly good'.

A lack of information – or knowledge about where to seek it – is a barrier to parents' use of childcare and early years provision. When asked directly, half (49 per cent) of parents felt that they would like more information about the childcare in their local area. Specific areas about which parents ask for more information include general information about childcare in the area, the cost of childcare and school holiday provision. Particularly interesting is the reliance on 'word of mouth' for obtaining information about all kinds of childcare and early years provision (36 per cent cited this source).

What do parents feel about their childcare and early years provision?

When parents are choosing childcare and early years provision to look after and educate their child, they are looking for the provider to fulfil a variety of roles. Their opinion of how well their provider meets these needs can vary depending on the provider they are using and on their pre-existing expectations. Chapter 7 looked across the range of factors that may have influenced parents' views of the formal provider that their child used most of the time. As well as why parents chose these formal providers.

Parents' decisions about which providers to use are often made having to take into account several competing factors. Some of these will be ideological, based on the kind of provision they would like for their child. Others will be practical, working within the constraints of the local childcare market, finding childcare to fit around parental work patterns, and so on. When asked why they chose their provider, overall, parents cited more 'pull' than 'push' factors, more often mentioning reasons why they were attracted to the provider than reasons around a lack of choice. The majority of parents felt that they had a real choice of providers, citing reasons such as trust in the carer and preferences to see their child educated as well as cared for.

Parents' reasons for choosing their formal childcare providers differed according to the age of their children. Trust was key for parents with 16 per cent citing this as the main reason for choosing their main formal provider. Concerns about educational development were also important with 15 per cent giving this as their main reason.

Parents using a formal institutional provider or a childminder were asked what, in their view, could be improved about a range of services, from buildings and premises to staff qualifications. Overall, six in ten (59 per cent) parents using an institutional provider or childminder stated that none of the improvements were needed at their provider. The most frequently cited aspect that needed improving were buildings and premises.

Parents were also asked to identify what academic and what social skills they thought their child was being encouraged to develop while they were at the (formal) provider. 67 per cent or more of parents said that each of the academic skills we asked about had been encouraged in their child at their main provider.

Parents were generally satisfied with the level of feedback they received about their children's progress at their formal providers: 95 per cent said they were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the feedback they got.

Childcare and early years providers have begun increasingly to offer services - such as health or education – which aim to assist the parents as well as their children. This movement has been part of the government's drive to integrate services at single sites, enabling parents access to a 'one stop shop' for advice not only about childcare, but about ways they might find training, support or access to employment, for health services for their children, and so on. Currently a minority of parents using childcare and early years provision said that their providers offered additional services (66 per cent of parents said that no services were offered). However, a substantial number of parents would like to see them available. Most commonly wanted were health services (20 per cent) and courses or training (24 per cent).

Awareness of the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (CSIW) and Estyn inspection results was relatively high with 58 per cent of parents saying that their main formal provider had been inspected.

Conclusions

Few government initiatives have addressed informal care, despite the fact that it makes up a large proportion of all childcare used – across families with a range of incomes. However, our study clearly shows that informal childcare plays a key role among families in Wales. It is not only used as a cheaper option than formal care, it is also often chosen because of the home environment, the trust which parents place in its providers and the flexibility in the arrangements which can be made.

An integral part of government pledges on childcare and early years provision is a commitment to 'affordable' provision. Our study indeed suggests that currently, childcare is affordable (though by no means usually easily affordable) to some, but less affordable – and sometimes a barrier to its use – for others. The need for more information about the costs of childcare services – upon which parents can make informed decisions – is also apparent.

Despite the government reports of an increase in the registered stock of childcare in Wales, we found evidence of a perceived shortfall among many parents in the number of childcare places in their local area. Nearly half of parents said they thought there were too few places in their local area. Problems with availability may be greater at particular times. There appears to be significant unmet demand for childcare at atypical times.

A lack of information – or knowledge about where to seek it – is an important theme emerging from our study. There appears to be at least some level of discrepancy between parents' perceptions of the local childcare and early years provision market and what is actually reported by parents who use childcare. Specific areas about which parents ask for more information include school holiday provision, early years provision and the cost and quality of childcare.

This report provides an initial look across a range of dimensions of childcare and early years provision, and highlights many issues of key interest to policy makers and academics working in this area. It provides up-to-date information to aid the evaluation of recent changes in childcare policy. With time, current policy initiatives will no doubt have further impact on the needs of parents identified in this report, across the dimensions identified, such as affordability, quality, availability and information. In the meantime, the issues raised in this report will hopefully also inform future policy on childcare in Wales.

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Aims of the study

The Welsh Assembly Government and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to carry out this study in order to provide salient, up-to-date information on parents' use, views and experiences of childcare and early years provision in Wales. It was commissioned at the same time as the Department for Education and Skills (D*f*ES) commissioned a study of childcare use in England. The data for this study was collected at the same time as that for the DfES survey, and the methodology, questionnaire and approach used was almost exactly equivalent to its English counterpart. However, the project was very much a separate one because childcare in Wales is not currently in the remit of the DfES. Rather, the Welsh Assembly Government oversees the implementation of this policy area.

This report is the result of research into childcare use in Wales only. The DWP had originally suggested a similar separate study into parents' use of childcare in Scotland, but at this point the Scottish Executive had already begun plans to carry out their own research into the issue. Throughout this report the overarching aim was to collect accurate data to aid the evaluation of recent policy interventions in the area of childcare and early years provision for families in Wales.

1.2   Policy background: the National Childcare Strategy and beyond

The introduction of the National Childcare Strategy in 1998 marked a radical shift in government policy in the UK and for the first time put childcare provision firmly on the political map. The strategy clearly signalled the government's commitment to providing "good quality and affordable childcare provision … in every neighbourhood". At the heart of the National Childcare Strategy lay the belief that, like education, different forms of childcare play a major role in children's social, cultural and psychological development. The strategy is also closely linked to other key policy priorities, namely tackling child poverty, labour market disadvantage and social exclusion[5]. The Welsh Assembly Government produced the 'Childcare Action Plan' in May 2002. Along with the UK Government's 10-year strategy for childcare, announced in late 2004, this document shows that both the Welsh Assembly Government and the UK Government have signalled their plans to develop their policies to provide 'affordable, flexible, high-quality childcare for all parents who need it'[6].

In November 2005 the Welsh Assembly Government published its childcare strategy 'Childcare is for Children' which supports the conclusions in this report regarding the need for stronger information services, especially about tax credits[7]. In line with the Childcare Bill in England, the Welsh Assembly Government will be introducing a statutory duty on local authorities to secure sufficient childcare, and also to provide information service to families.

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[5] DfEE (1998) *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: a Framework and Consultation Document,* London: The Stationery Office

[6] Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare, 2004

[7] Childcare is for Children: the Childcare Strategy for Wales. DfTE Information Document No. 047-05. Welsh Assembly Government, 2005.

Since 1998 a wide range of childcare initiatives and funding streams have been introduced, with linked but slightly different foci and aims. Some of these initiatives and funding are universal across all families across the whole of the UK. For example, both the UK Government and Welsh Assembly Government have implemented the provision of free part-time early years education for three and four year olds.

Some programmes have been launched across all areas of Wales, such as out-of-school childcare funding from the New Opportunities Fund, and school breakfasts are now being piloted. Out-of-school care is designed to enable parents to have access to childcare places between 8am and 6pm on weekdays, at after school clubs and breakfast clubs. The clubs can include specific activities, learning support, and assistance to targeted groups or wider ranges of children. As the services operate in the hours before and after school when parents are often travelling to or finishing work, the services have proved a useful form of childcare. Although not a universal service yet, many out-of-school clubs have developed with funding from the Big Lottery Fund (previously the New Opportunities Fund). Other programmes are provided only in the most disadvantaged areas, such as the Cymorth grant. Since 2002, Cymorth (the Children and Youth Support Fund) has enabled targeted support for children and young people across Wales, aiming to improve the chances of children and young people from disadvantaged areas, and includes Sure Start programmes for the 0-3 age group.

Integrated Centres in Wales – in collaboration with Cymorth – are, like Sure Start Children's Centres and Early Excellence Centres in England, building on many of the programmes set up in the early years of the National Childcare Strategy. They bring together, under the same roof, childcare, early years provision and a range of other family services in the most deprived areas of the country. In Wales, the Assembly Government intends to establish at least one Integrated Centre in every local authority.[8]

A range of childcare subsidies are also now available directly to parents. The main demand-side funding is the childcare element within the Working Tax Credit (WTC), which is available to low and middle income parents working more than 16 hours a week (both partners and couples). This was changed in April 2003 to make it more flexible and available to a greater number of families. There are further aims to expand this within the 10-year strategy. However, funding to help parents to pay for childcare is also available from a range of other sources (eg, Childcare grants for students; help with childcare costs provided as part of the New Deal for Loan Parents). There are also plans across the UK to extend support for employer-supported childcare, and the Welsh Assembly Government is considering its options for childcare provider approval schemes that can widen access to tax credits.

The National Childcare Strategy and the Welsh Assembly Government's Childcare Action Plan also include a commitment to raising the quality of childcare and giving

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[8] Welsh Assembly Government (2002) *Childcare Action Plan*. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government. Welsh Assembly Government Childcare Working Group (2005) A flying start : childcare for children, parents and communities : the final report of the Welsh Assembly Government Childcare Working Group. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government

parents the information they need to chose what is right for their children. Many studies have shown that positive outcomes for children are closely related to the quality of care children receive, as was shown by the study on the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education[9]. There is also plenty of evidence to suggest that parents will not use childcare services, unless they believe they are of acceptable quality and will meet their children's needs[10].

Reform of the regulation of inspections and registrations of childcare providers and childminders was implemented in Wales in 2002. The Care Standards Act 2000 moved regulation and inspection from Local Authorities to the National Assembly for Wales from this date, and the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (CSIW) was formed as an arm of the National Assembly. As in England, National Minimum Standards were adopted which set a baseline below which no (registered) service can fall. They cover all aspects of childcare provision, from health and safety to learning opportunities, and from staff qualifications to partnerships with parents. Estyn (Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales) continues to provide advice on quality and standards in education and training; specifically in relation to this study, inspecting pre-school education.

While setting minimum standards, the UK Government and Welsh Assembly Government is also encouraging providers to raise the quality of their service beyond the baseline guaranteed by the National Standards, through quality assurance schemes, such as Aiming High (for out-of-school care), Y Cylch Rhagorol (Welsh medium playgroups) and Children Come First (for childminders).

Formal childcare is used mainly by working families, and parents who are studying or training in order to re-enter the labour market or change career. Therefore, the National Childcare Strategy and the Welsh Assembly Government's Childcare Action Plan both place a great emphasis on ensuring that childcare services are sufficiently flexible to reflect changing employment patterns, and in particular trends in mothers' employment – as by and large, mothers still have main responsibility for childcare. This might mean, for example, an increasing need for childcare at non-standard times, a wide range of part-time arrangements, and wraparound childcare to combine with early years provision.

All in all, much has changed since the introduction of the National Childcare Strategy, which has encouraged a substantial increase in childcare services and a proliferation of delivery models. Since 1999, the New Opportunities Fund has helped create 22,000 new out-of-school childcare places in Wales The overall number of registered childcare places for children aged under eight in Wales has increased by nearly 18,500 between March 1999 and March 2005. The Assembly Government is committed to continuing its programme of work in this area.

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[9] Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004) *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project: final report – a longitudinal study funded by the DfES 1997-2004.*

[10] La Valle I, Finch S, Nove A, Lewin C (2000) *Baseline Survey of Parents' Demand for Childcare,* Research Report 176, London: DfEE.
Woodland S, Miller M, Tipping S (2002) *Repeat Study of Parents' Demand for Childcare,* Research Report 348, London: DfES.

1.3　History of the study

As the childcare world has undergone – and continues to undergo - radical transformation, it has been vital for policy makers to have access to up-to-date, robust and comprehensive information on parents' use of, need for and attitudes towards childcare and early years provision.

The study in Wales took place simultaneously with the same survey of childcare amongst parents in England. It was designed to fulfil a particular role in England – to combine two series of surveys - the Parents' Demand for Childcare series[11] (the Childcare series) and the Survey of Parents of Three and Four Year Old Children and their use of Early Years Services series[12]. Families in Wales had been included in the first Childcare survey (1999), but not the subsequent one (2001).

Focusing on families with children 14 and under, the survey collected information on their use of childcare and early years provision over the last year and, in more detail, over the last week. With an interest in childcare used for economic and other reasons, it collected information about services used at any time during the day or week.

1.4　Overview of the study design

1.4.1　The interviews

Just under 600 parents in Wales were included in the study, between September 2004 and early January 2005.[13] They were randomly selected from the Child Benefit records. Given its almost universal up-take, Child Benefit records provide a comprehensive sampling frame for families with dependent children. Excluding those removed from the sample frame before they were passed to us or those with untraceable addresses, 76 per cent of selected parents on England and Wales were interviewed. This represents a very good response rate and their socio-demographic profile very closely matches that of the Child Benefit record population.

All the parents selected had children aged 14 and under, in order to focus on the age group most often included within government policy on childcare. Conducted in people's homes, the interview with parents lasted for an average of three-quarters of an hour. A parent with main or shared responsibility for childcare decisions was interviewed. Any partners at home during the interview were asked personally about their socio-demographics. For others, the main respondent was asked to provide proxy information about their partner.

The interview focused on both childcare and early years provision. Because of time constraints, detailed information on the use and needs of all children in the family could not be collected. Rather, we obtained a broad picture about all the children, but then randomly selected one child (in families where there were two or more)

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[11] The latest study was Woodland, S, Miller, M, Tipping, S (2002) *Repeat Study of Parents' Demand for Chidlcare,* Research Report 176, London: DfEE.

[12] The latest study was Bell, A and Finch, S (2004) *Sixth Survey of Parents of Three and Four Year Old Children and Their Use of Early Years Services.* Research Report 525, London: DfES.

[13] Just under 8,000 families in England were also included.

about which to ask a more detailed set of questions. Similarly, if the 'selected' child had used more than one childcare or early years provider in the last week, we collected some information about all providers, but concentrated on their main provider (of formal care if they used any). The same decision was made about information about use in the last year rather than in the last week. We collected brief details about use over the last year, but concentrated on the childcare and early years provision that they had used in the last week[14]. It was agreed that use in the last week would be more reflective of regular arrangements, and data on more recent use of childcare was less likely to be affected by recall issues.

The interview broadly covered –

For all children in the family:
Use of childcare and early years provision in the last year (in summary)
Use of childcare and early years provision in the last week
Costs of and paying for childcare and early years provision (for providers used in the last week)
Sources of information and attitudes towards childcare and early years provision in the local area

For one randomly selected child:
Detailed record of attendance in the last week
Reasons for using and views of the main formal provider
Reasons for using more than one provider

As background:
Household structure
Socio-demographics
Parents' work details

Full details of the study design and implementation can be found in Appendix B.

1.4.2   Defining childcare

Following the model of the previous Childcare Surveys, the study uses a very inclusive definition of 'childcare and early years provision'. Parents are asked to include *any* time that their child is not with resident parents (or their current partner) or at school[15]. Thus, the definition is much wider than other studies that focus on childcare use when parents are working or studying or on early years provision. In order to remind parents to include all possible people or organisations that may be looking after their child, they were shown the following list –

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[14] Most parents were asked about childcare used in the last week. However, if the last week had been a school/nursery holiday, they were asked about the most recent normal week.

[15] Although a slight ambiguity is introduced, as parents are asked to think about 'childcare' that they use, before being given the broad definition.

Formal providers

Nursery school
Nursery class
Reception class
Special day school or nursery or unit
Day nursery
Playgroup or pre-school (including Welsh medium)
Childminder
Nanny or au pair
Babysitter who came to home
Breakfast/After School Club, on school site
Breakfast/After School Club, not on school site
Holiday club/scheme
Other nursery education provider (please specify)

Informal providers

My ex-husband/wife/partner/the child's other parent (who does not live in this household)
The child's grandparent(s)
The child's older brother/sister
Another relative
A friend or neighbour
Other childcare provider (please specify)

This inclusive definition of childcare and early years provision means that parents will have included time when their child was visiting friends or family, at a sport or leisure activity and so on. In order to be able to look separately at childcare and early years provision used for economic reasons and for the education of the child, parents were asked the reasons for using each provider. Thus, we are able to re-define childcare and early years provision in different ways.

Deciding on the correct classification of the 'type' of provider can be complicated for parents, especially given the changing childcare and early years market. We have therefore checked the classifications given by parents with the providers themselves and/or with administrative data sources.

Note that we have classified providers according to the provision for which they were being used (e.g. day care, early years provision, etc.). Thus, we have continued to use – and classify according to - terminology such as 'nursery schools' and 'day nurseries', rather than include forms of integrated provision such as Community Focused Schools. We did ask parents about any links that their providers had to integrated provision (using a list including, Sure Start, Integrated Centres etc.). However, at this stage, we were mainly looking at parental awareness of any links, and we report on this in Appendix B.

1.5   The report

1.5.1 The content of the report

The aim of this report is to provide an overview of the findings from the study. We report on all the major elements included in the interview with parents, and look across different types of families and children, where possible. The England data is being separately reported[16] and is not included here, but some comparison of key findings has been made where appropriate.

Chapter 2 addresses 'Who uses what childcare and early years provision?'. Here, we look at the proportions of families using childcare and early years provision – both over the last year and in the last week. We explore differences between different types of families, and particular focus is given to use of formal and informal provision.

In Chapter 3, 'Why do parents use childcare and early years provision?', we analyse levels of use of childcare and early years provision according to the reasons why the parents sent their children to these providers. We distinguish largely between 'economic reasons' (ie, for parents' work, study or jobsearch), 'educational reasons' (ie, development of the child) and 'other reasons' (eg, social and leisure). Pertinent to policy debates about enabling parents into work, we are able to disaggregate use of childcare and early years provision for economic reasons from amongst our data.

Chapter 4, 'When do parents use or need childcare?', focuses on one (randomly selected) child in the family. It uses retrospective diary data about the childcare and early years provision they received in the last week to report on patterns of use over the day and week. Such data enable us to look at issues around differential use of providers at different times of the day and week (eg, what childcare is used at atypical times) and at ways in which parents 'join up' the use of different providers across the day (ie, issues around integrated or wraparound provision).

The costs of childcare and early years provision are covered in Chapter 5. Looking across a range of dimensions including region, providers, different types of families, we report on the hourly and weekly amount parents pay for childcare and early years provision. We also take a wider look at parents' awareness of the cost of various forms of childcare.

Chapter 6, 'What are the barriers to using childcare and early years provision that parents want', covers a range of possible barriers, including cost, availability, quality and accessibility. It looks at the different types of barriers and, in some cases, the extent of the issues between different types of families. Whilst not hard measures of unmet demand, the chapter provides an insight into the types of difficulties perceived or experienced by parents in obtaining the childcare or early years provision that they would ideally like or need.

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[16] Bryson, C., Kazimirski, A., Southwood, H. (to be published) *Childcare and early years a study of parents' use, views and experiences,* London: DfES

Chapter 7 focuses parents' reasons for selecting their main providers and the balance between 'choice' and 'necessity'. We also look at parents' perceptions of the social and educational benefits of their child attending the main provider, and the perceived importance of the CISW and Estyn in the inspection of their main providers.

Finally, Chapter 8 draws together the findings from the preceding chapter and addresses the question 'From parents' perspectives, how are childcare policies working in practice?'

An overview of the socio-demographic profile of the families who were interviewed as part of the study is provided in Appendix A. A full methodological detail of the study is provided in Appendix B.

1.5.2 Interpreting results in the report

During the report, we report on data about -

- The family
- The selected child
- The main (formal) provider

A 'family level' weight is applied to the family analysis. This weight ensures that the research findings are representative of the population of families in Wales in receipt of Child Benefit. A 'child level' weight is applied to the selected child and main provider analysis. This weight combines the family level weight with an adjustment for the probability of the child being selected for more detailed information. Full details of the weighting are provided in Appendix B.

The tables in this report contain the total number of cases in the whole sample or in the particular sub-group being analysed, and the base for different columns (e.g. different types of families, income groups, etc.). The total base figure includes all the eligible cases (i.e. all respondents or all respondents who were asked a particular question) minus any coded as 'don't know' or 'not answered'. Thus, whilst the base description may be the same across several tables (e.g. all families using childcare in the last week), the number bases may differ slightly due to the exclusion of those coded 'don't know' or 'not answered'[17]. In some tables, the column bases do not add up to the total bases and this is mainly because some categories might not be included in the table, either because they are too small or are not useful for the purpose of the analysis.

Due to rounding, percentage figures may not add up to exactly 100 per cent.
Measures of local deprivation, as calculated by the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister, have been matched to the survey data and are used for sub-group analysis throughout the report. Families have been split into quintiles according to their local area score on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Sub-group analysis by income is also used, reflecting the income groups used in the Childcare Survey series as much as possible.

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[17] Occasionally, the proportion of people saying 'don't know' was sufficiently high to warrant showing them within the table (and therefore included in the base). This is the particularly the case for awareness questions.

The difference between percentages for most sub-groups of the sample are statistically significant. However, some bases for some estimates are still relatively small. It is therefore important to note the unweighted bases at the foot of the tables when drawing comparisons. Throughout the report, whenever the text comments on differences between sub-groups of the sample, these differences have been tested for significance and found to be statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence interval or above[18]. Similarly, standard deviations have been calculated when reporting on statistically significant differences in mean scores.

The symbols below have been used in the tables and they denote the following:

[ ] to indicate a percentage based on fewer than 50 respondents
+ to indicate a percentage value of less than 0.5 per cent
0 to indicate a percentage value of zero.

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[18] These confidence limits assume a simple random sample and no adjustment has been made for the effects of clustering. Although such an adjustment would increase the confidence limits slightly, they would not differ notably.

2 WHO USES WHAT CHILDCARE AND EARLY YEARS PROVISION?

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we provide an overview of families' use of childcare and early years provision. We take a brief look at their use over the last year and then concentrate on the last week, looking at the use of different provider types by different types of families and children. Building up a picture of families who do or do not use various forms of childcare, we provide a backdrop, which will inform our understanding of the subsequent chapters to the report.

In essence, this chapter addresses the following questions –

- What proportion of families used childcare in the last year?
  - What types of childcare did they use?

- What proportion of families used childcare in the last week?
  - What types of childcare did they use?

- Which families used childcare in the last week?

We also look at the use of providers where Welsh is spoken.

In order to be comparable with our previous studies, this chapter focuses on the use of childcare and early years provision using our very broad definition (see Chapter 1 for details). Hence, we report on families' use for all possible reasons – economic, educational and social. For an analysis of the use of childcare and early years providers for purely economic or purely educational reasons, the reader should refer to Chapter 3.

2.2 Use of childcare and early years provision in the last year

2.2.1 Levels of use and providers used in the last year

Almost all (96 per cent) families had used some form of childcare or early years provision – be it regular or ad hoc - within the last year[19]. Table 2.1 shows the types of providers – both formal and informal - that families had used in the last year.

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[19] Parents were asked about all children for whom they were responsible. Responsibility was defined as 'main or shared responsibility for making decisions about any childcare or nursery education'.

Table 2.1   Use of providers in the last year

	Column per cent
	%
Any childcare	**93**
Early years provision and formal childcare	**52**
Nursery school	5
Nursery class attached to primary or infants' school	11
Reception class attached to primary or infants' school	13
Special day school or nursery or unit for children with special needs	1
Day nursery	11
Playgroup or pre-school	11
Other nursery education provider	+
Childminder	4
Nanny or au pair	+
Baby-sitter who came to home	6
Breakfast club or After school club, on school/nursery school site	12
Breakfast club or After school club, not on school/nursery site	3
Holiday club/scheme	7
Informal childcare	**77**
My ex-husband/wife/partner	9
The child's grandparent(s)	62
The child's older brother/sister	9
Another relative	22
A friend or neighbour	15
Other	
Leisure/sport activity	4
Other childcare provider	3
No childcare used	**4**
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*561*

+ <0.5 per cent
Note: as families may have used more than one provider, percentages add to more than 100.

Within the last year, three-quarters of families (77 per cent) had used informal care compared to half having used formal care (52 per cent). Of all providers, families were most likely to have used grandparents. Two-thirds of families (62 per cent) had done so at some point in the last year. It is worth noting that the *two* most commonly used childcare providers – when looking over the last year – were both informal: as

well as grandparents, around a quarter of families had used other relatives (22 per cent).

In comparison to England, Welsh families were higher users of childcare, as 86 per cent of families in England had used childcare in the last year (compared to 96 per cent in Wales). This difference was based on higher use of informal care, as two-thirds of families in England (67 per cent), compared to three-quarters in Wales, had used this type of care (on the other hand, Welsh families were slightly less likely to have used formal care: 52 per cent compared to 57 per cent in England). Grossing up to national estimates, these figures represent 341 thousand families having used childcare in the last year. 185 thousand had used formal childcare or early years provision, and 273 thousand had used informal childcare. The estimates for key formal providers are given in Table 2.2.[20].

Table 2.2   National estimates of use of key formal providers in the last year, in Wales

	Number of families
Early years provision and formal childcare	185,000
Nursery school	18,000
Nursery class attached to primary or infants' school	39,000
Reception class attached to primary or infants' school	50,000
Day nursery	39,000
Playgroup or pre-school	39,000
Childminder	14,000
Breakfast club or After school club, on school/nursery school site	46,000
Breakfast club or After school club, not on school/nursery site	14,000

NB: numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand

Of course, we expect a great deal of variation in the levels of use of childcare and early years provision – and in the types of providers used – across different types of families. However, with our focus mainly on the use of childcare and early years provision within the last week (rather than the whole year), we report on these variations in Section 2.3 below.

2.2.2   Holiday clubs

Given that our interviews were carried out during term-time, families' use of holiday clubs was not picked up in the detailed questions that we asked about childcare use in the last week[21]. Hence before moving on to use of childcare during the last week, here is a look at use of holiday clubs in the last year by different family types.

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[20] National estimates are based on data of families with children aged 0-14 receiving child benefit at 1st September 2004, DWP Information and Analysis Directorate, Information Centre.

[21] We did ask about whether their main provider offered care in the school holidays. This is reported in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3)

Within the last year, 7 per cent of families had used holiday clubs. Table 2.3 shows that when looking solely at family type, couples seem to be more likely to have used a holiday club, but the difference is not statistically significant. There is however a strong association with income, as the higher the income of the family, the more likely families were to have used a holiday club. Four times as many families with an income of £32,000 and over had used a holiday club (12 per cent) as families in the lowest income bracket (3 per cent) – this can be partly explained by working status, as higher income families are more likely to be dual-earner households, with greater needs for childcare during school holidays.

Table 2.3   Use of holiday clubs in the last year, by family characteristics

	Row per cent	
	%	*Unweighted base*
Family type		
Couple	8	*405*
Lone parent	4	*134*
Family yearly income		
Under £10,000	3	*93*
£10,000-£19,999	7	*178*
£20,000-£31,999	6	*151*
£32,000+	12	*90*

Base: All families

2.3   Use of childcare and early years provision in the last week

2.3.1   Defining the 'last week'

As outlined in Chapter 1, it was decided to focus the interviews with parents on childcare and early years provision that had been used in the last week[22]. (A very broad picture of the last year was collected.) Two thirds (66 per cent) of families had used childcare or early years provision in the last week.

2.3.2   Types of childcare and early years provision used in the last week

The most commonly used formal and informal providers in the last week were the same as those used in the last year (Table 2.4). Grandparents were still the most likely provider (and most likely informal provider) of childcare for families, used by a third (36 per cent) of families in the last week.

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[22] Data are always more accurate if asking about very recent events. Most parents were asked about childcare used in the last week. However, if the last week had been a school/nursery holiday, they were asked about the most recent normal week.

Table 2.4   Use of providers in the last week

	Column per cent
	%
Any childcare	**66**
Early years provision and formal childcare	**38**
Nursery school	2
Nursery class attached to primary or infants' school	7
Reception class attached to primary or infants' school	9
Special day school or nursery or unit for children with special needs	+
Day nursery	7
Playgroup or pre-school	8
Other nursery education provider	0
Childminder	3
Nanny or au pair	+
Baby-sitter who came to home	2
Breakfast club or After school club, on school/nursery school site	8
Breakfast club or After school club, not on school/nursery site	2
Holiday club/scheme	0
Informal childcare	**47**
My ex-husband/wife/partner	6
The child's grandparent(s)	36
The child's older brother/sister	4
Another relative	7
A friend or neighbour	7
Other	
Leisure/sport activity	4
Other childcare provider	2
No childcare used	**34**
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*561*

+ *<0.5 per cent*

When we look at the amount and types of childcare and early years provision used over the last week, we are taking a 'snapshot' in comparison to their use over the last year. We are less likely to pick up ad hoc (usually informal) arrangements, but almost equally likely to pick up people's regular on-going (formal or informal) arrangements, particularly those used during term-time. Thus, the gap between the proportions using formal and informal care over the last year (of 25 percentage

points) is greatly reduced when looking at use over the last week: 47 per cent of families had used informal care compared to 38 per cent having used formal care.

Reflecting the regular use of formal childcare and early years provision, the proportions of families using each of these providers in the last week was only slightly lower than for the last year. For example, 7 per cent of families had used a day nursery in the last week, compared to 11 per cent in the last year. Baby sitters showed one of the biggest differences, as they were used by only 2 per cent of families in the last week (but 6 per cent of families in the last year). As babysitters are perhaps at the 'informal' end of formal care, they are more often used on an ad hoc basis, rather than a regular basis. The main formal provider type for which the proportions of families using it varies a lot between the last week and the last year is the holiday club. 7 per cent of families had used them over the last year, while no families had used them in the last week. This simply reflects the fact that interviews took place during the school term, as mentioned earlier.

In contrast to the pattern of formal provision, use of particular informal providers in the last week was much lower than use over the last year. For each informal provider, apart from ex-partners, around half or fewer than half the number of families had used them for childcare in the last week, compared to in the last year. For example, a third (36 per cent) of families had used grandparents, compared to two-thirds (62 per cent) in the last year.

Comparison to use of childcare in the last week in England shows there are fewer differences than seen earlier for yearly use. Overall use in the last week was the same (two-thirds of families), and levels of use of formal care were very similar. Informal care was the type of provision where a gap remained, with Welsh families being slightly more likely to have used informal care in the last week (47 per cent compared to 42 per cent in England). This was mainly based on a greater use of grandparents.

2.3.3   Which families used childcare and early years provision in the last week?

So, considering the two thirds (66 per cent) of families who had used childcare in the last week, what types of families were these? Who is more or less likely to use childcare – or particular types of childcare? In this section we report on this, looking at whether they are lone parent or couple families, and at family income. Looking at the selected child[23], we see whether there are differences in the levels and types of childcare use dependent on the age of the child.

Couples and lone parents

A simple look at lone parent and couple families suggests that there was little difference between them in terms of the proportion that had used childcare or early years provision in the last week. 67 per cent of couples had done so compared to 65 per cent of lone parents (difference not statistically significant). Use of formal care and informal care was also very similar (Table 2.5).

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[23] The child randomly selected during the interview on which to concentrate some of the detailed questions.

Looking at provider types more closely, there was a difference in the use of day nurseries, with twice as many couple families having used this type of provider (8 per cent compared to 5 per cent of lone parents). As for informal care, understandably, lone parents were much more likely to have used an ex-partner (14 per cent compared to 3 per cent).

Table 2.5   Use of childcare in the last week by family type

	Couple %	Column per cent
		Lone parent %
Any childcare	67	65
Early years provision and formal childcare	***41***	***32***
Nursery school	3	2
Nursery class	7	6
Reception class	10	7
Special day school or nursery	0	1
Day nursery	8	5
Playgroup or pre-school	9	4
Childminder	3	2
Nanny or au pair	+	0
Baby-sitter who came to home	2	1
Breakfast club or After school club, on site	8	10
Breakfast club or After school club, not on site	1	3
Informal childcare	***47***	***48***
My ex-husband/wife/partner	3	14
The child's grandparent(s)	37	33
The child's older brother/sister	4	3
Another relative	6	10
A friend or neighbour	6	7
Base: All families		
Unweighted base	*416*	*145*

+ <0.5 per cent

Family income

Higher income families were more likely to have used childcare in the last week than lower income families (Table 2.6). Three quarters (76 per cent) of families with a yearly income £32,000 or more had used childcare in the last week, compared to under two-thirds (61 per cent) of families with a yearly income under £10,000. Of course, this relationship may simply be a proxy for the relationship between use of childcare and whether the parents are working.

So, how do we account for higher income families using more childcare? Were they likely to be using more of particular types of childcare or early years provision, or is their greater use distributed across the different types of formal and informal provision? From Table 2.6 below, we see that the association between higher family income and greater use of childcare is accounted for largely (but not solely) by a greater use of *informal* childcare and early years provision among those with higher incomes. Five in ten (53 per cent) families with a yearly income of £32,000 or more used informal childcare in the last week, compared to four in ten (39 per cent) of those with a yearly income under £10,000.

Table 2.6   Use of childcare in the last week, by family yearly income

				Column per cent
	Under £10,000	**£10,000 - £19,999**	**£20,000 - £31,999**	**£32,000 +**
	%	**%**	**%**	**%**
Used any childcare	61	63	67	76
Used formal care	37	38	38	43
Used informal care	39	47	50	53
Base: All families				
Unweighted base	*98*	*186*	*158*	*92*

Looking at particular types of formal provision (Table 2.7), levels of use of the more traditional forms of early years provision (nursery schools, classes, etc.) did not vary between those with low, middle or high incomes.   However, those with higher incomes (£20,000 or above) were three times more likely than those with incomes under £20,000 to have used a day nursery (15 to 17 per cent compared to 5 to 6 per cent). Higher income families were also more likely than lower income families to have used a childminder (6 per cent of the highest income group compared to 1 per cent of the lowest income group). Lower income families, in turn, were more likely to have used a playgroup (11 per cent of the lowest income group compared to 4 per cent of the highest). Cost plays a part in explaining these differences, as the England report shows that day nurseries and childminders are among the most expensive types of providers, while playgroups are among the cheaper types of providers.

When we look at the use of different types of informal providers, use of grandparents increases according to levels of family income: grandparents were used by a quarter (27 per cent) of families in the lowest income quartile and by almost half (45 per cent) of families in the highest quartile. However, the opposite relationship is found when looking at the numbers of families using ex-partners as childcare. Those with yearly incomes under £10,000 were three times as likely to use ex-partners than those with incomes of £32,000 or more (9 per cent compared to 3 per cent). Of course, to a certain extent, this reflects the lower incomes of lone parents.

Table 2.7   Use of providers in the last week, by family yearly income

	Under £10,000 %	£10,000 - £19,999 %	£20,000 - £31,999 %	£32,000+ %
			Column per cent	
Early years provision and formal childcare				
Nursery school	4	4	2	1
Nursery class	6	9	8	3
Reception class	7	10	8	9
Special day school or nursery or unit	0	1	0	0
Day nursery	5	5	6	15
Playgroup or pre-school	11	7	8	4
Childminder	1	1	3	6
Nanny or au pair	0	0	0	1
Baby-sitter	1	2	2	3
Out-of-school club on site	8	8	8	11
Out-of-school club off site	1	3	2	2
Informal childcare				
My ex-husband/wife/partner	9	5	5	3
The child's grandparent(s)	27	36	37	45
The child's older brother/sister	0	6	3	4
Another relative	8	6	11	3
A friend or neighbour	6	5	6	11
Base: All families				
Unweighted base	*98*	*186*	*158*	*92*

Children's age

Given the different need for childcare and early years provision for children of different ages, we expect children's ages to be a key determinant of families' use. To look at this issue, we move from analysis of families' data to data for the selected child.

As seen in Table 2.8, three and four year olds were the key users of childcare and early years provision, with nine out of ten (87 per cent) having used childcare or early years provision in the last week. Combining the greater need for childcare for pre-school children with early years provision for this group, this is as we would expect. Similarly, we are not surprised that children aged two and under were the next most likely to have used childcare (69 per cent). Among school aged children, primary school children were more likely to have used childcare than secondary school children (54 per cent of five to 11 year olds compared to 43 per cent of 12 to 14 year olds).

Table 2.8   Use of childcare in the last week, by age of child

						Column per cent
	0 – 2 %	3 - 4 %	5 - 7 %	8 - 11 %	12 - 14 %	All %
Used any childcare	69	87	55	53	43	**58**
Used formal childcare	39	84	19	21	7	**29**
Used informal childcare	45	40	46	38	38	**41**
Base: All families						
Unweighted base	102	72	106	149	132	561

The differences in levels of use are largely explained by variations in the levels of use of formal childcare and early years provision. 84 per cent of three to four year olds had used formal childcare, compared to around a third or less of each other age group (and just 7 per cent of 12 to 14 year olds) – Table 2.9 shows that this difference is based on greater use of early years provision for three to four year olds rather than other formal childcare such as childminders. Out-of-school clubs were also more likely to have been used for five to 14 year olds than younger age groups. As for informal care, there were few differences – the most notable being the use of another relative, which decreased with age (10 per cent of the youngest age group compared to 3 per cent of 12 to 14 year olds). The types of providers used for different age groups is explored further in Chapter 3 through the analysis of the reasons for using different types of providers.

Table 2.9   Use of providers in the last week, by age of child

					Column per cent
	0 - 2 %	3 - 4 %	5 - 7 %	8 - 11 %	12 - 14 %
Early years provision and formal childcare					
Nursery school	2	6	0	0	0
Nursery class	0	35	0	0	0
Reception class	0	31	5	0	0
Day nursery	20	8	0	0	0
Playgroup or pre-school	15	14	0	0	0
Childminder	4	2	3	2	2
Nanny or au pair	0	0	1	1	0
Baby-sitter	0	4	2	3	0
Out-of-school club on site	0	1	10	15	4
Out-of-school club off site	0	0	1	2	1
Informal childcare					

My ex-husband/wife/partner	5	1	9	4	2
The child's grandparent(s)	37	29	32	25	29
The child's older brother/sister	1	1	3	2	6
Another relative	10	5	6	4	3
A friend or neighbour	2	11	5	8	3

Base: All families
Unweighted base	*102*	*72*	*106*	*149*	*132*

2.3.4 What variation was there in use across different areas?

The characteristics of families and children who use childcare and early years provision are of key interest when deciding on and evaluating childcare and early years provision policies. However, the area in which families live can also be a key determinant to the availability, quality and cost of childcare and early years provision. We have looked at use of childcare and early years provision according to the level of affluence or deprivation of their local area, as many of the recent policy initiatives have focussed on the most deprived areas of England and Wales.

Measures of local deprivation, as calculated by the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister, have been matched to the survey data. Families have been split into quintiles according to their local area score on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (see Appendix B for more details).

Area deprivation

Looking across the Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles, the pattern of childcare and early years provision use is not as clear as the pattern across family income quartiles. There is higher use of formal care in less deprived areas, but this is not statistically significant, and is balanced out with lower use of informal care (although also not statistically significant), resulting in very similar levels of overall use (Table 2.10).

Table 2.10   Use of childcare in the last week, by Index of Multiple Deprivation

	Used any childcare %	Used formal childcare %	Used informal childcare %	*Unweighted base*
1st quintile – least deprived	67	48	42	*98*
2nd quintile	65	38	52	*109*
3rd quintile	58	35	37	*89*
4th quintile	65	36	47	*117*
5th quintile – most deprived	72	37	53	*148*

Base: All families

2.4 Use of providers where Welsh is spoken

For each of the providers they had used in the last week, parents were asked whether the provider used the Welsh language when providing childcare or early years provision. 44 per cent of parents had used at least one provider where Welsh was spoken. This tended *not* to be the exclusive use of Welsh, as just 12 per cent of parents had used at least one provider where Welsh was used exclusively (or almost so) compared to 36 per cent of parents having used at least one provider where Welsh was used sometimes.

This varied by family type, with half of couple families having used at least one provider where Welsh is spoken (48 per cent) compared to one third of lone parent families (33 per cent). As Table 2.11 shows, this gap is based on differences in use of providers where Welsh is spoken sometimes, as well as use of providers where Welsh is spoken exclusively (although the latter difference is not statistically significant). This association with family type may be based on provider types used - income and area deprivation may also have a role, but due to small base sizes, the evidence is inconclusive.

Table 2.11   Use of providers where Welsh spoken, by family type

	Column per cent	
	Couple %	**Lone parent %**
Use of provider where Welsh spoken	48	33
Use of provider where Welsh spoken sometimes	39	27
Use of provider where Welsh spoken exclusively	14	7
Use of provider where no Welsh spoken	78	83
Base: All families who used childcare in the last week		
Unweighted base	*280*	*98*

2.5 Summing up

This chapter has provided an overview of parents' use of formal and informal childcare, over the period of a year as well as a week, and across all types of families.

Two-thirds of families had used childcare in the last week: 38 per cent had used formal care, and 47 per cent had used informal care. Out of all the childcare providers, families were most likely to have used a grandparent for childcare (36 per cent). Used by 10 per cent per cent of families, out-of-school clubs (on or off school sites) were the most commonly used type of formal provision.

The wide use of early years providers for three to four year olds points to the role of educational reasons for childcare. 84 per cent of children in this age group had received formal childcare in the last week, and this consisted mainly on early years education providers.

Income is also highlighted as associated with the use of formal care, suggesting the importance of the cost of childcare (discussed in Chapter 5). The lower cost of some early years education providers in comparison to other types of formal care may indeed also be driving the wide use of these providers for three to four year olds.

Now that the scene has been set in terms of overall use of both formal and informal childcare, we can move on to make the important distinction between economic use and educational use, explored in the next chapter.

3 WHY DO PARENTS USE CHILDCARE OR EARLY YEARS PROVISION?

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 provided an overview of the use of childcare and early years provision across different types of providers and by different families. In this chapter, we address the question of *why* parents were using these types of childcare and early years provision. How do levels of use - across different types of providers and across types of families – vary according to the reasons why the childcare or early years provision were being used? Our main focus is on use of childcare for economic reasons (parental work, jobsearch or study) or for the educational development of the child. The chapter is divided along these lines.

In essence, this chapter addresses the following questions –

- What proportion of families used childcare in the last week for economic or educational reasons?
  - What types of childcare did they use for these reasons?

- Which families used childcare in the last week for economic or educational reasons?

As in Chapter 2, we focus here on use in the last week.

3.2 Reasons for using childcare and early years provision in the last week

3.2.1 Defining economic and educational

Parents were asked their reasons for using each provider – both formal and informal - within the last week. They could give more than one answer to this question -

Which of the things on this card best describe the reasons you used [provider's name] in the week beginning Monday [date]?

Parents were given these options (those in brackets were only shown to parents in couple families):

1 **'So that I could work'**
(2 **'So that my husband / wife / partner could work)'**
3 **'So that I could look for work'**
(4 **'So that my husband / wife/ partner could look for work')**
5 **'So that I could study'**
(6 **'So that my husband / wife / partner could study')**
7 'So that I could look after the home / other children'
8 'So that I could go shopping / attend an appointment / social'
9 *'For my child s educational development'*
10 'Because my child likes spending time with / at the provider'
11 'So that my child could take part in a leisure activity'
12 'Other reason'
13 **'Because I am soon going to be working'**
14 **'Because I am soon going to be studying'**

15 'So that I could care for a relative / friend / neighbour'
16 'Because I was / am ill'
17 'So that my child and a relative could spend time together'
18 'For my child s social development'
19 'To keep the childcare place'
20 'So that I / we could have a break'

Answers relating to work and study, of either the respondent or their partner, were grouped during analysis and considered 'economic' reasons (shown in bold, above). Answers relating to the child's educational development were considered 'educational' for the purposes of this chapter (shown in italics, above). All other answers have been grouped as 'other reasons'.

3.2.2 *Reasons why parents used their childcare and early years providers in the last week*

The proportions of parents using various childcare and early years providers for economic and educational reasons are shown in Table 3.1. Whilst 66 per cent of families had used some childcare for *any* reason in the last week, only 40 per cent had used it for reasons which included economic activities and 25 per cent for reasons which included the children's education.

Table 3.1   Use of providers in the last week, by reason for use

			Column per cent
	For any reason %	**Economic reasons** %	**Educational reasons** %
Early years provision and formal childcare	*38*	*15*	*24*
Nursery school	2	1	2
Nursery class attached to primary or infants' school	7	2	6
Reception class attached to primary or infants' school	9	2	8
Special day school or nursery or unit for children with special needs	+	0	0
Day nursery	7	6	3
Playgroup or pre-school	8	2	5
Childminder	3	3	+
Nanny or au pair	+	+	+
Baby-sitter who came to home	2	1	+
Breakfast club or After school club, on school/nursery school site	8	3	3
Breakfast club or After school club, not on school/nursery site	2	+	1
Informal childcare	*47*	*29*	*2*
My ex-husband/wife/partner	6	2	6
The child's grandparent(s)	36	24	+
The child's older brother/sister	4	2	4
Another relative	7	3	7
A friend or neighbour	7	3	7
Other			
Leisure/sport activity	4	+	2
Other childcare provider	2	1	+
No childcare used	34	34	34
Used some childcare for economic reasons		40	
Did not use any of the childcare for economic reasons		27	
Used some childcare for educational reasons			25
Did not use any of the childcare for educational reasons			41

| *Base: All families* | *561* | *561* | *561* |

+ <0.5 per cent

Note: parents could say they had used their providers for more than one reason, so these subgroups are not mutually exclusive and families may have been represented twice.

When looking at use of childcare and early years provision for *any* reasons, levels of use of formal and informal care varied, with fewer families using formal childcare than informal (38 and 47 per cent respectively). This balance remains the same when we look solely at parents using childcare for economic reasons, with a greater use of informal than formal care. 15 per cent of parents had used formal childcare or early years provision for economic reasons in the last week, whilst 29 per cent of parents had used informal childcare for these reasons. By far the most commonly used providers for economic reasons were grandparents, used by 24 per cent of parents in the last week. The most commonly used formal provision for economic reasons were day nurseries (6 per cent of all parents), significantly more than the use of nursery classes or reception classes (2 per cent in both cases).

As we would expect, childcare and early years provision used for educational reasons were predominantly from among the formal providers. A quarter (24 per cent) of parents had used formal providers for educational reasons in the last week, compared to only 2 per cent using informal care for these reasons. Most often used were reception classes (8 per cent of parents said this), significantly more than other formal providers apart from nursery classes (6 per cent).

Table 3.1 shows the proportions of parents using childcare and early years provision for economic or for educational reasons. Of course, some parents used services for *both* economic *and* educational reasons. Table 3.2 shows the proportions of parents using it for either one reason or for a combination.

Table 3.2   Use of childcare for economic reasons, educational reasons or both

	Column per cent
	%
Economic reasons only	43
Educational reasons only	21
Economic and educational reasons	17
Other reasons only	20
Base: All families who used childcare in the last week	
Unweighted base	*378*

Among parents who had used childcare or early years provision in the last week, four in ten (43 per cent) had done so for economic reasons, without referring to any educational needs for their children. Nearly one fifth (17 per cent) of families using childcare and early years provision were doing so for both economic *and* educational reasons. A similar proportion (21 per cent) were using it for educational – and no economic – reasons. In addition, a fifth (20 per cent) of families using childcare in the last week were using their providers exclusively for reasons *other than* economic or educational purposes.

3.3 Which types of childcare were used by which families for economic reasons?

So, we have an overall picture of the proportions of families using childcare or early years provision for economic reasons and for the children's educational development. Sections 3.3 and 3.4 report on the extent to which this varies across different types of providers (largely distinguishing between informal and formal) and across different families.

Here, in Section 3.3, we focus on childcare and early years provision use for economic reasons. We first examine the effect that a family's structure might have on their reasons for using childcare and then consider whether family income levels, the age of the children, or area of deprivation affect levels of use.

3.3.1 Which families used childcare and early years provision in the last week for economic reasons?

Couples and lone parents

A similar proportion of lone parents and couple families use childcare in order to go to work or to study (37 per cent and 41 per cent respectively).

Family income

Family income was shown, in Chapter 2, to have a strong relationship with the use of childcare and early years provision. Higher income families were seen to be using more childcare than lower income families, and in general this was accounted for by the higher income families using more informal childcare.

It is not surprising then, to see that of the parents with the highest family incomes (£32,000 or more), over half (55 per cent) said they had used some kind of childcare for economic reasons. This compares with only a quarter (25 per cent) of parents with an income of under £10,000 (Table 3.3). (Of course, higher income families are more likely to contain dual-earners, who use more childcare for economic reasons.)

Table 3.3   Use of childcare for economic reasons, by family yearly income

				Column per cent
	Under £10,000 %	**£10,000 - £19,999** %	**£20,000 - £31,999** %	**£32,000+** %
Any economic reasons for using any childcare	25	37	43	55
Any economic reasons for using any formal childcare	9	12	15	28
Any economic reasons for using any informal childcare	16	30	35	34
Base: All families *Unweighted base*	*98*	*186*	*158*	*92*

The use of formal and informal childcare for economic reasons was also very different across families with different income levels. There was a greater disparity in the proportions of high and low-income families using formal care for economic reasons than for use of informal care. Table 3.3 shows that three times as many of the highest income families (£32,000 or more) said they had used formal childcare for economic reasons, compared to the lowest income families (under £10,000) (28 per cent compared to 9 per cent). Such a difference between families of higher and lower incomes may reflect the cost of formal care. Use of informal childcare for economic reasons was only *twice* as prevalent among the highest income group, compared to the lowest income group (34 per cent compared to 16 per cent).

We took the most-used formal institutional providers and the most commonly used informal provider (see Table 3.1) and examined whether or not each of them was used for economic reasons, across different family types. Table 3.4 shows that few specific provider types were more likely to have been used for economic reasons by some family income groups than others.

Table 3.4   Use of providers for economic reasons, by family yearly income

				Column per cent
	Under £10,000 **%**	**£10,000 - £19,999** **%**	**£20,000 - £31,999** **%**	**£32,000 +** **%**
Nursery School	1	1	0	1
Nursery Class	0	3	3	1
Reception Class	2	2	3	3
Day Nursery	5	4	4	11
Playgroup or pre-school	4	2	1	1
Child-minder	1	1	3	6
Breakfast club on site	0	3	4	6
Breakfast club off site	0	1	0	1
Grandparent	15	25	28	29
Base: All families				
Unweighted base	*98*	*186*	*158*	*92*

In most cases, there were no significant differences between parents in different income groups and their use of formal providers for economic reasons. This may be partly related to the almost universal uptake of free part time early years education places for three and four year olds. Similarly, parents do not usually pay for reception classes. There was only a difference between the use of day nurseries according to parents' income levels. 11 per cent of families in the highest income bracket (£32,000 or more) had used this provider type for reasons that included economic purposes, compared to just 4 to 5 per cent across the other income groups.

Given that nursery school, nursery class and reception class are very much associated with children's educational development, it is perhaps not surprising that the proportion of families who said they had used them for economic reasons was very low.

Grandparents were a key provider of childcare for all families, but Table 3.4 shows parents within the two highest income brackets were twice as likely to have used a grandparent for economic reasons as the lowest income group. Around three in ten parents with incomes over £20,000 or more (28-29 per cent) said they used grandparents for economic reasons, compared to 15 per cent of parents in the lowest income group. The parents in these higher income groups may also come from families with higher incomes; their own parents thus finding themselves with enough resources to retire and help look after their grandchildren, than those in lower income groups.

Children's age

We have seen that the age of the children in a family significantly influences the kind of childcare used by that family (see Chapter 2), with families with pre-school (particularly three and four year olds) children most likely to use any childcare or early years provision. This is partly explained by the early years education of these pre-school children. To what extent does this hold true when we look at childcare used for economic reasons? In this analysis, we look at the use of childcare by the 'selected' child.

Chapter 2 showed that three and four year olds were more likely to have received childcare, and also more likely to have received formal childcare or early years provision. As will be shown later, the main reason parents gave for children of this age group to be attending childcare or early years provision, was related to their wish to further their child's educational development. This is not surprising given that it is these children who are eligible for free early years education under the Government's current initiatives.

However, parents of this age group also appeared to be the most likely group to be using *formal* childcare for economic reasons (Table 3.5). Pre-school children were most likely to have received some form of childcare for economic reasons (reflecting the greater need for childcare before children start school). A third (37 per cent) of parents with children aged four and under were using some childcare for reasons that included economic activities, while only a quarter (25 per cent) of parents of secondary school age children (aged 12 - 14) were doing so.

Table 3.5 Use of childcare for economic reasons, by age of the 'selected' child

	0 - 2 %	3 - 4 %	5 - 7 %	8 - 11 %	12 - 14 %	Column per cent All %
Any economic reasons for using any childcare	44	32	30	34	25	**33**
Any economic reasons for using any formal childcare	23	17	12	10	3	**12**
Any economic reasons for using any informal childcare	30	22	20	26	22	**24**
Base: All families *Unweighted base*	*102*	*72*	*106*	*149*	*132*	***561***

Turning now to the use of *formal* childcare for economic reasons, amongst children of different age groups, the use of formal childcare for economic reasons was highest among those with children aged four or under: 20 per cent of all parents of these children said they had used a formal provider while they were working or studying. This compares to 11 per cent of parents of primary school age children (5 to 11), and 3 per cent of parents of secondary school age children (12 to 14).

Levels of use of *informal* care for economic reasons were far more evenly spread across the age groups, with around one in five children receiving informal care for economic reasons. This even included the 12 to 14 year olds: a fifth (22 per cent) both of parents of three and four year olds, and those of 12 to 14 year olds said they had used informal care while they worked or studied. If formal childcare for economic reasons is more common amongst parents of pre-school age children, we can assume it is because parents would require childcare during the day in a way that is not necessary when children are at school. The similar use of informal care for economic reasons across all the age ranges suggests that this type of childcare frequently fulfils a role which formal childcare or school hours do not.

3.3.2 What variation was there in use across different areas?

Area deprivation

We saw in Chapter 2 that families' use of childcare did not vary across different areas according to deprivation. But does looking solely at childcare use for economic reasons change the picture (Table 3.6)?

Table 3.6 Use of childcare for economic reasons, by Index of Multiple Deprivation

	1st quintile – least deprived %	2nd quintile %	3rd quintile %	4th quintile %	5th quintile – most deprived %
Any economic reasons for using any childcare	47	43	39	37	35
Any economic reasons for using any formal childcare	28	16	15	15	7
Any economic reasons for using any informal childcare	29	31	27	30	29
Base: All families *Unweighted base*	*98*	*109*	*89*	*117*	*148*

There was no significant difference in the use of *any* kind of childcare for economic reasons between families in the least deprived and the most deprived areas.

We can, however, see a trend in the use of *formal* types of childcare for economic reasons. Nearly three in ten (28 per cent) parents in the least deprived areas of the country used some formal childcare for the purposes of working or studying, while less than one in ten (7 per cent) of those in the least deprived areas did so. This may reflect the higher levels of unemployment seen in more deprived areas – if parents were not likely to be working, they were also not likely to be using formal childcare for this purpose. Approximately the same proportions of parents from different areas were using *informal* care for economic reasons.

3.4   Which types of childcare are used by which families for educational reasons?

We have seen that economic reasons were more likely to be given as a reason for using childcare and early years provision amongst families with certain characteristics, such as those with children aged four and under, and those with higher incomes. This section now asks what characteristics are associated with using childcare and early years provision for reasons linked to the child's educational development. We begin with a look at family structure and income, and then examine who gave educational reasons for using childcare by the children's ages, the family income and the deprivation of area in which the family lives.

3.4.1 Which families used childcare and early years provision in the last week for educational reasons?

Couples and lone parents

We saw, above, that both couple families and lone parents were just as likely to be using childcare for economic reasons. However, couple families were slightly more likely to be using childcare for educational reasons (27 per cent compared to 20 per cent of lone parents).

As there was little difference in the sample between the ages of selected children in lone parent and couple families, we may conclude that couple families are slightly more likely to use childcare for reasons that include their child's educational development. This may be because lone parents have chosen to use childcare, first and foremost, so that they could go to work, whereas couple families have the opportunity to parent-shift, and have the possibility to choose childcare for educational reasons.

Family income

Family income has been shown to be a key factor influencing the use of childcare. Also apparent is the fact that this relationship was particularly strong when we focus solely on childcare used for economic reasons. But are families' incomes also associated with their use of childcare for educational reasons? It would appear not, if we look at Table 3.7.

Table 3.7   Use of childcare for educational reasons, by family yearly income

				Column per cent
	Under £10,000 %	**£10,000 - £19,999** %	**£20,000 - £31,999** %	**£32,000+** %
Any educational reasons for using any childcare	28	26	24	24
Any educational reasons for using any formal childcare	28	25	24	21
Any educational reasons for using any informal childcare	1	3	2	1
Base: All families *Unweighted base*	*98*	*186*	*158*	*92*

So, the relationship is not as strong as for use of childcare for economic reasons. There is no significant difference in the use of childcare for an educational reason, between the highest and lowest income groups. This compares with a 30 percentage point difference in using *any* care for economic reasons, between the highest and lowest income groups (see Table 3.3).

Unlike their use of formal and informal childcare for the purposes of working and studying, parents' use for educational reasons according to income bracket does not vary greatly between formal and informal services. There was an insignificant six percentage-point difference in the use of formal childcare for educational reasons by parents in the highest and lowest income brackets, compared to a 19-percentage point difference in the uses of formal childcare for economic reasons between the same groups. There is also very little variation between income groups and the use of *informal* care.

Children's age

We saw, above, that younger children were more likely to be attending formal childcare services for reasons relating to their parents' work or study arrangements. But what patterns emerge when we look at the use of childcare and early years provision by different age groups, for educational reasons?

Table 3.8 shows that those aged three and four were more likely than others to be receiving some form of childcare for educational reasons, with four in ten (42 per cent) doing so, significantly more than the 2 in 10 (19 per cent) children aged two and under. We are not surprised to find that pre-school children were more likely to be receiving childcare for reasons including their education than primary school aged children. Among school age children, there are much lower levels of formal childcare use for educational reasons.

Table 3.8   Use of childcare for educational reasons, by age of the 'selected' child

	0 - 2 %	3 - 4 %	5 - 7 %	8 - 11 %	12 - 14 %	All %
					Column cent	per
Any educational reasons for using any childcare	19	42	8	9	4	**13**
Any educational reason for using any formal childcare	19	66	7	7	2	**15**
Any educational reasons for using any informal childcare	0	2	0	0	0	**+**
Base: All children *Unweighted base*	*102*	*72*	*106*	*149*	*132*	***561***

+ <0.5 per cent

We also looked at which providers were used by which age groups of children. As would be expected, early years providers such as nursery classes and reception classes were mostly used for educational reasons especially for children aged three and four.

Table 3.9   Use of providers for educational reasons, by the age of the 'selected' child

						Column per cent
	0 - 2 %	3 - 4 %	5 - 7 %	8 - 11 %	12 - 14 %	All %
Early years provision and formal childcare	19	66	7	7	2	**15**
Nursery school	2	5	0	0	0	**1**
Nursery class attached to primary or infants' school	0	27	0	0	0	**3**
Reception class attached to primary or infants' school	0	25	5	0	0	**4**
Day nursery	8	3	0	0	0	**2**
Playgroup or pre-school	9	8	0	0	0	**3**
Breakfast club or After school club, on school/nursery school site	0	0	1	6	2	**2**
Breakfast club or After school club, not on school/nursery site	0	0	1	1	0	**1**
Informal childcare	0	2	0	0	0	**+**
The child's grandparent(s)	0	2	0	0	0	**+**
Other						
Leisure/sport activity	0	1	0	3	2	**1**
Other childcare provider	0	0	1	1	0	**+**
No childcare used by 'selected' child	31	13	45	47	58	**42**
Base: All families						
Unweighted base	*102*	*72*	*106*	*149*	*132*	***561***

+ <0.5 per cent

Children in the later primary school years (8 to 11) were the most likely group to be using breakfast or after school clubs on school sites, for reasons that included their education. 6 per cent of children this age, used them for these reasons.

For parents of three and four year olds, many providers were clearly chosen for reasons which included their child's education, and in each case, these parents were the most significant users of these providers for such reasons. For example, 25 per cent of these parents used reception classes, and 27 per cent used nursery classes for educational reasons.

3.4.2 *What variation was there in use across different regions and areas?*

Area deprivation

Parents who used any formal childcare for economic reasons were most likely to be in the least deprived areas of the country. However, the pattern for families' use of childcare for reasons that include the child's educational development, is less slanted towards the more affluent areas (see Table 3.10). There are no significant differences in the use of childcare for educational reasons, across the five quintiles of area deprivation.

Table 3.10 Use of childcare for educational reasons, by Index of Multiple Deprivation

					Column per cent
	1st quintile – least deprived %	2nd quintile %	3rd quintile %	4th quintile %	5th quintile – most deprived %
Used any childcare for educational reasons	28	23	22	27	25
Used any formal childcare for educational reasons	25	22	22	27	24
Used any informal childcare for educational reasons	1	4	1	3	1
Base: All families *Unweighted base*	*98*	*109*	*89*	*117*	*148*

3.5 Summing up

This chapter has explored the numbers of parents using childcare and early years provision in order to work or study, or for their children's educational development. We have looked at different types of formal and informal provision and across different families structures, the age of the children, the families' income levels, and by considering the different areas of deprivation in which the families live.

The chapter has highlighted how levels and types of childcare use differ according to why parents are using it. On the whole, parents were most likely to say that they used childcare for economic reasons (40 per cent), although a large proportion (25 per cent) also said that they used childcare for educational reasons. Formal childcare was the main type used for educational reasons (24 per cent compared to 2 per cent of parents using informal care for these reasons).

Formal *and* informal childcare were found to be fulfilling a role before the children started school, enabling parents to work or study. 15 per cent of parents used formal childcare for economic reasons, and 29 per cent used informal childcare for these

reasons. However, formal childcare was also enabling parents with these pre-school children to help their child's educational development.

The use of formal and informal childcare for economic reasons was seen to be associated with families' financial contexts. Across Wales, parents in the more deprived areas were the least likely to be using formal childcare for their own work or study (7 per cent in the most deprived areas, compared to 28 per cent in the least deprived areas). Family income is also a considerable factor in parents' decisions to use formal childcare for economic reasons. 9 per cent of families in the lowest income families used formal childcare for economic reasons, compared to 28 per cent of families in the highest income bracket.

If we are to understand why parents have used childcare, we must also ask when they were using it. The next chapter considers, in detail, when parents used different formal and informal providers during the last week.

4   WHEN DO PARENTS USE OR NEED CHILDCARE AND EARLY YEARS PROVISION?

4.1   Introduction

Within this chapter, we provide a picture of parents' use of childcare and early years provision (for the selected child) by describing the pattern of use across the last week, in terms of number of providers used, as well as the number of days and the timing of sessions. A detailed look at *when* parents use childcare across the week is interesting from a policy perspective as it gives an insight into the following issues:

- The ways that early years provision is used alongside formal and informal childcare;
- The relative use of childcare for economic, educational and other reasons;
- The use of different forms of childcare at different times of the day and week (eg, at atypical working times).

This chapter focuses on the selected child only, as the information is based on an attendance diary for the last week, which applied only to the selected child. Detailed information was collected day by day, and session by session, about all childcare and early years provision used by the selected child in the last week.

4.2   Patterns of use across the week

4.2.1   Number of providers

Use of more than one childcare or early years provider was common. Whilst six in ten children who had received childcare in the last week had done so from only one provider (59 per cent), three in ten had had two providers (28 per cent) and one in ten (13 per cent) had had three or more.

Table 4.1 shows the number of different provider types used, separating out early years providers versus other formal childcare and informal childcare. A third of children who had received childcare or early years provision had done so from one early years provider (28 per cent), a fifth had received childcare from one formal provider (19 per cent), and over half from one informal provider (59 per cent). The small proportions who had used more than one provider of the same type show that the majority of those using more than one provider were using different types of childcare or early years provision, rather than two early years providers, or two other formal providers. Those using informal care were most likely to use more than one provider of the same type. 11 per cent of children who had received childcare had had two informal providers compared to 2 per cent in the case of both early years provision and 'other formal' childcare.

Table 4.1   Number of different provider types used in the last week

	Early years provision [24] %	Other formal[25] %	Informal %
			Column per cent
0	70	79	30
1	28	19	59
2+	2	2	11
Unweighted base	*331*	*331*	*331*

Base: All selected children who had received childcare in the last week

Now looking at the reasons for using childcare, and the number of providers used for each type of reason, we can see in Table 4.2 that using more than one provider is associated with using providers for different reasons, as there are few cases of using more than one provider for the same type of reason. One in three children had received childcare from just one provider for economic reasons only (34 per cent), one in ten had received childcare from just one provider for educational reasons only (9 per cent), and one in twenty had received childcare from just one provider for both economic and education reasons (6 per cent). Although the figure is low, children were more likely to receive childcare from two providers for economic reasons only (7 per cent compared to 1 per cent or under in the case of educational reasons only or both types of reason).

Table 4.2   Number of providers used for different reasons in the last week

	Economic reasons only %	Educational reasons only %	Economic & educational %	Neither %
				Column per cent
0	57	90	94	60
1	34	9	6	30
2	7	0	1	8
3+	2	+	0	3
Unweighted base	*331*	*331*	*331*	*331*

Base: All selected children who had received childcare in the last week

+ <0.5 per cent

[24] Early years provision is defined as 'Nursery school, Nursery class, Reception class, Special day school/nursery, Day Nursery, Playgroup or pre-school, Other nursery education provider'.

[25] Other formal is defined as 'Childminder, Nanny or au pair, Babysitter, Breakfast/after school club, Holiday club'.

4.2.2 Number of days used

Three in ten children had received childcare on five days of the week (30 per cent), reflecting the traditional pattern of working life (Table 4.3). Receipt of childcare on every day of the week (including weekends) was rare, at 3 per cent.

Table 4.3 Number of days used childcare in the last week

	Column per cent
	%
1	13
2	16
3	17
4	15
5	30
6	7
7	3
Unweighted base	*331*

Base: All selected children who had received childcare in the last week

Table 4.4 shows that the type of childcare received for five days of the week was more likely to be early years provision, as 18 per cent of children had received care from an early years provider for five days of the week, compared to 3 per cent in the case of other formal childcare, and 10 per cent in the case of informal care. Other formal care and informal care were more likely to have been used on just one day, especially in the case of informal provider types. 7 per cent of children had received other formal care on just one day, while 16 per cent of children had received informal care on just one day. This reflects the more ad-hoc nature of informal childcare provision.

Table 4.4 Number of days different provider types used in the last week

	Early years provision %	Other formal %	Informal %
0	70	79	30
1	2	7	16
2	3	3	17
3	4	4	13
4	4	3	10
5	18	3	10
6	0	0	2
7	0	0	2
Unweighted base	*331*	*331*	*331*

Base: All selected children who had received childcare in the last week

Information was collected about the activities of parents during each session of childcare. Table 4.5 shows the number of days childcare was used where the mother was working, looking for work or studying during all sessions of childcare used that day versus the number of days where the mother was not doing any economic activity for any of the sessions of childcare used. One in two children had *not* received care on any days with only economic activities (53 per cent), and a similar proportion had *not* received care on any days with only *non-economic* activities (55 per cent).

It was more likely for children to have received care on just one day with only *non-economic* activities (19 per cent) than in the case of economic activities (10 per cent), hence having more than one day with only economic activities was more common that having more than one day with only *non-economic* activities. Assuming the activities of the mother reflect the reasons for using childcare on each day, the low proportions with a high number of days with only one type of activity highlights the complexity of childcare needs and the interaction of multiple reasons for using childcare.

Table 4.5   Number of days of economic activity and non-economic activities (mother's activities)[26]

	Economic activity only %	Non-economic activity only[27] %
	Column per cent	
0	53	55
1	10	19
2	8	7
3	10	6
4	11	6
5	8	7
6	0	0
7	0	+
Unweighted base	*331*	*331*

Base: All selected children who had received childcare in the last week

+ <0.5 per cent

4.3   Patterns of use across the day

The periods of time childcare could be used have been classified into six categories, as shown in Table 4.6[28]. Weekday daytime (9am to 3.29pm) and weekday late afternoon (3.30pm to 5.59pm) were the most common times for the use of childcare,

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[26] This will include a small proportion of female carers who were not the mother of the children (e.g. grandmothers)

[27] Non-economic activities included looking after the home or other children, caring for someone else, shopping, attending an appointment and socialising.

[28] These are not exclusive categories, and a single extended period of childcare might cover several of them.

with around two-thirds of children who had received childcare in that week having received childcare during those periods. A third of children (31-35 per cent) in each case received childcare in a weekday evening (6pm to 9.59pm) or in a weekend period, and a quarter received it during the early morning period (6am to 8.59am). The least likely time to be receiving childcare was the weekday night period (10pm to 5.59am).

Table 4.6   Timing of sessions

	Column per cent
	%
Weekday early morning	24
Weekday daytime	58
Weekday late afternoon	69
Weekday evening	35
Weekday night	15
Weekend	31
Unweighted base	*331*

Base: All selected children who had received childcare in the last week

The timing of sessions does of course however vary hugely by provider type. Table 4.7 shows that a third of children had received early years provision in the daytime compared to just 10 per cent having received other formal care in that time period. Reflecting the greater flexibility of informal care, children were then much more likely to have received informal care than other types of care from late afternoon onwards and at the weekend.

Table 4.7   Timing of sessions with different provider types

	Column per cent		
	Early years provision %	Other formal %	Informal %
Weekday early morning	6	4	15
Weekday daytime	31	10	28
Weekday late afternoon	7	18	49
Weekday evening	0	4	28
Weekday night	0	+	15
Weekend	+	1	27
Unweighted base	*331*	*331*	*331*

Base: All selected children who had received childcare in the last week

+ <0.5 per cent

Taking into account the activities of the mother during sessions (Table 4.8), the early morning and late afternoon periods were associated more with economic activity than non-economic. Twice as many children having received early morning childcare during a period of economic activity as one of non-economic activity (18 per cent compared to 6 per cent), and almost twice as many in the late afternoon period (46 per cent compared to 25 per cent). In turn, evenings, nights and weekend were more associated with non-economic activities.

Table 4.8   Timing of session by economic activity and non-economic activities (mother's activities)[29]

	Economic activity only %	Non-economic activity only %
		Column per cent
Weekday early morning	18	6
Weekday daytime	33	30
Weekday late afternoon	46	25
Weekday evening	11	23
Weekday night	3	11
Weekend	7	25
Unweighted base	*331*	*331*

Base: All selected children who had received childcare in the last week

4.4   Wraparound care

Wraparound care is an issue of particular interest in the context of patterns of use of childcare, in terms of the way parents cope with matching their childcare needs and the availability of childcare providers. If one provider is not available for the complete period of time for which the parent needs childcare, then not only is another provider needed, but accompanying the child on the journey from one provider to another also needs to be organised[30].

For every session of childcare recorded in the attendance diary, information was collected on who had taken and who had collected the child for every session. One in four children (26 per cent) who had received childcare in the last week had been taken or collected by their childcare provider. Focusing only on those who had received childcare from more than one provider, the proportion who had used wraparound care increases to 46 per cent.

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[29] This will include a small proportion of female carers who were not the mother of the children (e.g. grandmothers)

[30] As well as childcare needs not matching the availability of childcare providers, there may be other reasons for use of more than one provider in succession, such as not wanting children to spend more than a certain amount of time with a particular provider.

4.5   Summing up

This chapter has provided a clear picture of how use of different providers pans out across the week for different types of families, in terms of the number of providers used, number of days, the timing of sessions, and wraparound care.

Weekday daytimes and weekday late afternoons were the most common times for the use of childcare - 58 and 69 per cent of children who had received childcare, respectively, had done so during these periods.

31 per cent of children had received care from an early years provider in the daytime period, compared to just 10 per cent of children having received other formal care in that time period, showing that this period is dominated by early years education provision.

Economic reasons as well as educational reasons for using childcare and early years provision have a clear impact on patterns of use. The combination of these reasons lead to more providers being used, as it is rare for just one provider to be used for both types of reasons, and to be available at all times required. Use of wraparound care was also seen to be common. Taking into account what the mother is doing during sessions, 18 per cent of early morning childcare was used as a result of mothers working or studying at that time, compared to 6 per cent of early morning childcare which was used when the mother was doing something else.

Use of wraparound care was common - 26 per cent of children who had received childcare or early years provision in the last week had been taken or collected by their childcare provider.

Having analysed parents' needs and use of childcare in detail, it is now important to work out the role of cost in childcare use, which is discussed in the next chapter.

5   THE COST OF CHILDCARE AND EARLY YEARS PROVISION

5.1   Introduction

The cost of childcare and early years provision has been a key concern reflected in recent childcare policy. It is often discussed as a barrier to employment, especially for mothers, and the way the costs should be shared between parents and the government has been an issue of recent debate. It is also an area, as discussed in Chapter 1, where there have been several recent policy developments, such as the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit, and free part-time nursery education places for three and four year olds.

All families who had used childcare or early years provision in the last week were asked detailed questions about any payments made in that week to the childcare providers they had used, including payments made from outside the household as well as directly by the family. This chapter explores which families are paying for childcare, and whether they are receiving financial help. The actual weekly and hourly costs paid by families are given in Section 5.4, and receipt and awareness of tax credits are examined in Section 5.5.

5.2   What proportion of families pay for their childcare or early years provision?

Almost half of families who had used some childcare or early years provision in the last week had made a payment to at least one of their childcare providers[31] (44 per cent). The payments referred to could have been paid by the families themselves or via subsidies from other people or organisations, and covered the following services:

- Education fees/wages;
- Childcare fees/wages;
- Refreshments/meals;
- Use of equipment;
- Travel costs;
- Trips/outings;
- Other.

46 per cent of couple families had made a payment for their childcare and early years provision compared to 38 of lone parent families (Table 5.1), but this difference is not statistically significant.

As for the number of children in the family, half of families with two or more children had made a payment compared to just one third of one-child families (54 per cent of families with two children and 50 per cent of families with three children or more, compared to 32 per cent).

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[31]Families were asked about any money that was paid before or after the last week to cover costs for that week (including statutory free nursery education).

Table 5.1   Whether payment was made, by family characteristics

	Row per cent	
	%	*Unweighted base*
Family type		
Couple	46	*280*
Lone parent	38	*98*
Number of children		
1	32	*92*
2	54	*178*
3+	50	*108*

Base: All families who had used childcare in the last week

5.3   Financial help towards childcare or early years provision

8 per cent of families who had made a payment to at least one provider said they had received some financial help towards it. Financial help included any help from outside the family, paid either to the family or directly to the provider to cover childcare costs. The sources of financial help asked about were as follows:

- Local Education Authority;
- Local Authority Social Services Department;
- An employer;
- Childcare support fund/ Access Fund;
- An ex-husband/wife/partner;
- Other person (eg, relative) or organisation.

It should be emphasised that as receipt of financial help here is based on parents' awareness of payments made directly to providers, the proportion saying that they receive help is likely to be an underestimate.

5.3.1 Receipt of tax credits

Families were also asked about receipt of tax credits (Table 5.2). Two thirds (69 per cent) of families received Child Tax Credit: 29 per cent of families received it along with Working Tax Credit and 40 per cent received it on its own[32]. Of those receiving Working Tax Credit, only 6 per cent were in receipt of the childcare element (a further 4 per cent were unsure).

Couple families were more likely to receive tax credits in general, and specifically Child Tax Credit only – possibly reflecting being more likely to be working

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[32] Child Tax Credit is a payment to support families (whether working or not), which is paid in addition to Child Benefit and any Working Tax Credit. Working Tax Credit is a payment to top up the earnings of working people on low incomes, and includes support for the costs of qualifying childcare (the childcare element).

households than lone parent families (48 per cent compared to 18 per cent), while similar proportions of both types of family received both tax credits.

Table 5.2   Receipt of tax credits, by family type

			Column per cent
	Couples %	Lone parents %	All
Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit	28	31	29
Child Tax Credit only	48	18	40
None of these	24	50	31
Base: All families			
Unweighted base	*410*	*145*	*555*

As for income (Table 5.3), middle income earners were most likely to be in receipt of tax credits. Around four-fifths of each middle income group were receiving tax credits in comparison to less than half of the lowest income group, and three-quarters of the highest income group.

The low proportion of the lower income group receiving Child Tax Credit (Table 5.3) essentially reflects the fact that non-working families are more likely to still be on Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance[33].

Table 5.3   Receipt of tax credits, by family yearly income

				Column per cent
	Under £10,000 %	£10,000 - £19,999 %	£20,000 - £31,999 %	£32,000 + %
Working Tax Credit & Child Tax Credit	22	48	24	13
Child Tax Credit only	21	30	57	53
None of these	57	22	19	34
Base: All families				
Unweighted base	*97*	*184*	*155*	*92*

5.4   The weekly cost of childcare and early years provision

Families who had made a payment for childcare in the last week were asked a set of

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[33] The aim of Child Tax Credit is to bring together the financial support available for children from both out of work benefits (IS and JSA) and tax credits. The first step towards this was to equalise the payments between the two systems so that they provided the same level of support regardless of which a family was receiving; the second step will be to deliver the IS/JSA support via CTC – involving the "migration" of families from the IS/JSA system to the CTC system.

detailed questions about the amount that they had paid. Information was asked of each provider used for any of the children in the family. Hence, we have been able to calculate the weekly cost of childcare for the whole family.

Including subsidies - the help with payments discussed in Section 5.3 - the average weekly cost of childcare and early years provision was £14.17[34] for those who had paid anything in the last week (much lower than the average cost in England of £23.00). Not including the subsidies, the average weekly cost paid by families was £14.00. These average costs mask a wide variation in the amounts paid by different families (Figure 5.1), as well as a wide variation in the weekly cost of different childcare and early years providers, explored in the England report[35].

Figure 5.1 Weekly childcare and early years provision cost (not including subsidies)

Base: All families who usually pay for childcare, after subsidies (180)
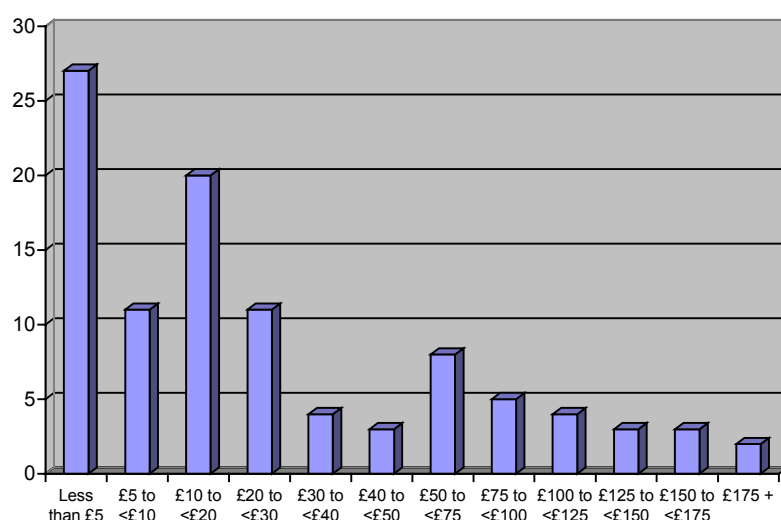
5.4.1 How easy do parents find it to pay?

Families who had paid for childcare in the last week were asked how easy or difficult they f   weekly cost were mixed, but relatively positive (Table 5.4). Three times as many parents said that it was very easy or easy than parents who said that it was difficult or very difficult (55 per cent compared to 19 per cent).

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[34] The average cost given here is the median (rather than the mean). Weekly costs were collected by provider for the last week, a total was calculated and the respondent was asked if this was their usual weekly cost; if not, they were asked for the usual cost, which is the figure used in this section.

[35] The bases are too low to report on cost by provider type in Wales.

Table 5.4   How easy or difficult families found it to pay the weekly cost

	Column per cent
	%
Very easy	34
Easy	21
Neither easy nor difficult	26
Difficult	16
Very difficult	3
Unweighted base	*172*
Base: All families who usually pay for childcare, after subsidies	

Of course, we need to bear in mind that this is not a complete picture of the affordability of childcare. These parents had all used childcare and had therefore found some way of affording it. We know from Chapter 2 that users of childcare had higher incomes on average than other families. In Chapter 6, we explore parents' perceptions about the affordability of childcare in their local area. This provides a broader picture, including both users and non-users of childcare and early years provision.

5.4.2   The hourly cost of childcare and early years provision

The hourly cost of childcare and early years provision has been calculated from the weekly cost and number of hours of childcare used. It has been calculated for all families who had made a payment to a provider in the last week. The hourly cost also takes into account the number of children looked after at the same time, and hence is worked out to represent the hourly cost per child.

Including subsidies, the average hourly cost was £0.72[36] (half the average cost in England, at £1.43). Not including subsidies, the average hourly cost was £0.70. This average hourly cost is out of all payments made to all providers, whether formal or informal, and as shown in the England report hourly cost varies widely by provider type[37].

5.5   Awareness of childcare costs and help with payment

A key issue in any changes in policy and increasing financial help to families is how aware families are of what is available. In this section, awareness of the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit is explored, as well as where families obtain information. Families' knowledge of which providers are covered by the childcare element is also covered.

5.5.1   Awareness of the childcare element and sources of information

Families who were not receiving the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit and who usually pay for childcare were asked whether they were aware that the

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[36] The average cost given here is the median (rather than the mean).
[37] The bases are too low to report on cost by provider type in Wales.

Government offers extra help with the costs of certain types of childcare and early years provision through the tax credit system. Two thirds (68 per cent) of these parents said that they were aware.

Parents who were in receipt of or aware of the childcare element of the tax credit system had found out about it from quite a wide range of sources (Table 5.5). The main sources were TV advertising (cited by 32 per cent), the tax credits application pack (23 per cent) and by word of mouth (Relatives/friends/neighbours, 19 per cent). Of possible interest are those sources rarely mentioned. Very few parents had found out about the childcare element from their employer or from their childcare provider.

Table 5.5   Sources of information on the childcare element

	Column per cent
	%
TV adverts	32
Received tax credits application pack	23
Relatives/Friends/ neighbours	19
Letter from Inland Revenue	11
Job Centre/Job Centre Plus/ New Deal advisor	9
Newspaper/magazine	6
Tax Credit Office or Inland Revenue Official	5
Other leaflets	5
Employer/Workmates	5
Letter from DWP	4
Department of Work and Pensions	3
Leaflet in Post Office	3
Internet	2
Childcare provider	2
Radio adverts	2
Hospital/ surgery/ clinic/ GP/ Health visitor	1
Notice in Child Benefit book	1
Just started claiming Child Benefit	1
Radio/TV news	1
Citizen's Advice Bureau	1
Accountant/ solicitor/ financial advisor	1
Other advert	+
Welfare Rights Worker	+
Other	2
Unweighted base	*385*

Base: All families who received or were aware of the childcare element

+ <0.5 per cent

5.5.2 Awareness of eligibility for childcare element

The childcare element of Working Tax Credit currently covers only certain formal childcare providers – widening eligibility to other providers, including informal types, has however been considered. In this policy context, current awareness of eligibility is useful to inform the debate.

Parents were given a list of providers and asked which they thought were eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit (including those who had not previously heard of the childcare element). In Table 5.6, we split the providers shown to parents into those that are – on the whole - currently eligible (as for example not all after school clubs are eligible) and those that in general are not.

Looking firstly at those providers who are generally eligible, more parents were aware that registered childminders were eligible than any other provider. Two thirds (70 per cent) of parents knew that registered childminders were eligible, compared to half in each case (both 51 per cent) who were aware that a Local Authority day nursery or private day nursery would be eligible. Awareness was lowest for out-of-school clubs, identified by a third of parents (33 per cent).

Among the generally ineligible providers, one in five parents (22 per cent) thought that nannies and au pairs were eligible, and 14 per cent thought that grandparents were eligible.

The lack of awareness about eligible providers, together with the not insignificant proportions of parents thinking that nannies, au pairs and grandparents were among the eligible providers for the childcare element, show the confusion among parents about these issues.

Table 5.6   Awareness of eligibility for tax credits

	Column per cent
	%
Generally eligible	
Registered childminder	70
Local Authority day nursery	51
Private day nursery	51
After school/holiday club	33
Not generally eligible but thought to be	
Nanny or au pair	22
Grandparent	14
Friend or neighbour	5
Unregistered childminder	3
Another type of provider	+
None of these	7
Don't know	7
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*561*

+ <0.5 per cent

5.6   Summing up

The cost of childcare is a complex issue to explore, as this chapter has shown, and analysis relies on parents' awareness of subsidies. A clear picture of the financial aspects of childcare for different types of families has nevertheless been achieved.

Among those who pay, the amounts paid vary enormously, partly because of different types of provision used. Concerns over parents' awareness of the help available are somewhat confirmed, as the proportion receiving the childcare element seems low, and general awareness of the childcare element and eligibility is mixed. For example, only 6 per cent of families receiving the Working Tax Credit, were aware of the childcare element.

There is some room for improvement in terms of increasing parents' awareness of the help available. Knowledge of the types of childcare eligible for the childcare element is low, but it is unclear to what degree this translates into families receiving less help than they are entitled to. Only two thirds (70 per cent) of parents recognised a registered childminder as being eligible for the childcare element, and one-fifth thought a nanny or au pair was eligible (while in general this type of provider is not eligible). Awareness of actual costs seems relatively good, based on the estimates of the cost of day nurseries and childminders.

Having identified cost as a barrier for some families, how important is it as a barrier, versus availability for example? This is explored in the next chapter.

6   WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO USING CHILDCARE OR EARLY YEARS PROVISION?

6.1   Introduction

Within its 10-year strategy for childcare, the Government has signalled its plans to develop its policies to provide 'affordable, flexible, high-quality childcare for all parents who need it'[38]. This builds on the National Childcare Strategy, which aspired to provide "good quality and affordable childcare provision … in every neighbourhood". The policies – and proposed policies – which work towards these broad aims, should have benefits for families and children across a range of perspectives. Good quality childcare and early years provision have been shown to have positive outcomes for children in terms of their educational and social development. Affordable childcare can enable parents (particularly mothers and lone parents) to enter the labour market or increase their hours, thus tackling issues around child poverty, labour market disadvantage and social exclusion.

In preceding chapters, we have reported largely on families' *use* of childcare and early years provision. How many families use it? What types of families? How much do they pay? When do they use it? Why do they use it? And so on. These are all key data for assessing how well government policies are targeting different types of families – and different types of childcare. However, in order to better assess recent childcare policies, we also need to look at the *barriers* – both perceived and experienced – faced by parents with regards to using the types and the amount of childcare that they would ideally choose. An understanding of these barriers will inform future policy – be it about the provision of better information or the actual childcare market.

This chapter covers a wide range of issues that may impact on families' use of childcare and early years provision. They include both barriers that have been *experienced* by parents and parents' *perceptions* about provision in the local area which might influence their childcare decisions. These are investigated in terms of –

- Costs and affordability of childcare and early years provision
- Times that childcare and early years provision is available
- Availability of childcare and early years provision in their local area
- Quality of available childcare or early years provision
- Access to information on childcare and early years provision
- Distances travelled to childcare and early years providers

6.2   Costs and affordability

Chapter 5 provided details of the cost of childcare for parents who had used it during the last week. Here, in Section 6.2, we look at the extent to which parents' perceptions of the cost of childcare may influence their decisions to use it, reporting on parents' views on the affordability of childcare in their local area and the extent to which parents cite 'cost' as a reason for not working or using more than one provider.

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[38] Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare, 2004

6.2.1 Affordability in the local area

Parents were asked what they thought about the childcare costs in their local area -

'And thinking about the overall affordability of childcare provided in your local area, for a family like yours how good would you say this is?'

Their answers (using a four-point scale) are shown in Table 6.1 below. Because of the high proportion (35 per cent) of parents who were unaware of the affordability of local childcare (and thus answered 'don't know'), they are included in the percentage breakdown in the table.

Table 6.1   Views of affordability of childcare in local area

	Column per cent
	%
Very good	9
Fairly good	27
Fairly poor	22
Very poor	8
Don't Know	35
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*561*

It was rare for parents to rate the affordability of local childcare as 'very good'. Around the same proportion of parents rated the affordability as 'very poor' as 'very good' (8 per cent and 9 per cent), and most parents chose to use more moderate ratings. The most commonly expressed views were that affordability was fairly good (27 per cent) or fairly poor (22 per cent), with fewer parents expressing views more extreme than these.

Does use of childcare affect views of local childcare costs?

Parents who had used childcare in the last week were *more* positive about the affordability of local childcare than parents who had not used it (Table 6.2). They were more likely to say that local childcare was 'very' good or 'fairly' good, in terms of affordability if they had used it (29 per cent compared to 23 per cent of those who had not used childcare). However, they were no less likely than others to rate local childcare as poor (30 per cent in both cases).

Table 6.2   Views of affordability of childcare in local area by whether or not the family used childcare in the last week

		Column per cent
	Used childcare in the last week	Did not use childcare in the last week
	%	%
Very good	10	6
Fairly good	29	23
Fairly poor	21	23
Very poor	9	7

Don't Know	32	40
Base: All families		
Unweighted base	*378*	*183*

So, were parents who have used childcare more positive about its affordability because of a greater knowledge of the cost of childcare? Or was it because they tended to come from groups more able to pay for childcare, with higher incomes, for example? We can see below, that parents who had a higher family income were generally more positive about the affordability of childcare in the area.

Views on costs of local childcare by income

Those with higher incomes were generally more positive about the affordability of local childcare (Table 6.3). 47 per cent of parents with a family income of over £32,000 rated it as 'very' or 'fairly' good compared to 29 per cent of parents with a family income of under £10,000. In general, however, ratings of affordability were relatively stable across all incomes.

Table 6.3   Views of affordability of childcare in local area by family yearly income

				Column per cent
	Under £10,000	**£10,000 - 19,999**	**£20,000 - 31,999**	**£32,000 or more**
	%	%	%	%
Very good	6	8	10	11
Fairly good	23	24	28	36
Fairly poor	30	21	19	18
Very poor	5	8	12	7
Don't Know	36	39	31	27
Base: All families				
Unweighted base	*98*	*186*	*158*	*92*

Opinions about the cost of childcare and the age of children in the family

Table 6.4 provides a picture of parents' views about the affordability of local childcare, looking across parents with pre-school and school aged children.

Table 6.4   Views of affordability of childcare in the local area by presence of pre-school age or school age children in the family

	Pre-school age children present %	School aged children present %
		Column per cent
Very good	11	8
Fairly good	33	26
Fairly poor	23	21
Very poor	9	8
Don't Know	24	38
Unweighted base	*230*	*496*

Base: All families. Because some families have both pre-school and school age children present, some families may be represented twice.

Parents with pre-school children were more positive than parents with school age children about the affordability of local childcare (44 per cent rated it as fairly good or very good compared to 34 per cent of other parents). Parents with school aged children were more likely not to know about local affordability. This will no doubt be linked to a greater likelihood of using childcare for pre-school children and the subsidised early education places available for this age group.

6.2.2 Cost as a reason for using more than one childcare or early years provider

The survey included questions to try to untangle why parents used more than one childcare or early years provider for their child. If parents used more than one provider for the selected child in the last week, they were asked about why they chose to do this. The question they answered was -

*'And did you use more than one place or person for [childcare or nursery education/childcare] for [child's name] in that week for any of **these** reasons?*

Respondents could give as many answers as they wished.

Within the debates about the need for integrated provision, we wanted to find out the extent to which combining providers was due to choice or necessity (eg, cost constraints). 9 per cent of parents who used more than one provider cited financial issues as a reason for this (Table 6.5).

Table 6.5   Reasons for using more than one provider for the 'selected' child in last week

	Column per cent
	%
None of these reasons	47
I need more than one provider because I work / study	30
The provider(s) are not available on all the days I want	13
To meet / keep in touch with other local parents / children	12
Cost / financial reasons	9
The provider(s) do not offer enough sessions / hours	6
Other	2
Contact with relative enjoyed (as well as formal childcare)	2
Unweighted base	*135*

Base: All families where the 'selected' child uses more than one provider in the last week

6.2.3   Cost of childcare as a reason for not working

Parents who were not working (excluding those on maternity leave or long term disabled or sick) were asked if issues about childcare were part of their decision not to work. They were shown a showcard of 10 reasons related to childcare, and asked

'Could you look at this card and tell me if you are also not working for any of these reasons?'

Respondents could give more than one answer. Table 6.6 shows the proportion of parents who gave each answer.

Again, the cost of childcare was an issue for a significant minority of non-working parents. For the majority of these parents, it was their *choice* to stay at home with their child rather than work. However, 15 per cent said that they could not find childcare that would make working worthwhile and 10 per cent said that they could not afford quality childcare. Tables 6.7 and 6.8 show childcare related reasons for not working, according to parents in different subgroups – whether they are in a couple or lone parent family, and whether the family has pre-school or school aged children present. There were no significant differences between these groups and whether or not cost was a factor affecting their decision not to work. However, these tables will be referred to in later sections of the chapter.

Table 6.6   Childcare-related reasons for not working

	Column per cent
	%
I want to stay with my child(ren)	45
My child(ren) is/are too young	26
My child(ren) would suffer if I went out to work	19
I cannot find childcare which would make working worthwhile	15
I cannot find childcare for the hours/days I need for work	10
I cannot afford quality childcare	10
I cannot find childcare near where I live	5
I cannot find reliable childcare	4
Child(ren) has/have a long term illness/disability/special needs and need(s) a lot of attention	7
I cannot find good quality childcare	3
Other	3
None of these	24
Unweighted base	*196*

Base: All families where the respondent is not working

The results in Table 6.6 are broadly comparable to those found in a similar study of parents in England. Most commonly stated as a reason for not working by parents in both Wales and England was that they would prefer to stay with their children - around half said this in Wales (45 per cent) and in England (50 per cent).

Table 6.7   Childcare-related reasons for not working, by family type

	Column per cent	
	Couple **%**	**Lone parent** **%**
I want to stay with my child(ren)	49	40
My child(ren) is/are too young	30	20
My child(ren) would suffer if I went out to work	26	8
I cannot find free/cheap childcare which would make working worthwhile	12	21
I cannot afford good quality childcare	8	14
My child(ren) has/have a long term illness/disability/special needs	7	8
I cannot find childcare near where I live	5	4
I cannot find good quality childcare	4	3
I cannot find childcare for the hours/days I need for work	4	18
I cannot find reliable childcare	2	6
Other reason(s)	2	4
None of these	25	23
Unweighted base	*128*	*68*

Base: All families where respondents who are not working, excluding those on maternity leave or long term sick or disabled

Table 6.8   Childcare-related reasons for not working, by presence of pre-school or school age children in the family

	Column per cent	
	Pre-school children present **%**	**School age children present** **%**
I want to stay with my child(ren)	52	44
My child(ren) is/are too young	37	23
My child(ren) would suffer if I went out to work	23	19
I cannot find free/cheap childcare which would make working worthwhile	17	14
I cannot afford good quality childcare	11	11
I cannot find childcare for the hours/days I need for work	10	10
I cannot find reliable childcare	4	3
I cannot find childcare near where I live	4	4
I cannot find good quality childcare	3	4
My child(ren) has/have a long term illness/disability/special need	3	8
Other reason(s)	2	3
None of these	18	24

| *Unweighted base* | *109* | *175* |

Base: all families where the respondent is not working, excluding those on maternity leave or long term sick or disabled. Because some families have both pre-school and school age children present, some families may be represented twice.

6.3   Times that childcare and early years provision is available

The growth of a '24 - 7' society means that an increasing number of parents are having to work at times which have traditionally been regarded as 'family times' such as evenings and weekends. Work outside what used to be the 'standard' nine to five, Monday to Friday week is now the norm for many parents, rather than the exception. However, the majority of recent childcare policies focuses on formal childcare, which is largely available at 'standard' hours (eg, Monday to Friday, eight 'til six). Little has been proposed to facilitate the provision of informal childcare or formal childcare at atypical times. Indeed, there are debates around the extent to which the use of informal childcare can or should be facilitated (eg, eligibility for tax credits, approval schemes). There are also issues around what types of childcare parents would ideally choose during atypical times (eg, more home-based care; informal care).

In contrast, parents with young children have potentially benefited from a number of policies designed to make work more attractive by promoting ways of working that enable employees to combine paid work with other aspects of their lives more effectively. Parents with young children have the right to ask for flexible arrangements, such as part-time work and term-time contracts. The Assembly Government's work/life balance initiative, working with Chwarae Teg, has sought to raise awareness among employers of the advantages of allowing staff to work flexibly in ways that successfully reconcile the needs of both parties. This is a trend that accords with several European Union directives promoting choice for workers over working arrangements. Such moves may potentially decrease demand for childcare in times such as school holidays.

Furthermore, the government's 'extended schools' initiatives (launched in 1998) have been designed to tackle the longer working hours culture, and to help parents find solutions to childcare problems while they travel to and from work before 9am and after 5pm. 'After school' and 'breakfast clubs' have been established in many areas, to offer childcare services for parents whose working patterns requires childcare assistance outside of the normal '9 to 5' hours.

In this section, we take a brief look at the extent to which the times at which childcare is – and is not - available may cause barriers to parents using childcare or going out to work. We look firstly at childcare during school holidays, secondly at childcare issues for atypical workers, and finally the extent to which times, generally, are cited as a barrier to going out to work.

6.3.1 Coping with the school holidays

Are providers open in the holidays and is this enough?

When asked about availability of childcare in the school holidays, three in ten (31 per cent) parents reported that their main provider[39] was open, at least some of the time, in the school holidays.

Parents whose formal providers were *not* open in the holidays were asked if they would like them to be. Demand was quite high, with 44 per cent of these parents saying that they would like their provider to offer care in the holidays, suggesting a substantial need for more childcare at these times for many parents.

6.3.2 Needing childcare at atypical hours

During the interview we asked parents who had ever worked before 8am –

'Does starting work before 8am cause you or your partner any particular problems in terms of your childcare arrangements?'

Parents could answer 'Yes' or 'No'.

We used a similar wording for those who had told us they had ever worked after 6pm, and those who worked on Saturdays or Sundays. The fact that they found these arrangements difficult does not assume that they could not actually make the arrangements possible.

Working atypical hours was a cause of difficulties for parents in trying to organise and secure their childcare arrangements. One fifth of parents working early mornings (before 8am) or evenings (after 6pm) said that their working hours caused problems with childcare arrangements (20 per cent in both cases). 15 per cent of parents who worked Saturdays and 23 per cent of those who regularly worked Sundays experienced problems arranging their childcare around work.

6.3.3 Lack of available childcare hours as a reason for using more than one childcare or early years provider

Parents who used more than one childcare or early years provider for the selected child were asked why they had chosen to do this. Choosing from a list of options (see Table 6.5), 6 per cent of parents said that they used more than one provider because one of their provider(s) did not offer *enough* sessions and 13 per cent said that it was due to the providers not being available on the *days* that they needed them.

6.3.4 Lack of available childcare hours as a reason for not working

Parents who were not working (excluding those on maternity leave or long term disabled or sick) were asked if issues about childcare were part of their decision not to work. 10 per cent of non-working parents said this was – at least partly – due to a lack of available childcare hours (see Tables 6.6 to 6.7). Lone parents in this situation were more likely to give this as a reason for not working, than parents in couples (18 per cent compared to 4 per cent respectively).

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[39] For the selected child.

6.4   Availability of childcare or early years provision

The cost of childcare and the times when it is available are two important barriers to its use.   However, there is a general issue about the extent to which parents perceive that there are sufficient numbers of childcare places available to parents in their local area.   In this section, we report on parents' views, both generally on the availability in their local area and, more specifically, about the extent to which a lack of childcare places has been a reason for their not using childcare or not going out to work.

6.4.1 Views on availability of places in local area

Parents were asked -

*'Please now think about the overall number of places at childcare providers in your local area, that is, places at the types of **formal provider** shown at the top of this card.   Currently, would you say that there are too many places, about the right number or not enough?'*

Table 6.9 shows the breakdown of parents' views. Four in ten (37 per cent) thought there were enough places, and a larger proportion (45 per cent) – a very large minority - thought there were not enough. As with perceptions of affordability, quite a substantial proportion (18 per cent) of parents said that they did not know about the availability of places.

As the comparison of availability between England and Wales is of particular interest, these views have been compared to those reported in the England report, and parents' views in England on the availability of places in the local area are very similar.

Table 6.9   Views on the availability of places in the local area

	Column per cent
	%
Too many	+
About the right number	37
Not enough	45
Don't know	18
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*561*

+<0.5 per cent

These negative views do not appear to be associated to any large extent with a lack of contact with the local childcare market (Table 6.10).

Table 6.10 Views on the availability of places in the local area by whether or not the family used childcare in the last week

	Used childcare in the last week %	Did not use childcare in the last week %
		Column per cent
Too many	+	1
About the right number	37	36
Not enough	44	46
Don't know	18	17
Base: All families		
Unweighted base	*378*	*183*

+ <0.5 per cent

6.4.2 Lack of availability as a reason for not working

Parents who were not working (excluding those on maternity leave or long term disabled or sick), were asked if issues about childcare were part of their decision not to work. Table 6.6 shows how parents responded to this question. 5 per cent of non-working parents said that they did not work, at least in part, because they cannot find childcare near where they live. Lone parents in particular, were more likely to find they could not work at least in part because they could not find childcare for the hours or days they would need to work – 18 per cent of lone parents gave this as a reason for not working, compared to only 4 per cent of couple families (Table 6.7).

Non-working parents were also asked (using a five-point scale) to agree or disagree with this statement –

'If I could arrange good quality childcare which was convenient, reliable and affordable, I would prefer to go out to work.'

Table 6.11 shows the extent to which the availability of such childcare would be an important factor in influencing parents to take up paid work.   Around half (52 per cent) of non-working parents agreed (some strongly) with the statement.

More lone parents 'agreed' or 'agreed strongly' with the statement than couple parents (68 per cent of lone parents compared to 43 per cent of couples) (Table 6.12).

Table 6.11 Whether the respondent would work if they could arrange reliable and quality childcare, by family type

			Column per cent
	Couple %	Lone parent %	Total %
Agree strongly	14	21	17
Agree	29	47	35
Neither agree or disagree	16	7	13
Disagree	32	17	27
Disagree strongly	10	7	9
Unweighted base	*157*	*81*	*238*

Base: All families where the respondent is not working, excluding those on maternity leave or long term sick or disabled.

6.5   Quality of available childcare or early years provision

Government policies have not focused solely on the *quantity* of childcare and early years places. It has clearly stated the importance (following several studies highlighting this) of *good quality* provision. In this section, we report on the extent to which parents feel that such provision is available in their local area and whether a lack of quality childcare has influenced their decisions not to use childcare or not to go out to work. In other words, to what extent is a lack of quality a barrier to using childcare?

6.5.1 Views on quality of childcare in local area

Parents were asked to rate the overall quality of the childcare in their local area, using a four-point scale –

And thinking about the overall quality of childcare provided in your local area, how good would you say this is?

As seen in Table 6.12, very few parents rated the quality as very poor. However, although one in five (21 per cent) felt it was 'very' good, the largest group (37 per cent) rated it as 'fairly' good. Again, a significant proportion of parents (28 per cent) felt they could not make a judgement on the quality of local childcare.

There was no statistical significance between parents' views according to whether or not they had used childcare in the last week.

Table 6.12 Parents' views on the quality of childcare in the local area

	Column per cent
	%
Very good	21
Fairly good	37
Fairly poor	11
Very poor	4
Don't know	28
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*561*

Parents with higher incomes, and parents in couple families were all more likely than their counterparts to rate positively the quality of local childcare (Tables 6.13 to 6.14).

Table 6.13 Views on quality of childcare in the local area by family yearly income

				Column per cent
	Under £10,000	**£10,000 - £19,999**	**£20,000 - £31,999**	**£32,000+**
	%	%	%	%
Very good	14	17	27	26
Fairly good	30	41	35	37
Fairly poor	17	11	11	5
Very poor	4	4	3	6
Don't know	35	26	23	26
Base: All families				
Unweighted base	*98*	*186*	*158*	*92*

Table 6.14 Views on quality of childcare in the local area, by family type

	Column per cent	
	Lone parent **%**	**Couple** **%**
Very good	13	23
Fairly good	37	37
Fairly poor	14	10
Very poor	4	4
Don't know	33	26
Base: All families		
Unweighted base	*145*	*416*

Parents of pre-school children were more positive about the quality of local childcare than parents of school age children (68 per cent compared to 56 per cent rated it as 'very' or 'fairly good') (Table 6.15).

Table 6.15 Views on the quality of childcare in the local area, by presence of pre-school age or school age children in the family

	Column per cent	
	Pre-school children **present** **%**	**School age children** **present** **%**
Very good	25	20
Fairly good	43	36
Fairly poor	9	10
Very poor	3	5
Don't know	21	29
Unweighted base	*230*	*496*

Base: All families. Because some families have both pre-school and school age children present, some families may be represented twice.

6.5.2 Lack of good quality childcare available as a reason for not working

When non-working parents were asked about their choices and barriers to work, 3 per cent cited a lack of good quality childcare as a reason for their not working (Table 6.6).

In Section 6.4.2 we saw that nearly half (52 per cent) of all parents who were not currently working agreed that they would work if they could arrange 'convenient, reliable and affordable' and 'good quality' childcare. However, we can see here that when we asked for the childcare-related reasons for not working, these divided into many reasons and quality was one of many factors that influenced this decision. The desire for parents to stay with their children, concern that their children are too young for childcare, or would suffer if they went to work were much larger factors in comparison.

6.6 Access to information on childcare and early years provision

Potentially, a major barrier to accessing good quality, affordable childcare at the times when parents need it could be a lack of information about how and where to find it. Therefore, we report here on where parents get their information from, what they think about it, and what more information they would like.

6.6.1 What sources of information do parents use?

Parents were asked about the sources of information they used to find out about childcare in their local area. Table 6.16 shows the percentage of parents that mentioned each source (from a list that was shown to them).

Table 6.16 Where respondents found information about childcare in their area

	Column per cent
	%
Word of mouth (eg, friends or relatives)	36
School	15
Local advertising	9
Health visitor/ clinic	9
Local Authority	7
Children's Information Services	3
Childcare provider	4
Jobcentre, Jobcentre Plus Office or Benefits Office	5
Doctors surgery	5
Internet	2
Local library	3
Church or religious organisation	3
Your employer	1
ChildcareLink	+
Local community centre	2
Yellow Pages	4
National organisation(s) (e.g. 4Children, CAB	1
Other	2
Sure Start	1
No sources of information used	43
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*561*

+ <0.5 per cent

Most frequently (cited by 36 per cent), parents got their information about childcare from talking to friends and relatives (word of mouth). Among more formal routes, schools played an important part in providing information, with 15 per cent of parents citing this as a source. Several other sources were cited each by under 10 per cent of parents. In particular, we should note the 3 per cent of parents using Children's Information Services (CIS). A substantial number (43 per cent) of parents had not discovered information about childcare from any of the sources listed (or from any alternative sources which they could have mentioned).

In Tables 6.17 to 6.20, we look at the different sources of information cited by different types of family. In these tables the sources of information are listed in order of decreasing frequency.

Parents who had used childcare were more likely to say that they had found out information through talking to their friends or relatives, than those who did not use childcare. Families who had *not* used childcare were more likely to say they had used none of the listed sources (55 per cent compared to 37 per cent) (Table 6.18). Given the size of the bases, no further significant differences were found between users and non-users of childcare.

Table 6.17 Where respondents found information about childcare in their area, by whether or not the family used childcare in the last week

	Column per cent	
	Used childcare in the last week	Did not use childcare in the last week
	%	%
Word of mouth (eg, friends or relatives)	40	29
School	16	14
Health visitor/ clinic	11	4
Local advertising	10	8
Local Authority	8	4
Children's Information Services	4	1
Jobcentre, Jobcentre Plus Office or Benefits Office	4	7
Yellow Pages	5	2
Doctor s surgery	5	6
Local library	4	3
Childcare provider	5	3
Local community centre	3	+
Internet	3	0
Church or religious organisation	2	4
National organisation(s) (e.g. 4Children, CAB)	2	0
Other	2	1
Sure Start	1	0
Your employer	1	1
ChildcareLink	+	0
No sources of information used	37	55
Base: All families		
Unweighted base	*378*	*183*

+ <0.5 per cent

It is worth noting that lower income families and lone parents were more likely than others to have used the Jobcentre for information (Tables 6.17 and 6.19).

Table 6.18 Where respondents found information about childcare in their local area, by family yearly income

				Column per cent
	Under £10,000 %	£10,000 - 19,999 %	£20,000 - 31,999 %	£32,000 or more %
Word of mouth (e.g. friends or relatives)	34	39	35	36
Health visitor/ clinic	14	7	9	7
Jobcentre, Jobcentre Plus Office or Benefits Office	15	5	1	1
School	13	14	18	17
Local advertising	8	8	9	13
Local Authority	8	4	8	9
Yellow Pages	6	2	2	7
Doctor s surgery	5	3	6	5
Local library	5	2	5	3
Church or religious organisation	4	2	2	4
Local community centre	3	2	3	1
Internet	3	2	0	4
Childcare provider	3	6	6	2
Sure Start	2	0	0	0
ChildcareLink	1	0	0	1
Children's Information Services	1	2	4	5
National organisation(s) (e.g. 4Children, CAB)	1	1	0	3
Other	1	1	3	2
Your employer	0	0	1	3
No sources of information used	36	46	45	41
Base: All families				
Unweighted base	*98*	*186*	*158*	*92*

Table 6.19 Where respondents found information about childcare in their area, by family type

	Column per cent	
	Lone parent %	**Couple %**
Word of mouth (e.g. friends or relatives)	32	38
Jobcentre, Jobcentre Plus Office or Benefits Office	11	3
School	10	17
Health visitor/ clinic	10	8
Local Authority	4	7
Local advertising	5	11
Yellow Pages	5	3
Local library	4	3
Doctor's surgery	3	6
Local community centre	3	2
Internet	3	1
Childcare provider	2	6
Sure Start	2	0
National organisation(s) (e.g. 4children, CAB)	1	1
Church or religious organisation	1	3
Other	1	2
Children's Information Services	+	4
ChildcareLink	0	+
Your employer	0	1
No sources of information used	48	42
Base: All families		
Unweighted base	*145*	*416*

+ <0.5 per cent

Information sources used by parents with pre-school and school aged children appear to differ more than can be explained by their greater likelihood of using childcare (Table 6.20). Parents with pre-school children were more likely to have got information on childcare from health visitors than those with school aged children (21 per cent compared to 6 per cent). Conversely (and not surprisingly), they were less likely to have got information on childcare from schools than those with school aged children (11 per cent compared to 18 per cent, respectively).

Table 6.20 Where respondents found information about childcare in their local area, by presence pre-school age or school age children in the family

	Column per cent	
	Pre-school age children present %	**School age children present %**
Word of mouth (e.g. friends or relatives)	50	33
Health visitor/ clinic	21	6
Local advertising	11	8
School	11	18
Childcare provider	7	4
Local Authority	8	6
Yellow Pages	8	2
Doctors surgery	6	5
Children's Information Services	5	2
Jobcentre, Jobcentre Plus Office or Benefits Office	5	4
Local library	4	4
Internet	4	1
Church or religious organisation	3	2
National organisation(s) (e.g. 4Children, CAB)	2	1
Local community centre	2	2
Other	2	1
Sure Start	2	+
Your employer	+	1
ChildcareLink	+	+
No sources of information used	23	49
Unweighted base	*230*	*496*

Base: All families. Because some families have both pre-school and school age children present, some families may be represented twice.

+ <0.5 per cent

6.6.2 ChildcareLink

Less than 0.5 per cent of parents said that they had used ChildcareLink in the last year. Even after prompting, no more parents were aware of the service. The only parents aware of ChildcareLink were those who had used it.

6.6.3 Children's Information Service (CIS)

Parents who had not mentioned the CIS as an information source initially, were asked directly whether they were aware of it. 3 per cent had mentioned it as an information source. A further 7 per cent were aware when prompted. Thus one in ten (10 per cent) parents were aware overall, making awareness of CIS higher than for ChildcareLink. Awareness was higher amongst parents in higher income families (Table 6.21).

Table 6.21 Awareness of CIS, by family yearly income

	Under £10,000 %	£10,000 - £19,999 %	£20,000 - £31,999 %	£32,000+ %
				Column per cent
Yes	7	6	12	19
No	93	94	88	82
Base: *All families* *Unweighted base*	*98*	*186*	*158*	*92*

Reflecting higher levels of awareness than for ChildcareLink, more parents had used the CIS in the last year. 4 per cent of parents said they had used the CIS, with usage greater for parents with higher family incomes (Table 6.22).

Table 6.22 Use of CIS, by family yearly income

	Under £10,000 %	£10,000 - £19,999 %	£20,000 - £31,999 %	£32,000+ %
				Column per cent
Yes	1	3	7	8
No	99	97	93	92
Base: *All families* *Unweighted base*	*98*	*186*	*158*	*92*

6.6.4 Is this enough information?

So far in this section, we have reported on where parents have found information on childcare. Here, we turn to the issue of whether parents felt that there was *sufficient* information available to them about the childcare in their local area. From Table 6.23 it is clear that a significant proportion (49 per cent) of parents would like more information.

Table 6.23 Whether parents receive enough information about childcare in the local area

	Column per cent
	%
About right	26
Too much	1
Too little	49
Don't know or not sure	24
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*561*

Parents with pre-school childcare were more content with the amount of information available, than those with school age children: six in ten (59 per cent) of parents of school aged children said 'too little' information was available, compared to five in ten (47 per cent) parents of pre-school aged children.

The base sizes did not allow us to find any significant differences between views of families who had used not used childcare in the last week, or between high and low income families, or those in couple or lone parents families.

Table 6.24 Whether parents get enough information about childcare in local area, by presence of pre-school age or school age children in the family

	Column per cent	
	Pre-school %	School age %
About right	30	25
Too much	2	1
Too little	59	47
Don't know or not sure	9	28
Unweighted base	*230*	*496*

Base: All families. Because some families have both pre-school and school age children present, some families may be represented twice.

6.6.5 What more information would parents like?

Parents who said that they thought there was too little information available about childcare were asked what more information they would like. They were given a list of options (plus the ability to give another answer) and asked to pick as many as applied to them. The most commonly cited areas about which more information was needed were:

- General information about childcare in local area (39 per cent)
- Costs of available childcare (36 per cent)
- Childcare during the school holidays (34 per cent)

- Childcare before or after the school day (23 per cent)
- Quality of childcare available (22 per cent)

We should note the close links between these most commonly cited issues and parents' views and perceptions of these discussed in earlier sections. For example, many parents were unaware of the cost or quality of childcare in their local area. This is particularly interesting when we look at the information needs of different types of parents. Overall, families where there was at least one school-aged child, were less likely to need any more information, than those where there was at least one pre-school aged child present.

Parents of pre-school children wanted more information on the quality of local childcare. 32 per cent said that they would like to know more about the quality of local childcare, compared with only 20 per cent of those with school aged children (Table 6.25). Parents with school aged children were more concerned than parents with pre-school children about information on childcare during school holidays and childcare for older children (37 per cent compared to 25 per cent).

Table 6.25 What more information parents would like, by presence of pre-school age or school age children in the family

	Pre-school children present %	School age children present %
		Column per cent
General information on childcare in the local area	50	36
Costs of available childcare	42	34
Pre-school childcare options	33	10
Quality of childcare available	32	20
Hours of childcare available	26	21
Childcare during the school holidays	25	37
Childcare before or after the school day	20	24
Schools	16	7
Childminders, nannies, au pairs	11	3
Childcare for older children	8	21
Don't need more information	3	10
Other information	2	2
Childcare for children with special needs/disabilities	0	1
Don't need childcare	1	1
Don't Know	3	7
Unweighted base	*153*	*335*

Base: All families who thought too little information was available. Because some families have both pre-school and school age children present, some families may be represented twice.

6.7 Distances travelled to current provider

In this final section, we report on the distances which parents are travelling to get to their providers, and the extent to which their journey lengths cause them difficulties. Not having suitable childcare that is local to home can be a barrier to using childcare – or using more childcare – especially for families without private transport. Distances which parents choose to travel can also be indications of the availability of suitable childcare in their local area.

6.7.1 How far away is the main provider for parents and does it cause problems?

Parents were asked how long it would take to walk from their home to their main formal provider (Table 6.26). Four-fifths of journeys (81 per cent), by foot, to the main provider would take half an hour or less. 9 per cent of journeys would take between half an hour to an hour. For one in ten (7 per cent) parents, their journeys would take longer than 90 minutes by foot.

Table 6.26 Estimated minutes taken to walk to main provider

	Column per cent
	%
1 to 30 mins	81
31 to 60 mins	9
61 to 90 mins	4
91 to 120 mins	4
more than 180 mins	3
Unweighted base	*143*

Base: All families with a 'selected' child whose main provider was a nursery school, nursery class, reception class, special day nursery, day nursery, playgroup or pre-school, after school or breakfast club, holiday club or other nursery education provider

On the whole parents found it easy to get to their main provider (Table 6.27). Overall, 89 per cent of these parents said this was the case.

Table 6.27 How difficult parents find it to get to main provider

	Column per cent
	%
Easy	89
Difficult	8
Neither	4
Unweighted base	*143*

Base: All families with a 'selected' child whose main provider was a nursery school, nursery class, reception class, special day nursery, day nursery, playgroup or pre-school, after school or breakfast club, holiday club or other nursery education provider

6.8 Summing up

In this chapter, we have highlighted the diverse range of *potential* barriers to using childcare and early years provision that parents can face. It has shown the extent to which each of these is a current problem for parents (and, in some cases, to which parents in particular). Conversely, it shows the extent to which these potential barriers have proved not to be issues for many parents. In summary -

- Currently, childcare and early years provision is affordable (though by no means usually easily affordable) to some, but less affordable – and sometimes a barrier to its use – for others. Lower income families rated affordability lower than those with higher incomes. For example, 47 per cent of parents with an income of £32,000 or more said childcare affordability was 'fairly good' or 'very good' compared to 29 per cent of parents in the lowest income group.

- For significant minorities, lack of affordable childcare is cited as a reason for not using it and for not working.

- Taking into account all the different barriers to working, including lack of affordable, accessible or quality childcare, it is worth noting that overall, 21 per cent of respondents said they did not work for at least one of the following reasons:

  - I cannot afford quality childcare
  - I cannot find reliable childcare
  - I cannot find childcare for the hours/days I need
  - I cannot find good quality childcare
  - I cannot find childcare near where I live

- We also found evidence of a perceived shortfall among many parents in the *number* of childcare places in their local area. In terms of the extent to which a lack of available places was a barrier to parents using childcare or early years provision or to working, evidence is mixed. It was not often cited unprompted as a reason for not working (although those who did were more likely to come from lower income and lone parent families). However, when asked whether they would work if they could arrange 'good quality childcare which was convenient, reliable and affordable', half (52 per cent) of non-working parents said that they would.

- There appear to be significant levels of unmet demand for childcare during less traditional times, such as school holidays, weekends and evenings. 44 per cent of parents whose formal provider was not open in the school holidays said they'd like it to be.

- Parents are largely positive about the *quality* of their own provision and of that available in their local area. 37 per cent of parents said the quality of local childcare was 'fairly good' and 21 per cent said it was 'very good'.

- A lack of information or knowledge about where to seek it is a barrier to parents' use of childcare and early years provision. When asked directly, four in ten parents felt that they would like more information about the childcare in their local area. Specific areas about which parents ask for more information include general information about childcare in the area, the cost of childcare and school holiday provision.

- Particularly interesting is the reliance on 'word of mouth' for obtaining information about childcare and early years provision (36 per cent of parents cited this as a source), coupled with a lack of awareness of two of the key government-led information sources, namely CIS and ChildcareLink.

7 WHAT DO PARENTS FEEL ABOUT THEIR CHILDCARE AND EARLY YEARS PROVISION?

7.1 Introduction

When parents are choosing childcare and early years provision to look after and educate their child, they are looking for the provider to fulfil a variety of roles. In this chapter we explore what parents think about the early years provision and childcare that their children receive. We look at this across children of all ages, to ensure sufficient bases in our samples.

This chapter will investigate the degree of choice that parents have when they select their providers, both informal and formal. We then go on to report parents' opinions about how the provider could improve its services. One way that the Assembly Government has sought to ensure quality of childcare and early years provision in Wales is through inspections carried out by the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (CSIW) (part of the National Assembly for Wales) and by Estyn (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales). In broad terms, CSIW inspects the quality of care under the Children Act 1989, while Estyn inspects the quality of early years education provision. Section 7.5 explores parents' awareness of inspections, as well as how they make use of inspection results.

Following on from this, we examine parents' views of the skills that they feel their child is learning at their provider, and then ask about the feedback they receive relating to their child's progress. Finally, in Section 7.8, we report on the extent to which providers were offering the types of integrated services which are being developed as part of initiatives such as Integrated Centres.

7.2 'Main' providers

7.2.1 Formal 'main' providers

Throughout this chapter, we focus primarily on the *main formal* childcare or early years providers used by the parents for the 'selected' child (as randomly chosen during the interview) [40]. In addition, a small number of questions were asked about informal providers as discussed below.

Table 7.1 shows the breakdown of main formal providers, split into institutional and individual providers. Far more parents were using an institutional provider as their main provider for their child than individual formal providers (86 per cent compared to the 13 per cent using individual providers). The most commonly used of these institutional providers were out-of-school clubs on school sites, identified by a fifth (22 per cent) of families using formal provider, as their main provider (although this was not statistically significant from reception classes or nursery classes). Amongst the individual formal providers, childminders made up the vast majority, used by 7 per cent of families who have a main formal provider – again, only a significantly larger proportion than those using nannies or au pairs (not babysitters).

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[40] The computer program identified the formal provider used for the greatest number of hours in the last week. Respondents were asked whether this was their main formal provider and given the opportunity of identifying an alternative if appropriate.

Around four in ten (40 per cent) of the families mainly using formal providers were doing so for their child aged 5-14 years. Although a larger number of 'selected' children receiving main formal provider care were aged four and under (60 per cent), the number of providers available for this age group is also larger. This could perceivably spread the main providers for these children across a number of early years providers, whereas school-age children were restricted to using out-of-school clubs only, explaining why out-of-school clubs on school sites are the most commonly used formal provider by these parents.

Table 7.1   Main formal providers used for the 'selected' child

	Column per cent
	%
Institutional provider	*86*
Breakfast club/After school club on site	**22**
Reception class attached to a primary or infants school	**16**
Day nursery	**14**
Nursery class attached to primary or infants school	**14**
Playgroup or pre-school	**13**
Breakfast club or After school club off site	**4**
Nursery school	**3**
Individual providers	*13*
Childminder	**7**
Babysitter	**4**
Nanny/au pair	**2**
Other	*1*
Leisure or sports activity	1
Unweighted base	*166*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child mainly used a formal provider for this child in the last week.

Throughout this chapter, we report the opinions of parents using the main formal providers shown in bold in Table 7.1. In several cases questions were only asked if parents were using formal institutional providers, in which case we report on all parents who used these specific types of provider. The base sizes are too small to look at any of the issues across provider types.

7.2.2   Main' providers – formal or informal

In some sections of the chapter, we focus on the child's main provider - be it formal or informal. In these cases we include analysis of main informal providers.[41] Table 7.2 shows the breakdown of these informal providers. By far the most common informal provider was the child's grandparents, identified by two-thirds (66 per cent) of parents who mainly used an informal provider.

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[41] Parents using formal and informal providers were asked which was their main provider overall. Parents who identified an informal provider as their 'main provider' were asked about reasons for choosing that provider (as well as reasons for choosing their main formal provider). Parents using only informal providers were asked to identify their main informal provider and asked about reasons for choosing that provider.

Table 7.2   Main informal providers used for the 'selected' child

	Column per cent
	%
The child's grandparent(s)	66
Another relative	12
My ex-husband / wife / partner / the child's other parent	9
A friend or neighbour	7
The child's older brother / sister	6
Unweighted base	*176*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child only used an informal provider for this child in the last week, plus those parents who did have a formal provider but identified an informal provider as their main provider.

7.3   How do parents select providers?   What degree of choice do they have?

Parents' decisions about which providers to use are often made having to take into account several competing factors. Some of these will be ideological, based on the kind of provision they would like for their child. Others will be practical, working within the constraints of the local childcare market, finding childcare to fit around parental work patterns, and so on. In the end, many parents will have decided on particular providers by balancing out various 'push' and 'pull' factors. We are able to look at these issues with regard to the main providers used by parents. By analysing the reasons why parents chose the provider, we draw out the extent to which parents did actually 'choose' their providers. Linked with this, by looking at the extent to which – and in what ways – parents felt that the provider could make *improvements* in their provision we give further indications of what parents felt about the providers they used (see Section 7.4). In the following tables about parents' choices, we have included parents who used any kind of formal provider – be it an institution or an individual.

7.3.1 Reasons for choosing formal providers

Parents were asked the single most important reason why they chose their main formal provider. They were asked:

'People have different reasons for choosing childcare or nursery education. From this card, why did you choose [provider's name] to look after [child's name]?'

The results can be seen in Table 7.3. Overall, parents cited more 'pull' than 'push' factors, more often mentioning reasons why they were attracted to the provider than reasons around a lack of choice.

Table 7.3   Main reason for choosing main formal providers

	Column per cent
	%
I could trust this person/these people	16
Wanted child to be educated while being looked after	15
I wanted my child to mix with other children	13
It had a good reputation	12
I wanted reliable arrangements	6
I wanted someone properly trained to look after child	5
His/her brother(s)/sister(s) went there	5
Fitted in with my/my partner s working hours	5
It is easy to get to	4
It was recommended to me	2
Child's choice	2
I wanted my child to be looked after at home	2
It was low cost	1
I could not afford to pay for formal childcare	1
Knew they would bring up child the same way I would	1
My employer subsidises this childcare	1
No other choices available to me	3
Other reason(s)	7
Unweighted base	*163*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child mainly used a formal provider for this child in the last week.

On the whole, parents did not appear to have chosen their main provider through a lack of choice or because of practical factors that forced them to make their decision. Of all parents whose child used a formal provider, 5 per cent or less gave reasons associated with being 'pushed' into using their providers: for example, because they had 'no other choices available to them' (3 per cent), because it was 'low cost' (1 per cent), or because the care fitted their (or their partner's) working hours (5 per cent). No significant differences were found between these 'push' factors.

'Pull' factors which attracted at least one in ten parents to their providers, were: trust in the providers, the desire to have their child educated while being looked after, the need for their children to mix with other children, and the good reputation of the provider (between 12 per cent and 16 per cent of parents in each case, with no significant differences between them).

7.3.2 Do parents choose formal providers for different reasons, if they use them for economic or educational reasons?

During the interview, parents were asked why they had used each of their providers in the last week, and given a list of reasons to choose from (see Chapter 3). These reasons have been grouped during analysis, to form three categories: economic reasons - associated with the parents' work or study, educational reasons – related

to the child's educational development, and other reasons – which do not fall into either of these categories.

We have been able to look at the specific reasons for choosing the main formal provider, by the reasons that these providers were used by the parent – economic, educational or for other purposes. The results are shown in Table 7.4. The need for childcare to fit in with working hours was more important to parents using providers for reasons which included economic factors (9 per cent) than those whose reasons including educational purposes (1 per cent). Conversely, those using them for reasons that included the child's education were more likely to cite the educational and social aspects, than those who used it for reasons that included work or study (25 per cent compared to 7 per cent).

Table 7.4   Why parents chose providers by the reasons they were using the provider

			Column per cent
	For reasons which include economic	For reasons which include educational	For reasons which include other activities
	%	%	%
I could trust this person/these people	22	14	17
I wanted reliable arrangements	12	4	4
Fitted in with my/my partner's working hours	9	1	1
Wanted child to be educated while being looked after	7	25	13
I wanted someone properly trained to look after child	8	4	4
I wanted my child to mix with other children	7	14	18
Other reason(s)	6	7	7
His/her brother(s)/sister(s) went there	6	5	6
I wanted my child to be looked after at home	5	0	0
It is easy to get to	5	2	5
It had a good reputation	4	17	15
Knew they would bring up child the same way I would	2	0	2
I could not afford to pay for formal childcare	1	0	0
It was recommended to me	1	2	0
It was low cost	0	0	2
My employer subsidises this childcare	2	1	0

No other choices available to me	4	1	2
Child's choice	1	3	5
Unweighted base	*70*	*87*	*71*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child mainly used a formal provider for this child in the last week. Because families could give more than one reason for using their providers, these categories are not mutually exclusive and families may be represented more than once.

7.3.3 Reasons for choosing informal providers

Table 7.2 shows a breakdown of the informal providers used by families where the only provider for the selected child was informal, or where the parent identified an informal provider as the main provider. By far the main reason for choosing informal providers was that they could trust them. Table 7.5 shows that over half (56 per cent) of parents who had main *informal* providers, chose them because they could trust them. This factor, which 'pulls' parents to using an informal provider, is much greater than any of the 'push' factors, which might force parents to use a friend or relative for childcare. For example, only 6 per cent of parents who used informal childcare said that they did so because they could not afford formal childcare.

Table 7.5   Reasons for using main informal providers

	Column per cent
	All main informal providers %
I could trust this person/these people	56
I could not afford to pay for formal childcare	6
I wanted someone who would show my child affection	5
The person is family	5
I wanted my child to be looked after at home	4
It fitted in with my/my husband/wife/partner's working hours	4
I wanted reliable arrangements	3
So that my child and a relative could spend time together	3
Child's choice	2
I knew they would bring up my child the same way I would	1
It was low cost	1
No other choices available to me	1
It is easy to get to	1
I wanted my child to mix with other children	1
His/her brother(s)/sister(s) went there	1
Other reason(s)	5
Unweighted Base	*176*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child only used an informal provider in the last week, plus those parents who did have a formal provider but identified an informal provider as their main provider.

7.3.4 Did parents choose informal providers for different reasons if they were using them for economic or non-economic reasons?

Maybe not surprisingly, few parents said that they were using their main informal provider for educational reasons. Here, we therefore compare the reasons cited by parents using the providers for economic reasons and those using them for other reasons (e.g. social, leisure) (Table 7.6). The majority of parents, whatever reason they are using their provider, said that they chose their main informal provider because they could trust them. If parents were using their informal childcare for reasons that included economic reasons, they were less likely than parents who used their carer for 'other reasons' to say they had done so because the carer 'was family' (1 per cent compared to 6 per cent). There were no other significant differences between parents who used their providers for different kinds of reasons.

Table 7.6   Why parents chose providers by the reasons they were using the provider

	Reasons which include economic %	Reasons which include other activities %
	Column per cent	
I could trust this person/these people	62	54
Other reason(s)	6	5
It fitted in with my / my husband/partner's working hours	5	2
I could not afford to pay for formal childcare	5	7
Wanted someone who would show my child affection	5	7
I wanted my child to be looked after at home	4	4
I wanted reliable arrangements	3	3
It is easy to get to	2	2
Knew they would bring up child the same way I would	2	0
Child's choice	1	3
The person is family	1	6
I wanted my child to mix with other children	1	1
It was low cost	1	1
So that my child and relative could spend time together	0	4
His/her brother(s)/sister(s) went there	0	2
No other choices available to me	2	0
Unweighted base	*107*	*90*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child mainly used a formal provider for this child in the last week.

7.4   How can formal providers be improved?

Parents using a formal institutional provider or a childminder were asked what, in their view, could be improved about a range of services, from buildings and premises to staff qualifications. Using a showcard with a list of options they were asked -

'Sometimes parents who are generally happy with the education or childcare their child is receiving still feel that various improvements could be made. Do you think [provider's name] could improve in any of the ways shown on this card?'

Parents could choose as many as they wanted from the list or give an alternative improvement if they wished. As in the previous section, we have aggregated parents' views of all formal providers to obtain adequate bases. Table 7.7 shows the breakdown of parents' responses.

Overall, six in ten (59 per cent) parents using an institutional provider stated that none of the improvements were needed at their provider. If we look more closely at the improvements that were suggested, certain issues were more commonly cited than others.

The most frequently cited (16 per cent) aspect that needed improving informal institutional providers were buildings and premises. This was much more frequently mentioned than equipment or toys (8 per cent), or staff's training or experience (4 per cent) as in need of improvement.

Table 7.7   Improvements that parents would like to see at main formal providers

	Column per cent
	All formal institutional providers and childminders **%**
Building/premises	16
Number of staff per group/class or group/class size	13
Outdoor play opportunities	11
Equipment or toys	8
Staff's qualifications, training or experience	4
Hygiene, health or safety	3
Security	3
None of these	59
Unweighted base	*152*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child mainly used a formal institutional provider or childminder in the last week.

7.5   The role of CSIW and Estyn

7.5.1 Inspections of early years provision and childcare services

Since 2002, the CSIW expanded its inspections to include early years and childcare services in Wales, including childminders and providers that offer free early years education.   During this survey we asked some questions designed to help us understand parents' awareness of the CSIW and Estyn's work and whether these inspections and their results influenced their choice of childcare provider.   These questions were asked of all main formal providers used for the selected child, apart from nannies or au pairs, babysitters, or sports and leisure activities.

This section looks firstly at whether parents were aware of their provider having been inspected, and goes on to explore whether knowledge of an inspection affected their decision to use their provider.

Parents were asked –

Some reception classes, nursery education and childcare providers are inspected to ensure they meet certain standards. Has [provider's name] been inspected before or since [child's name] has been there?

Yes, before
Yes, since
Yes, both
No
Don't know

The majority of parents (58 per cent) said an authority had inspected their main provider before or since their child had started using it. Around four in ten (39 per cent) did not know, and 4 per cent said their provider had not been inspected.

Did parents receive inspection results?

Those parents who knew that their provider had been inspected (before and/or since their child was there) were asked whether they had received the inspection results. Parents' responses to this were split with around half of parents saying they had received results, and the other half saying they had not (there was no significant difference between the two figures) (see Table 7.8).

Table 7.8   Whether parents received information about inspections at their main provider

	Column Per cent
	%
Received information about inspection	48
Did not receive information about inspection	43
Don't know or not sure	9
Unweighted base	*88*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child mainly used a formal institutional provider or childminder in the last week and whose parents said this provider had been inspected

7.5.2 *Parents' awareness of who carries out the inspections*

We also looked at parents' awareness of who carried out inspections. Parents who knew that an inspection took place (either before, after or since their child started attending the provider) were shown a list of organisations, and asked to choose which ones they thought were involved in the inspection of their main provider. They could give as many answers as they wished in response. The question was worded-

Was the inspection at [provider's name] carried out by any of the organisations shown on this card?

Local Education Authority / Local Authority
Independent School's Council
Estyn
Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (CSIW)
Another organisation
Not sure

A quarter (26 per cent) of parents whose main provider was inspected by the CSIW were aware that it had been carried out by the CSIW (Table 7.9). However, a similar proportion (28 per cent) thought their provider had been inspected by the Local Education Authority. Awareness was poorer amongst parents whose provider was inspected by Estyn, with only 12 per cent citing this as the inspecting body, and many of them answering that the Local Education Authority or Local Authority had undertaken the assessment.

Table 7.9   Who parents think carried out the inspections

			Column per cent
	CSIW-inspected providers [42]	**Estyn-inspected providers** [43]	**All formal institutional providers and childminders**
	%	**%**	**%**
Local Education Authority / Local Authority	28	34	36
Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales	26	18	17
Estyn	6	12	11
Independent Schools Council	6	1	4
Another organisation	0	2	2
Not sure	38	35	33
Unweighted base	*56*	*71*	*88*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child mainly used a formal institutional provider or childminder in the last week and who said this provider had been inspected

Note: Day nurseries, playgroups, and childminders can be inspected by both CSIW and Estyn, so they have been included twice in the respective bases.

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[42] Day nurseries, out-of-school clubs, childminders and playgroups or pre-schools. Holiday clubs are also inspected by CSIW but are not included here because the study focused on term-time childcare.

[43] Reception classes, nursery classes, nursery schools, day nurseries, childminders and playgroups or pre-schools.

7.6 How do parents feel about the role their provider has in teaching their pre-school children?

One of the most commonly cited reasons for parents choosing their main institutional provider was that they wanted their child to be educated while they were being looked after. It is, particularly, a key issue for many parents and providers of pre-school children. Both educational and social development is considered crucial to children's development in the early years. This section reports parents' views on how well their providers deal with the educational and social development of their pre-school child.

Parents who used institutional childcare and early years provision or childminders for their child (aged two to five) were asked to identify what academic and what social skills they thought their child was being encouraged to develop while they were at the provider. Parents were asked first about the academic skills they believed their child was learning at their provider -

Does [provider's name] encourage [child's name] to learn and develop skills in any of the areas shown on this card?

1. *Recognising letters, words, numbers or shapes*
2. *Enjoying books*
3. *Finding out about animals or plants*
4. *Finding out about people or places around the world*
5. *Finding out about health or hygiene, e.g. washing hands.*
6. *Not sure*
7. *None of these*

They were then asked about more personal and social skills –

And does [provider's name] encourage [child's name] to learn and develop skills in any of the areas shown on this card?

1. *Playing with other children and making friends*
2. *Listening to other children and adults*
3. *Expressing thoughts or feelings*
4. *Good behaviour*
5. *Being independent and making choices*
6. *Tackling everyday tasks, e.g. putting on coat, clearing up*
7. *Not sure*
8. *None of these*

7.6.1 Academic and social skills

Looking firstly at academic skills, the vast majority of parents across all providers reported that their provider was teaching their children the skills we listed. No less than 81 per cent of parents cited most of these skills. Significantly fewer (67 per cent) parents viewed 'finding out about people or places' as a skill that their provider encouraged (Table 7.10).

Table 7.10 Academic skills: parents' views of their main provider

	Column per cent
	%
Recognising letters, words, numbers or shapes	95
Enjoying books	93
Finding out about health and hygiene	87
Finding out about animals and plants	81
Finding out about people or places around the world	67
Not sure	2
None of these	3
Unweighted base	*87*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child is aged two to five and mainly attended a formal institutional provider or childminder

As with academic skills, the vast majority of parents thought that their main provider was encouraging all six of the social skills listed. Playing with other children (98 per cent) and good behaviour (93 per cent) were much more likely to be cited than 'expressing thoughts or feelings' (74 per cent).

Table 7.11 Social Skills: Parents' views of their main provider

	Column per cent
	%
Playing with other children and making friends	98
Good behaviour	93
Listening to other children and adults	84
Tackling everyday tasks, e.g. putting on coat, clearing up	87
Being independent and making choices	79
Expressing thoughts or feelings	74
Unweighted base	*87*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child is aged two to five and mainly attended a formal institutional provider or childminder

7.7   How do parents feel about the level of feedback they get from their provider about their children?

As well as receiving information about inspections of the childcare and early years provision, many parents of young children expected to be informed about their child's progress for the months or years they were at the provider. We asked parents of two to five year olds at formal institutional providers or childminders, several questions about their views about this communication with these providers. This section looks at these questions in detail, beginning by asking whether parents feel satisfied with the amount of information they received about their child's learning and play. We then explore the different ways that parents received feedback about their child's progress, for example through written or oral reports, or through the child bringing home the tangible results of their childcare sessions.

7.7.1 How satisfied are parents that they are able to get enough idea about their child's learning and play activities?

Many providers give parents feedback about what their child does while they are at the childcare or early years provider. We asked parents –

How satisfied are you that you are able to get enough of an idea about [child's name]'s learning and play activities at [provider's name]?

They were given an option of five answers, from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. Overall, there was a high level of satisfaction about the feedback parents get from their providers.   95 per cent were either 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' (Table 7.12).

Table 7.12 How satisfied are parents with the feedback from their main provider

	Column per cent
	%
Very satisfied	64
Fairly satisfied	31
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	3
Fairly dissatisfied	0
Very dissatisfied	2
Unweighted base	*89*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child is aged two to five and mainly attended a formal institutional provider or childminder

7.7.2 How do parents receive feedback from their providers?

So, high proportions of parents were satisfied with the information they receive about their child's progress from their main providers. Providers give this feedback to parents in many different ways. We therefore asked parents -

In which, if any, of the ways shown on this card do you get an idea of how [child's name] is getting on at [provider's name]?

>   1. *Talk with staff about how child is getting on*
>   2. *Written reports prepared by staff*
>   3. *Parents' evenings/meetings*
>   4. *Pictures, drawings and other things child brings home*
>   5. *Pictures, drawings and other things displayed on the premises*
>   6. *Other*
>   7. *None of these*

Parents could give as many responses as they wished. On the whole, parents received feedback mostly by talking to staff (83 per cent), and through pictures and drawings that their child brought home (85 per cent) (Table 7.13).

Table 7.13 Methods by which parents receive feedback

	Column per cent
	%
Pictures, drawings and other things child brings home	85
Talk with staff about how child is getting on	83
Pictures, drawings and other things displayed on the premises	56
Written reports prepared by staff	48
Parents evenings/meetings	50
Other	3
None of these	3
Unweighted base	*89*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child is aged two to five and mainly attended a formal institutional provider or childminder

Is this feedback often enough for parents?

All these parents were also asked if they were happy with the frequency of feedback they received, whatever the method used to get it to them. They were asked -

And would you say you are able to get an idea of how [child's name] is getting on at [provider's name] often enough or not often enough?

Around eight in ten parents (83 per cent) said they received information about the child's progress 'often enough', while just under two in ten (16 per cent) were more critical, saying they did not receive feedback 'often enough'.

7.8 What services are there for parents at their childcare providers?

Childcare and early years providers have begun increasingly to offer services - such as health or education – which aim to assist the parents as well as their children. This movement has been part of the government's drive to integrate services at single sites, enabling parents to 'one stop shop' for advice not only about childcare, but about how they might find training, support or access to employment, for health services for their children, and so on.

We asked parents with children (of all ages) at formal institutional providers about the services that their main providers offered. The question was worded –

Sometimes services for parents are also available at the same place that provides [childcare or nursery education / childcare]. At [provider's name], are any of the services on this card available for parents?

We then went on to ask which, if any, of these they had used. Finally, we asked if parents would like to see particular services at their main providers, if they were not currently provided.

Table 7.14 summarises the services that parents were aware of , and would like to see, at their main provider. Six in ten (66 per cent) of parents said that none of these services were offered at their provider. The most commonly available service was that offering courses or training for parents (11 per cent), significantly more available than parenting classes, helping finding childcare, job advice or counselling services (all mentioned by 4 per cent or fewer parents).

But what services would parents use if their provider offered them? We can see that a quarter (24 per cent) of all parents wished to see more courses or training for them and a fifth (20 per cent) were keen to see more health services at their provider.

Table 7.14 Services available to parents at their main provider

	Column per cent	
	Services available	**Services wanted**
	%	%
Courses or training	11	24
Advice or support for parents	9	10
Parent or childminder and toddler sessions	8	14
Health services for families	7	20
Parenting classes	4	5
Help in finding additional childcare	2	11
Job or career advice	2	9
Counselling services	1	1
Other services	2	1
None	66	39
Don' t Know	4	1
Unweighted base	*144*	*144*

Base: All families whose 'selected' child mainly used a formal institutional provider or childminder in the last week

7.9 Summing up

This chapter has investigated some key issues about parents' views of their childcare and early years providers for children. Key points include –

- The majority of parents felt that they had a real choice of formal providers, citing reasons for choosing providers such as trust in the carer (16 per cent), and preferences to see their child educated as well as cared for (15 per cent).

- For those using informal providers, trust was cited even more often as a reason for choosing to use them (56 per cent of parents cited this as the main reason for choosing their informal provider).

- Most parents were largely content with their providers, with the majority (59 per cent) unable to suggest any improvements.

- Large proportions of parents reported that their formal providers were encouraging the development of their children's academic and social skills. No fewer than 67 per cent of parents said that any one of the social or academic skills we suggested, were being encouraged at their child's main formal provider.

- Parents were generally satisfied with the level of feedback they received about their children's progress at their main formal providers. 64 per were very satisfied with their feedback.

- Whilst currently a minority of parents using childcare and early years provision said that their providers offered additional services, substantial numbers of parents would like to see them available. Most commonly wanted were health services (20 per cent), or access to more training or courses. (24 per cent).

8 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Background

In the preceding chapters, we have provided a picture of the childcare and early years provision market in Wales in 2004, from the perspective of parents of children aged 14 and under. We have reported on the reasons why parents use various forms of childcare (in order to work, for the educational development of the child, etc.), and the proportions of families involved in each. Selecting one child from the family, we have taken a detailed look at the pattern of use across a particular week, to investigate the number of hours and the actual times of day when various types of childcare and early years provision is being used. The weekly and hourly costs of childcare were provided. Parental views on current providers – why they were chosen, room for improvement, the importance of inspections and services provided – were discussed. Finally, we reported on the size of potential barriers to using childcare and early years provision, such as affordability, quality and accessibility.

Whilst each chapter provides information that is critical in its own right, it is useful to look at the main emergent themes, particularly how they relate to current – or proposed – policies on childcare and early years provision. In this final concluding chapter, we comment on the following, drawing on what we know about parents' use of, need for and views of childcare and early years provision –

- Formal and informal care;
- Cost and affordability;
- Availability;
- Quality;
- Information needs;
- Integrated services.

8.2 Formal and informal care

Most government policies have focused on issues surrounding the use of and demand for formal childcare and early years provision. Little has been done with regard to informal care, despite the fact that it makes up a large proportion of all childcare used. There are debates about the extent to which the government should involve itself in issues about informal care. These include the extent to which informal childcare should be encouraged as a choice against formal childcare, in terms of children's educational and social development, and the extent to which government could or should oversee the quality of informal childcare provided.

However, our study clearly shows that informal childcare plays a key role among families in Wales. It is not only used as a cheaper option than formal care. It is often chosen because of the home environment, the trust which parents place in its providers and the flexibility in the arrangements which can be made.

8.3 Cost and affordability

Traditionally, better-off families are more likely to use - particularly formal - childcare and early years provision, largely due to a greater ability to afford such provision and a greater need, with one or both parents engaging in paid work. However, many of

the childcare and early years initiatives have concentrated on improving the accessibility and affordability of childcare and early years provision to families that are less well-off. The recognised link between parental work and the reduction of child poverty, combined with the need for good quality, affordable childcare provision to enable parents to enter work, has led the government to concentrate its efforts on providing this childcare for those who most need it. There have been a series of initiatives (eg, Integrated Centres) that have focused solely (to date) on the more deprived areas of Wales. Changes in the tax credit system have aimed to provide financial help towards the costs of childcare. In addition, the benefits of early years education – again particularly for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds – has led to the introduction of universal free part-time early years education.

Our study suggests that currently, childcare is affordable (though by no means usually easily affordable) to some, but less affordable – and sometimes a barrier to its use – for others. The need for more information about the costs of childcare services – upon which parents can make informed decisions – is also apparent.

Currently, parental views are mixed regarding the affordability of childcare and early years provision. Among those currently paying for childcare or early years provision, twice as many parents said that it was easy to afford than parents who said it was difficult. When asked about affordability of local childcare in general, parents tend neither to rate it as 'very good' nor as 'very poor'. Rather, parents' views are more moderate, perceiving it as 'fairly good' or 'fairly poor'. Again, those on lower incomes perceived their local childcare as less affordable. Thus, as far as most parents are concerned, whilst the cost of childcare and early years provision is not seen as prohibitive, neither is it seen as highly affordable.

Moreover, for particular – more disadvantaged – families, perceptions and experiences are of less affordable provision. For significant minorities, lack of affordable childcare is cited as a reason for not working. Similarly, there are families who find they have to send their children to more than one childcare provider because of cost issues.

Of course, whilst parents who pay for childcare can provide us with a grounded assessment of the cost of their childcare, we do not know the basis on which parents (particularly those who do not use paid childcare) rate the cost of local childcare. However, we have some indications of the potential usefulness of providing more – or better – information for parents regarding the costs of childcare. We know that the cost of available childcare is cited as one of the main issues on which parents would like to have access to more information.

There also appears to be room to improve parents' awareness of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit (bearing in mind that it is relatively new). Two thirds of families not receiving the childcare element were unaware (even when prompted) that the government offers extra help with the costs of childcare through the tax credit system; however, a large proportion of these families were likely to have been ineligible for the childcare element making it difficult to quantify awareness amongst eligible non-recipients. Moreover, there is quite a degree of confusion around the types of providers for which parents can claim the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit (bearing in mind that, in its current form, it is relatively new). By no means had all parents correctly identified the providers that were in general eligible and significant minorities of parents thought that in general ineligible providers (particularly nannies, au pairs and grandparents) were in fact eligible.

8.4   Availability

Between 1999 and March 2005, registered childcare places for children aged under 8 in Wales, has increased by nearly 18,500. Across Wales, as in England, the government has also introduced free part-time nursery education places for three and four year old children. However, we found evidence of a perceived shortfall among many parents in the number of childcare places in their local area. Nearly half of parents said they thought there were too few places in their local area. In terms of the extent to which a lack of available places was a barrier to parents using childcare or early years provision or to working, evidence is mixed. It was not often cited unprompted as a reason for not working. However, when asked whether they would work if they could arrange 'good quality childcare which was convenient, reliable and affordable', half of non-working parents said that they would.

Problems with availability may be greater at particular times. With greatest policy focus placed on formal childcare and early years provision at traditional times (part-time early years places and childcare places to cover the 'normal' working day), there will be potential gaps in availability at other times, such as atypical hours and school holidays. Indeed, there appears to be significant unmet demand for childcare during these periods.

8.5   Quality

Government has clearly stated the importance of providing childcare and early years provision of high *quality*. Parents – particularly those who use childcare and early years provision – are largely positive about the quality of their own provision and of that available in their local area. However, the quality of provision is an area where a significant number of parents would like more information.

8.6   Information needs

A lack of information – or knowledge about where to seek it – is an important theme emerging from our study. There appears to be at least some level of discrepancy between parents' perceptions of the local childcare and early years provision market and what is actually reported by parents who use childcare. We have some indications that parents – particularly parents who have not used childcare recently – are not always aware about the types of government help available (eg, help towards childcare costs via tax credits). When asked directly, four in ten parents felt that they would like more information about the childcare in their local area.

Specific areas about which parents ask for more information include school holiday provision, childcare before and after the school day and the cost and quality of childcare. What is particularly interesting is the reliance on 'word of mouth' for obtaining information about childcare and early years provision, coupled with a relative lack of awareness of two of the key government-led information sources, namely CIS and ChildcareLink. Of the more formal sources of information, schools and television adverts (the latter for tax credits) seem to be key ways for parents to access information. This is clearly an issue for further investigation, as better or more information may enable parents to make informed decisions about their use of childcare and early years provision. In turn, this will enable some to find childcare and early years provision that suits their needs (e.g. times available, cost, quality) and lead some to take up paid work.

8.7   Integrated services

Whilst our study did not focus heavily on identifying and exploring integrated provision such as Integrated Centres (it is a little too early to do so in such a generalised survey), we did ask parents about any services provided at the site of their childcare and early years providers. In addition – and maybe more importantly at this stage - we asked about what they might like to have available to them. Whilst currently a minority of parents using childcare and early years provision said that their providers offered such services (the main ones being courses or training, advice to parents and parent/childminder and toddler sessions), substantial numbers of parents would like to see them available. Most commonly wanted are courses or training and health services.

Part of the rationale for integrated provision is the usefulness of 'wraparound' childcare and/or provision. For working parents, having part-time early years provision and the 9 'til 3 school day can cause problems. Either they are organising for someone else to pick up their children and provide childcare during their remaining working hours or their working hours have to be arranged around taking and collecting their children. For some parents, we found that these issues were barriers to taking up paid work at all. We also found widespread use of providers for taking and collecting children.

8.8   Summing up

This report provides an initial look across a range of dimensions of childcare and early years provision, and highlights many issues of key interest to policy makers and academics working in this area. It provides up-to-date information to aid the evaluation of recent changes in childcare policy. With time, current policy initiatives will no doubt have further impact on the needs of parents identified in this report, across the dimensions identified, such as affordability, quality, availability and information. In the meantime, the issues raised in this report will hopefully also inform future policy on childcare in Wales.

APPENDIX A SOCIODEMOGRAPHICS

Family structures and composition

Almost all (94 per cent) of the parents who answered the questionnaire for this survey were women. The majority (73 per cent) of respondents were part of a couple, while the remainder were lone parents.

The mean size of household was four people – the largest household had nine people, and the smallest, two.

Adult age

The mean age of the respondents was 35, and of their partners, 39. Table A1 shows the proportions of respondents who were lone parents or part of a couple by different age bands.

Table A.1   Age of respondents, by family type

			Column per cent
	Couple	**Lone parent**	**All**
	%	%	%
20 and under	1	7	2
21 to 30	19	34	23
31 to 40	53	39	49
41 to 50	25	20	24
51 and over	2	+	2
Base: All families			
Unweighted base	*415*	*145*	*560*

Marital status

Lone parents fell into several categories with regards to their marital status. Over half (57 per cent) were 'single, that is never married', a third (28 per cent) were divorced, just over a tenth (13 per cent) were married but separated, and 2 per cent were widowed.

Of the couple families, respondents were most likely to be married and living with their husband or wife (79 per cent), with a substantial proportion (16 per cent) saying they were never married and therefore were, we assume, co-habiting with their partner. 5 per cent of respondents in couples said they were divorced and less than 0.5 per cent per cent told us they were married and separated from their husband or wife[44].

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[44] This situation is feasible if parents were in a transitional stage or if their relationship was not stable

Adult Ethnicity

At the end of the interview, we asked parents to identify which ethnic group they felt 'best described' themselves. The majority (98 per cent) of respondents identified themselves as White. Of the remainder, 0.9 per cent said they were Pakistani, 0.8 per cent described themselves as Mixed race, and 0.4 per cent also said they were part of another ethnic group not listed.

Table A.2   Ethnicity of respondents

	Column per cent
	%
White	98
Pakistani	1
Mixed race	1
Black – African	+
Black – Caribbean	+
Bangladeshi	+
Indian	+
Other	+
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*560*

+<0.5 per cent

Number of children in the household

The mean number of children in the households we surveyed was two, with a maximum of six in some households. To give the study context, it is useful to note that of all the families that had only one child, a third (33 per cent) were lone parents, and two thirds (67 per cent) were couple families. Of all the families that had three or more children, a quarter (27 per cent) were lone parents, and two thirds (73 per cent) were couple families. When looking at the number of families who had at least one child aged five or under, we saw that a fifth (26 per cent) were lone parents, and four fifths (74 per cent) were couple families.

Table A3 shows that most families (70 per cent) did not have any children aged two to four, while a third (26 per cent) of families had one child of that age.

Table A.3   Number of children aged two to four, by family type

			Column per cent
Number of children	**Couple**	**Lone parent**	**All**
	%	%	%
0	68	75	70
1	27	24	26
2	5	2	4
3	0	0	0
4	0	0	0
Base: All families			
Unweighted base	*416*	*145*	*561*

+<0.5 per cent

84 per cent of families had at least one school age child present in the family, and 38 per cent of families had at least one pre-school age child present in the family. Table A4 shows a breakdown of the number of couple and lone parent families who fell into these groups.

Table A.4   Presence of preschool and school age children, by family type

			Column per cent
	Couple	**Lone parent**	**All**
	%	%	%
Pre-school age children present	39	37	38
Pre-school age children not present	62	63	62
School age children present	84	84	84
School age children not present	16	16	16
Base: All families			
Unweighted base	*416*	*145*	*561*

Children's Characteristics

The gender of the 'selected' child chosen at random in each family was split evenly between boys and girls (49 per cent were boys, and 51 per cent were girls). 8 per cent of the 'selected children' had a special educational need.

Income

Table A5 shows family income levels.

Table A.5   Family yearly incomes

	Column per cent
	%
Under £10,000	20
£10,000 – 19,999	33
£20,000 – 31,999	30
£32,000 or more	19
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*534*

Qualifications

We asked parents about their highest qualifications. Table A6 shows the proportion of respondents who had at least one GCSE grade D-G and Table A7 shows those who had at least one A-Level.

Table A.6   Whether or not respondents received Grades D-G at GCSE

	Column per cent
	%
Achieved at least grade D-G at GCSE or higher	75
Did not achieve grade D-G at GCSE or higher	25
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*559*

Table A.7   Whether or not respondent received at least one A-Level

	Column per cent
	%
Achieved at least one A-Level	25
Did not achieve at least one A-level	76
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*559*

As well as these qualifications, we asked respondents about their vocational qualifications. 54 per cent had at least one vocational qualification.

Other Characteristics

Over half (57 per cent) of the respondents said they were buying their house with the help of a loan or mortgage. A third (32 per cent) were renting their home, and the remainder were split between owning it outright (8 per cent), living rent-free or paying part rent and part mortgage (both 2 per cent).

Table A.8   Tenure status of respondents

	Column per cent
	%
Buying it with the help of a mortgage or loan	57
Rent it	32
Own it outright	8
Live rent-free (including rent-free in relative's/friend's property)	2
Pay part rent and part mortgage (shared ownership)	2
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*560*

Three quarters (75 per cent) of respondents had a driving licence, and 27 per cent did not. Of those who had a licence, the vast majority had access to a car (96 per cent).

Family working status

As for family working status, Table A9 shows that nearly half (43 per cent) were from couple families where both parents worked, and a fifth (24 per cent) were from couple families with only one earner. Lone parents, working and non working, each made up 12 and 15 per cent, respectively, of our respondents.

Table A.9   Family working status

	Column per cent
	%
Both working	43
Couple – one working	24
Couple – neither working	5
Lone parent working	12
Lone parent not working	15
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*561*

Table A10 provides more detail of working status, taking into account the hours worked by those in employment. Working lone parents were evenly split between full-time and part-time employment. Working arrangements among couple families were evenly split between those were both parents worked full time, one worked full time and the other part time, or an arrangement where one worked full time and the other did not work.

Table A.10 Family working hours

	Column per cent
	%
Lone parent in FT employment	6
Lone parent in PT employment	6
Lone parent not in paid employment	15
Couple - both in FT employment	22
Couple - one in FT and one in PT employment	20
Couple - one FT one not working	21
Couple - one or both in PT employment	5
Couple – neither in paid employment	5
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*561*

Atypical hours

We asked respondents whether they ever worked hours considered 'atypical'. The definition of working atypical hours is whether they worked usually or sometimes before 8am, after 6pm, or at the weekend.

Table A11 Atypical working hours

	Column per cent
	%
Both working parents doing atypical hours	23
1 parent doing atypical hours	39
At least 1 working but neither parent doing atypical hours	6
Neither parent working	5
Lone parent doing atypical hours	9
Lone parent not doing atypical hours	4
Lone parent not working	15
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*561*

Geographical spread

The sample was also spread across areas differing according to affluence. Using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), the Government's own measurement tool, we can see the spread of respondents as shown in Table A13. Parents living in the most deprived areas made up 28 per cent of the sample, and those in the least deprived made up 17 per cent of the sample.

Table A.13 Area of Index of Multiple Deprivation

	Column per cent
	%
1st (Least deprived)	17
2nd	19
3rd	15
4th	22
5th (Most deprived)	28
Base: All families	
Unweighted base	*561*

APPENDIX B TECHNICAL REPORT

B.1 Questionnaire Development and the interview

The questionnaire was developed by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), and through liaison with the Steering Group at the Department for Education and Skills and the Welsh Assembly Government. The questionnaire development and testing was carried out in England and all the results were fed through to the questionnaire used in Wales, which was almost exactly the same. The Welsh Assembly Government, in particular, advised on issues and terminology particular to the Welsh context. For example, Welsh providers can be linked to Integrated Centres, Sure Start centres or Community Focused Schools – a slightly different list to those in England. Similarly, a question was included about whether the providers used Welsh or English (or a mixture of both) when caring for children. Inspections of childcare and early years education providers are carried out in Wales by Estyn and the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales, both of which were asked about in the version of the questionnaire used in Wales.

The questionnaire was translated into Welsh to ensure that any respondents could take part in the survey in Welsh if they preferred. NatCen has a team of Welsh-speaking interviewers who were able to conduct interviews in Welsh.

The interviews lasted on average 43 minutes and consisted of questions on the family's use of childcare in the last week and the last year, details of the cost of this childcare, and a complete attendance diary for one child in the family, randomly selected by the computer program. This was followed by questions about the main provider used for the 'selected' child, and sections designed to gauge the attitudes of parents to general local childcare issues. The final sections gathered information about the respondent's economic activity, as well as their partner if applicable, and questions to classify the respondent and their family according to income, ethnicity and so on (see Table B.1 for a summary of the questionnaire structure).

The interviews were conducted face-to-face on a laptop computer, using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI), programmed using Blaise. Aids to interviewing consisted of a set of showcards, a weekly calendar, and a three-year calendar to aid work history.

The survey was a combination of two previous studies on childcare and early years education in England – the *Parents' Demand for Childcare* studies (baseline in 1999, repeated in 2001) and the *Survey of parents of three and four year old children and their use of early years services* series (1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004). Therefore, a significant part of the survey's development was involved in how to effectively combine the two, to adequately reflect the key policy issues of interest to both and to provide the best compromise between the two previous studies in the space available. For information about childcare and early years education use in Wales, this survey initiated a completely new series.

After a Feasibility Study by NatCen, the questionnaire was developed by researchers with expertise in the areas covered by the previous two studies. The resulting new draft questionnaire was tested cognitively with 17 parents in England through a combination of doorstep recruiting and interviewing parents from a particular nursery. Recommendations were followed through to the pilot stage questionnaire's development.

In part, this combination of surveys resulted in a slightly different questionnaire for those parents whose 'selected' child was aged two to five and who used a formal institutional provider or childminder. Topics such as how far the main provider encourages social and academic skills in the child, and how much feedback parents get about their child's progress, were covered only for parents with a selected child in this age group. Table B.1 indicates the sections of the questionnaire which were only asked of this group of parents.

At the cognitive pilot and pilot stages, interviewers were briefed and de-briefed in person by the research team, and interviewers completed an evaluation form, where they were asked to summarise their experiences or raise any particular problems during fieldwork. These forms were used as the basis for discussion at the de-briefings.

Feedback from the pilot stage was very positive. Interviewers found that they were able to 'sell' the survey easily, and that respondents were keen to take part. The interviewers had several minor, but very helpful comments to make about how we could improve the interview computer program, and the accompanying documents. In particular the definition of childcare, which covered both formal and informal types of care, was refined and techniques were developed to ensure parents were fully aware that we were interested in *all* kinds of childcare. In addition, the section which collected an 'attendance diary' for the selected child was a challenging feature of the questionnaire, and the pilot revealed ways that extra tools, such as calendars, could be introduced to enable parents accurately to recall childcare they used in the last week.

Table B. 1 Questionnaire content

Module A	Household composition
Module B	Household use of childcare in the last year • Types of providers used for all children
Module C	Household use of childcare in the last week • Types of providers used for all children
Module D	Household childcare costs (for providers used in the last week) • Payments to providers including payments in kind • Awareness of Tax Credits • Details of benefits
Module E	Detailed record of attendance in the last week for selected child • Breakdown of childcare use for randomly selected child, hour by hour • Details of how child was taken to and picked up from each provider
Module F	Details of main provider for selected child in the last week • Why parents chose their main provider • *Parents of two to five year olds only:* awareness of skills encouraged at the provider • *Parents of two to five year olds only:* parental involvement with the child at home

	• *Parents of two to five year olds only:* information received by parents about their child's progress at the main provider • *Parents of two to five year olds only:* the transition to reception class • Integrated services offered at the main provider • Travel arrangements to the main provider
Module G	Attitudes towards childcare in the local area • Views on the affordability, quality and availability of childcare in the local area • Sources of information about local childcare
Module H	Reasons for patterns of provision • *Parents of two to five year olds only:* why parents used more than one provider for the selected child • *Parents of two to five year olds only:* why parents did not use nursery education every day
Module I	Respondent's work • Work history in last two years • Any atypical hours worked and whether this caused any childcare problems • Whether childcare was a barrier to working
Module J	Household and child classification questions • Classification of family members according to special educational needs, disability, ethnicity, qualifications and housing tenure
Module K	Provider details, data linkage consent and admin questions
Module L	Partner's economic activity and classification questions Activities • Work history in last two years • Classification of partner according to ethnicity and qualifications

A minor error in the Blaise program early on in the fieldwork period meant that a small proportion of parents had been interviewed but not asked the questions about their own involvement at home, in the child's development. However, this was rectified quickly and all parents were telephoned by interviewers at the NatCen Telephone Unit, to ask these missing questions. The response rate from parents to this follow-up interview was good.

B.2   Sample Management

The selection of the sample and the opt-out was undertaken by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), on behalf of the Inland Revenue who hold Child Benefit records. The sample was drawn from the Inland Revenue's records of recipients of Child Benefit. As explained in Chapter 1 the sample consisted of parents of children aged 14 and under. Child Benefit records are a highly comprehensive form of sampling method, because take-up amongst parents is nearly 100 per cent. A small number of parents were excluded from the sampling frame, according to Inland

Revenue procedures, and these exclusions were weighted for later (see Section B.8).

As Child Benefit records are recorded on a child level, rather than family level, the following strategy was used:

1. Sectors were sampled with probability proportional to the weighted number of children aged 0-14 in them;
2. within the selected sectors, Child Benefit recipients were sampled with a probability proportional to the weighted number of children aged 0-14 years for whom they are receiving benefits;
3. A single child was selected at random from the selected Child Benefit recipient, during the interview.

This sampling method meant that each child was weighted separately.

As explained in stage 3 of the sampling method, during the interview the CAPI program selected a child, at random, for which the attendance diary questions were asked. This method also took account of the fact that babies will have been born between the date of sampling and the fieldwork, allowing for babies to be randomly selected as much as older children (as long as they were not the first born). First born children born after June 2004 were still excluded from the sample, so that the sample of children under six months will not be representative of all children under six months. Children aged 14½ were not included in the sampling process as they had a high probability of being 15 by the time the interviewer called to do the interview.

B.3   Contacting Respondents

All interviews were conducted by NatCen interviewers. Since the sample was drawn from Child Benefit records, interviewers had contact details for named individuals. Each sample member received an opt-out letter (in English and in Welsh) in July 2004. The opt-out letter introduced NatCen and explained that an interviewer would be sending them another letter in the autumn before calling on them. Cases where the respondent did not opt out at this stage were issued for interview.

The opt-out rates are provided in Section B.5. DWP continued to provide NatCen with the details of late opt-outs, changes of address and newly 'sensitive' cases. All late opt-outs were removed from the sample and interviewers were informed of any changes of address. Newly sensitive cases were removed from the sample up to the beginning of fieldwork; after this point, it was agreed that we would contact these individuals, given that they had not chosen to opt out of the study.

Because there could have been several months between respondents receiving the opt-out letter from DWP, and the time when the interviewer approached them, interviewers were asked to send a second letter to respondents, in order to remind people about the study. After sending this 'advance letter' (in English and in Welsh), interviewers then called at the respondent's home. Where possible, interviews were conducted in private, and all respondents read the advance letter and frequently asked questions before the interview commenced.

The named person from the sample was the person listed as the recipient of Child Benefit in that household, and in most cases this was the mother. However, it was not necessarily the same person who was interviewed. To be eligible for interview,

the respondent must have had *main or shared responsibility for making decisions about any childcare that the child(ren) in the household may receive.* Interviewers were briefed on the possibility that some parents may be under 18, and were issued the standard Guidelines on Interviewing Children and Young Adults for advice.

During fieldwork, interviewers followed a procedure for tracing those who had moved away. When interviewers were able to establish their new address, they were instructed to follow up at the new address as long as it was local to them. Where respondents had moved out of the area the case was allocated to another interviewer where possible.

If the nominated respondent did not speak English or Welsh well enough to complete the interview, then interviewers were instructed that they could use another household member to assist as an interpreter. If using a family member as an interpreter was not possible, there was an unsuccessful outcome code for the interview.

Where a respondent had a partner living in their household, and the partner was available, a short interview with the partner was also conducted. However, if the partner was not there or was unwilling to take part then the respondent could answer as their proxy.

B.4   Briefing

All interviewers attended a full day briefing on the project before starting fieldwork, led by the NatCen research team. Interviewers also had comprehensive project instructions covering all aspects of the briefing.

Briefing sessions provided an introduction to the study and its aims, an explanation of the sample and contact procedures, full definitions of formal and informal childcare, and a dummy interview exercise, designed to familiarise interviewers with the questions and flow of the questionnaire. The day also included a session on conducting research with parents, focussing on issues of sensitivity, practicalities and dealing with requests for information.

B.5   Fieldwork and response rates

The survey was in the field from early September 2004 to early January 2005. Table B.2 provides detailed response rates for Wales. Overall, 17 per cent of the addresses were identified as 'out of scope' either by the interviewer (for example those who had moved away without successful tracing, or who had no children in the relevant age group) or because they had opted out before the interview (around 10 per cent of the full sample chose to opt out before the interview). Based on the 'in scope' sample, the field response rate was high at 76 per cent. 21 per cent (of the in scope sample) were refusals in the field, and 4 per cent could not be contacted or were unable to take part for other reasons.

Table B. 2 Response rates

Outcome	Total	% of in scope	% of all
Full sample pre opt out	**891**	-	-
Addresses 'in scope'	**741**	-	**84**
Interview	561	76	63
- full, no partner	*144*		
- full, partner interview	*152*		
- full, partner interview in proxy	*260*		
- full, partner interview refused	*4*		
- partial successful	*1*		
Refusal	153	21	17
- by household	*6*		
- about eligibility	*18*		
- by respondent	*100*		
- by proxy	*11*		
- broken appointment	*18*		
No contact	27	4	3
- with household	*8*		
- with respondent	*6*		
- away/ill during fieldwork	*4*		
- language difficulties	*1*		
- other in scope unproductive	*8*		
Addresses 'out of scope'	**150**	-	**17**
Opt outs and office refusals	92	-	10
- opt out to DWP	*54*		
- excluded by DWP during fieldwork	*7*		
- office refusal to NatCen	*31*		
Problems with address	53	-	6
- mover, no follow up address	*48*		
- unable to find address	*1*		
- vacant/no resident household	*4*		
Ineligible household – no children in age range	5	-	1

An increasing rate of inaccurate addresses from the Child Benefit records led to a higher than usual number of 'out of scope' addresses. This is mainly due to the fact that Child Benefit records are now paid directly into the recipient's bank account, giving them little incentive to inform the Inland Revenue when they have changed address. A slightly higher proportion of ineligible cases in the boost sample, due to problems with the boost sample's details also led to a higher than expected proportion of 'out of scope' addresses for this section of the sample.

The survey adhered to NatCen's standard field quality control measures. As part of the routine procedures every interviewer is accompanied in the field by a supervisor for a full day's work twice a year. This system ensures that in general at least 10 per cent of interviewers will have been supervised on this particular survey. In addition, one in ten interviews are routinely back-checked by NatCen's Quality Control Unit. Back-checking is carried out by telephone where possible, or by post. Back-checks thank the respondent for taking part, ask whether the right person was interviewed, whether various procedures were carried out correctly, and whether the interviewer left a good impression. No significant problems were revealed by the back-checking of this survey, and the feedback on interviewers was overwhelmingly positive.

B.6   Coding and editing of data

The CAPI program ensures that the correct routing is followed throughout the questionnaire, and applies range and consistency error checks. These checks allow interviewers to clarify and query any data discrepancies directly with the respondent, and were used extensively in both questionnaires. A separate 'in-house' editing process was also used, which covered some of the more complex data checking, combined with the coding process for open answers.

Following briefings by the NatCen research team, the data was coded by a team of coders under the management of the NatCen Operations team, using a second version of the CAPI program which included additional checks and the codes for open answers. 'Other specify' questions are used when respondents volunteer an alternative response to the pre-coded choice offered them. These questions were back-coded to the original list of pre-coded responses where possible (using a new set of variables rather than overwriting interviewer coding). Notes made by interviewers during interviews were also examined and the data amended if appropriate, ensuring high quality data. Queries and difficulties that could not be resolved by the coder or the team were referred to researchers for resolution.

In the course of each interview, where a respondent gave details of current or recent spells of employment, this information was coded to be consistent with Standard Industrial and Occupational classifications – SIC (1992) and SOC (2000). Industry was classified to a 2-digit level and Occupation to a major group .

Once the data set was clean, the analysis file of question-based and derived variables was set up in SPSS , and all questions and answer codes labelled.

94 per cent of respondents agreed for their interview data to be linked to administrative records held at the DfES. This will allow future research to be undertaken into the use and views of childcare in relation to the results of the National Pupils Database.

B.7   Provider checks

In both the Parental Demand and Early Years surveys, checks were carried out on respondents' classifications of the providers they used, in order to improve the accuracy of the classifications. Slightly different methods were used in each survey series, and this survey used an adapted version of these to verify the provider classifications of parents in this study.

Checks were carried out for all 'institutional' formal childcare/nursery education providers, i.e. all formal providers except individuals such as childminders, nannies/au pairs and babysitters. The provider types checked were:

- Nursery school
- Nursery class attached to primary or infants' school
- Reception class attached to a primary or infants' school
- Special day school or nursery or unit for children with special educational needs
- Day nursery
- Playgroup or pre-school
- Breakfast club or After school club, on school/nursery school site
- Breakfast club or After school club, not on school/nursery school site
- Holiday club/scheme

Other 'formal' providers such as nannies and au pairs, babysitters and childminders were not included in these checks because experience in previous surveys has shown a reluctance by these providers to take part in checks.

Providers checked were those used in the past week by all children in the family, not just the 'selected' child. However, we only contacted the providers of those families who had agreed, when asked in the parent interview, that this could be done and had provided sufficient contact details. During this process we also checked for duplicate providers; this meant that if a provider was used by more than one family we ensured they would not be contacted more than once.

B.7.1 Provider check procedures

At the end of the interview, parents were asked if they would be willing to let us contact their providers, explaining that we wished to check their classification of provider type with the providers themselves. If parents agreed, interviewers recorded the addresses and telephone numbers of the providers in the CAPI program during the interview.

The next steps of the provider checks were in two stages: an automated 'logical check' based on the provider interviews, and a manual check to make decisions by looking at both parents' and providers' classifications where there was no resolution after the automated logical checks.

Provider checks: part one

Firstly, we contacted those providers who we had full details for, and conducted a six minute telephone interview with them to check the classifications given by parents. The interview was designed to obtain the following information:

- Provider classification
- Information about what type of organisation provides the service (Local Authority; private business etc)
- Whether the provider is part of, or linked to an integrated care setting (eg, local Sure Start etc)
- The age groups for which the whole provider caters, and the age groups covered by individual services, if different

With this information the programmer ran an automated check to verify, change or query parents' original classifications. A number of cases were 'thrown out' during these checks, and were passed on to the next stage. These included cases where:

- There was no provider classification available because they had not been contacted, or they had refused the provider interview
- Parents' and providers' classifications did not match at all

Provider checks: part two

Where cases could not be matched with the provider's classifications (usually because of lack of information about providers on which to match) a manual check was carried out using the same rules as used in the automated checks as far as possible. Either the parental or provider classification was determined as the final classification, according to pre-specified rules.

Table B.3 shows the classifications of the providers we checked, comparing the parents' classification to the final classifications after all checks. After the checks, there was a 4 per cent decrease in the classification of nursery schools, 2 per cent decrease in off-site out-of-school clubs, a 1 per cent increase in the classification of day nurseries, and a 3 per cent increase in the classification of on-site out-of-school clubs. The classification of playgroups or pre-schools went up by just 2 per cent, and a small number of other providers were reclassified into 'Other Nursery Education Provider'. As these were not checked in the original provider checks process, these have only appeared as a resulting classification, not as an original classification (the latter are indicated in bold).

Table B. 3 Classifications of providers before and after provider checks

		Column per cent
Provider type	**Classification According to parents** **%**	**Final classification after all checks** **%**
Nursery school	9	5
Nursery class	16	15
Reception class	20	20
Special day nursery	1	1
Day nursery	12	13
Playgroup or pre-school	15	17
Breakfast or afterschool club on site	20	23
Breakfast of afterschool club off site	8	6
Holiday club	N/a	n/a
Other nursery education provider	N/a	+
Base	*309*	*309*

Base: All formal institutional providers identified by parents

+<0.5 per cent

B.8   Weighting

The sample for this study was weighted to take account of any undersampling of certain groups undertaken at the sample selection stage. The weighting procedure for this study consisted of two stages. The first stage was to remove the biases which arose from the sample design, the second was to match the profile of the (weighted) sample to the population for a set of key characteristics.

Sample design weights

The childcare sample was designed to be representative of the population of children on the Child Benefit records, rather than the population of Child Benefit recipients. This means the sample was biased towards larger households and needed to be weighted before any analyses could be carried out on household level data. The selection weights also corrected the selection probabilities for cases where the number of children on the sample frame differed from the number of children found in the household at interview.

Second stage of sampling (calibration weighting)

The final stage of the weighting procedure was to adjust the weights using calibration weighting in CALMAR[45] (Deville & Sarndal, 1992)[46]. The aim of the calibration weighting was to correct for differences between the (weighted) achieved sample and the population profile caused by excluding cases from the sample frame before sampling, random chance in the selection process and the effects of differential non-response.

Calibration weighting requires a set of population estimates to which the sample will be weighted, these estimates are known as control totals. The DWP provided NatCen with a breakdown of the sampling frame (before exclusions) for different variables at recipient and child level.

Calibration weighting works by adjusting the original sampling design weights to make the weighted survey estimates of the control totals exactly match those of the population. The adjustments are made under the restriction that the initial selection weights must be altered as little as possible, so their original properties are retained.

Using the weights

A single child was selected for interview at each responding household. The sample was analysed at both household and child level, depending on the issues involved and the questions asked. There were therefore two final weights; a household weight for the household level analyses and a child weight for analyses of data collected about the selected child.

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[45] CALMAR, an acronym for CALibration on MARgins, is a macro program run in SAS which adjusts the margins of a contingency table of survey estimates to match the known population margins.

[46] Deville J-C & Sarndal C-E (1992) *Calibration estimators in survey sampling*. Journal of the American Statistical Association, Vol 87, 376-382.

B.9   Fieldwork Materials

The following materials were used during the study, including the opt-out letter, the advance letters sent by interviewers and the address record form for both the main and boost sample. Some of the tools used during the interview are also shown, but the questionnaire is not included for reasons of available space in this report.

- Opt out letter – English
- Opt out letter - Welsh
- Advance letter – English
- Advance letter - Welsh
- ARF (address record form)
- Calendar – three year
- Calendar – weekly
- Example showcard