

SOCIAL RESEARCH NUMBER:

60/2016

PUBLICATION DATE:

27/09/2016

Childcare in Further Education

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

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

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
Parent learners	Parents who are also enrolled onto FE courses
Teenage parents	Parents aged 19 or younger
Young parents	Parents under the age of 25
ALG	Adult Learning Grant
CSA	Childcare Sufficiency Assessment
DLS	Discretionary Learner Support Fund
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
FCF	Financial Contingency Fund
FE	Further Education
FEI	Further Education Institution
LPCG	Lone Parents' Childcare Grant
LPG	Lone Parents' Grant
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NIACE	National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
NPTC	Neath Port Talbot College
NUS	National Union of Students
SEN	Special Educational Needs
WEA	Workers' Educational Association
WGLG	Welsh Government Learning Grant

1. Executive summary

Introduction and methodology

- 1.1 Arad Research was commissioned by the Welsh Government to undertake a study into the extent to which childcare is a barrier to young parents in Wales wishing to enter, return to, or continue with further education (FE) in Wales.
- 1.2 The Welsh Government's budget includes a commitment of £0.4 million to *'implement a pilot childcare scheme promoted by the NUS for further education students'*. This research sought to examine the evidence base and the rationale for a new programme.
- 1.3 The research focused on a series of research questions, with priority placed on the following six:
 1. What are the specific issues facing young parents wishing to enter, or continue in FE? For example, is cost the only/main barrier?
 2. To what extent do childcare demands prevent young parents (up to 20 years of age, and a second group between 20 and 25 years of age) in Wales entering, or continuing in, FE?
 3. How many young parents are accessing support that is currently available?
 4. How many additional parents could be helped to access, or continue, in FE if further support was offered in Wales?
 5. Are there specific barriers for parents wishing to enter Welsh medium FE or wishing to make use of Welsh medium childcare?
 6. How does existing support available to young parents wishing to access FE in Wales compare to other regions of the United Kingdom? For example, the Care to Learn scheme.
- 1.4 The research included a series of stakeholder interviews, alongside reviews of literature and data relating to childcare in FE. The rationale for the method employed was to ensure that the research drew on the expertise and knowledge of stakeholders, whilst making efficient use of existing data and published literature.

What are the specific issues facing young parents wishing to enter, or continue in FE?

- 1.5 There are many complex and inter-related barriers faced by learners in Wales wishing to access FE in Wales. The most common barriers outlined in the literature relate to the availability of provision, awareness of options, transport, financial constraints and attitudinal barriers to education. These barriers are not unique to parent learners, but overcoming them is often more challenging for parent learners than for most non-parent learners. One barrier, however, that is unique to young parents is the need to access childcare.

To what extent do childcare demands prevent young parents in Wales entering, or continuing, FE?

- 1.6 Cost and affordability of suitable options are often the main childcare barriers faced by FE parent learners. Even where cost barriers are removed by the financial support available through the Financial Contingency Fund (FCF), the availability of suitable childcare can remain a barrier. Logistical challenges such as the location of the provision, transport to and from the provider as well as coordinating childcare provision times with learning times, add further barriers for parent learners to access suitable childcare.
- 1.7 On-site crèche and childcare facilities (where available) provided by individual Further Education Institutions (FEIs) appear in most cases, to adequately meet the current demand for childcare amongst FE learners. Many of the affordability barriers of childcare have also been addressed through the financial support available through the FCF. The study findings indicate that increasing the availability of childcare provision alone is unlikely to increase the demand for childcare and the take up of FE courses unless other barriers such as accessibility to childcare are also addressed.

How many young parents are accessing support that is currently available?

- 1.8 A significant percentage of recent FCF expenditure is allocated to supporting the costs of childcare for FE learners in Wales. However, the demand for and the number of childcare funding awards offered to FE parent learners has remained fairly constant in recent years. The findings of this study also indicate that the majority of FEIs in Wales are easily able to fund applications for childcare support through the FCF.
- 1.9 The extent to which young parents are accessing support depends largely on their awareness of its availability. The findings of this research outline that communicating information about funding sources available to young parents is not as effective as it could be. As a result awareness of the support available amongst young parents may not be as high as it could be.

How many additional parents could be helped to access, or continue, in FE if support was offered in Wales?

- 1.10 The number and proportion of young people who are NEET in Wales have fallen since 2013. Similarly the birth numbers and rates for young mothers in Wales have also steadily declined since 2009. This suggests that the number of young parents who could access FE, but do not, may also be falling. However, it remains unclear how many young parents who do not access FE, would be encouraged to do so if further support was offered to them.

Are there specific barriers for parents wishing to enter Welsh-medium FE or wishing to make use of Welsh-medium or bilingual childcare?

- 1.11 There do not appear to be any additional barriers faced specifically by parent learners who wish to study FE courses through the medium of Welsh. There is evidence however to suggest some regional variation in the availability of Welsh-medium childcare.

How does existing support available for young parents wishing to access FE in Wales compare to other regions of the United Kingdom?

1.12 In other UK nations there are financial support programmes in place aimed specifically at young parent learners. This is not the case in Wales where young parents in FE are supported through discretionary funds such as FCF, which is available to eligible FE students.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

This study concludes that current discretionary funding arrangements appear to meet the needs of FE parent learners who require support with the costs of childcare. As such, and based on the evidence reviewed from various sources, we recommend that an additional pilot programme is not required at this moment in time.

Recommendation 2

FEIs rely largely on their FCF allocation to provide the childcare support that their parent learners require. The Welsh Government should therefore consider continuing to allocate these funds to FEIs.

Recommendation 3

Further efforts may be required to improve the way information about available support is shared with young parents in order to raise their awareness of the financial support opportunities that are currently available to them.

2. Introduction and background

- 2.1 Arad Research was commissioned by the Welsh Government to undertake research into the extent to which childcare is a barrier to young parents entering, returning to, or continuing with further education (FE) in Wales. The research aimed to examine the extent to which current measures are meeting potential demand for childcare amongst young parent learners, and whether any further action or intervention is required to help young parents access FE.

Background to the research

- 2.2 Developing innovative approaches to childcare provision is a key priority of the Welsh Government's 2015 Child Poverty Strategy. This includes ensuring the availability of affordable and accessible childcare to help move parents into work and education and reduce the number of children living in workless households. The Welsh Government has already implemented a number of policy interventions to support access to childcare and increase engagement in education, employment and training for young people. These include the *Building a Brighter Future: Early Years and Childcare Plan* and the *Youth Engagement and Progression Framework*.
- 2.3 Recognising the issues faced by parents who are currently engaged in FE, the Welsh Government supports schemes including the Financial Contingency Fund and the Welsh Government Learning Grant (albeit that these grants are not exclusively aimed at young parents). Additionally, the Welsh Government's budget includes a commitment of £0.4 million to '*implement a pilot childcare scheme promoted by the NUS for further education students*'. Prior to developing and implementing such a scheme, the Welsh Government wishes to consider the evidence base and the rationale for a new programme. This research seeks to add to this evidence base. The specific research questions this research has sought to address are:

1. What are the specific issues facing young parents wishing to enter, or continue in FE? For example, is cost the only/main barrier?
2. To what extent do childcare demands prevent young parents (up to 20 years of age, and a second group between 20 and 25 years of age) in Wales entering, or continuing in, FE?
3. How many young parents are there accessing support that is currently available?
4. How many additional parents could be helped to access, or continue, in FE if further support was offered in Wales?
5. Are there specific barriers for parents wishing to enter Welsh medium FE or wishing to make use of Welsh medium childcare?
6. How does existing support available to young parents wishing to access FE in Wales compare to other regions of the United Kingdom? For example, the Care to Learn scheme.
7. If a new intervention is not recommended, what changes, if any, would be required to reduce the barriers for young parents in, or wishing to enter, FE? For example, a change to current provision.
8. How could a new intervention(s) be tested and appraised? I.e. what criteria would be used to assess the effectiveness of the intervention?
9. What cost effective policy interventions could the Welsh Government offer to remove childcare as a barrier to young learners in Wales?

2.4 Priority was placed on answering the first six research questions. Sections 4 to 9 of this report address these questions individually. Responses to research questions 7, 8 and 9 are included in the study conclusions.

3. Methodology

3.1 This section provides an overview of the methodology adopted by Arad to undertake this research. Our approach included a series of initial scoping interviews, followed by reviews of literature and data relating to childcare in FE. It was acknowledged during the inception stage that the timescales for this research allowed limited scope for primary data collection. Therefore, the rationale for the method employed was to ensure that the research drew on the expertise and knowledge of stakeholders, whilst making efficient use of existing data and published literature.

Inception and design phase

3.2 Following an initial inception meeting with the Welsh Government to agree the overall methodology Arad developed a search strategy for the literature review, including key search terms and research questions to be addressed, as well as detailing the scope of the review (e.g. focusing on literature after 2010). Arad also developed a discussion guide for the initial scoping interviews.

Scoping interviews

3.3 Arad undertook 15 scoping interviews with representatives from Further Education Institutions (FEIs), Colleges Wales, the Welsh Government and the National Union of Students Wales. Arad also facilitated a group discussion with student services' managers during a student services' network meeting.

3.4 The purpose of these interviews was:

- To identify relevant sources of information for the literature and data reviews;
- To gather views on current support and funding arrangements;
- To gather views on the potential demand for additional childcare support; and
- To gather views on potential policy interventions.

Survey

3.5 A survey of FEIs was also carried out, aimed specifically at student support services. The purpose of the survey was to gather data and views on the support available and the demand for support for childcare in FE settings. The survey focused on the following themes:

- Data available on young parents at FEIs;
- Existing on-site crèche facilities at FEIs;
- Demand for childcare and support to meet the costs of childcare;
- Current funding support arrangements.

The data collected was analysed alongside information provided by stakeholders interviewed during the scoping stage.

Data review

3.6 Available data¹ was analysed to help answer two of the research questions, namely: how many young parents are accessing support that is currently available? and: how many parents could be helped to access, or continue, in FE if further support was offered in Wales? Data was sourced through desk research and through scoping interviews with stakeholders. Administrative data was accessed via Welsh Government sources (such as Welsh Government Statistical Releases and StatsWales), Office for National Statistics datasets and Financial Contingency Fund returns provided by FEIs to the Welsh Government. National Survey for Wales data was also used to analyse trends among NEET young parents and views on childcare.

Literature review

3.7 The purpose of the literature review was to provide answers to the specific research questions outlined above in section 1.3. The literature included in the review was identified via online searches² and through scoping interviews. Literature was included or screened out based on a review of publication titles,

¹ A list of the data sets used is included in Annexe B of this report.

² Key terms used for online searches include: childcare for FE learners; barriers to childcare; parents experiences of childcare; barriers to FE; Student support; Funding; Access to FE; as well as combinations of the following terms: barriers, FE, childcare, support, funding, evaluation, access.

abstracts or summaries. Following the screening process, an initial list of potentially relevant literature was drawn up which included literature from across Wales and more widely across the UK. It was agreed that the included literature should be published in or after 2010 (with the exception of articles deemed particularly pertinent by the research team).

- 3.8 An appraisal template was produced in order to record summary details on each of the relevant documents in the initial list. This template was used to collate findings against the key research questions and to screen documents for inclusion in the literature review. Literature deemed suitable for inclusion was then analysed and used to inform this report.

4. What are the specific issues facing young parents wishing to enter, or continue in FE

- 4.1 This section discusses the barriers that young parents can face when entering or continuing in FE. It draws on literature reviewed as part of this study and the stakeholder interviews conducted. The most common barriers outlined in the literature relate to the availability of provision, awareness of options, transport (including the cost and availability), financial constraints and attitudinal barriers to education.
- 4.2 Spielhofer et al. (2010) explore barriers to participating in education and training among various different sub-groups of young people and parents. The study surveyed 2029 young people across six Local Authorities in England who had completed Year 11 in either 2008 or 2009. Interviews were also conducted with booster samples of 519 young people across specific sub-groups (76 of whom were teenage parents) and 102 parent interviews. The study found that all teenage parents interviewed experienced at least one barrier or constraint when deciding what to do after completing Year 11. Furthermore, across the whole sample of young people, five per cent experienced multiple barriers when making their choices; the most common cited by teenage parents was a course not being available in their area.
- 4.3 A report published by Public Health England (2014), outlining factors that increase the chances of being NEET for six months or more, reported (based on data analysed by the Audit Commission in 2010) that young parents are 2.8 times more likely to be NEET than other young people of the same age who are not parents. However, the research did not control for other factors, such as socio economic and financial issues, that could also contribute to this.

Availability of learning provision

- 4.4 There are 14 FE colleges / institutions in Wales. Two of these are based in north Wales (Grŵp Llandrillo Menai and Coleg Cambria); one is located in mid Wales (Coleg Ceredigion); two are based in south West Wales (Pembrokeshire College

and Coleg Sir Gâr) and two are based in the Swansea and Neath valley (Gower College Swansea and Neath Port Talbot College Group). Six institutions are located in south east Wales (Coleg Gwent St David's Catholic College, Cardiff and Vale College, Coleg y Cymoedd, The College Merthyr Tydfil and Bridgend College). In addition WEA Cymru YMCA Community College operates across Wales as a whole providing adult education for communities.³

- 4.5 A number of the colleges, particularly those in north, mid and south west Wales, cover a large geographical catchment area. This in turn can create specific challenges for some learners located in rural areas and / or those who have limited transport options, to access the learning course of their choice. However, some of these colleges (e.g. Grŵp Llandrillo Menai) attempt to address this by providing courses at a number of campuses located across a relatively wide geographic area.
- 4.6 Stakeholders interviewed judged that college mergers in Wales over the last few years had, in some cases, created more access barriers to courses for some learners. The Welsh Government's transformation agenda⁴ led to a number of FE college mergers in Wales reducing the total number of colleges from 22 in 2010 to the current 14. Table 1 outlines the college mergers that have taken place in recent years.

³ Further details regarding the location of FE colleges in Wales can be found here: http://www.collegeswales.ac.uk/wales_colleges-42.aspx

⁴ <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/091125transformationen.pdf>

Table 1: FE College mergers in Wales since 2010.

College	Area covered by the Institution	Merger
Cardiff and Vale College	Covers Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan from two main campuses located in Cardiff and Barry	The college formed in August 2011 as a result of a merger between Coleg Glan Hafren and Barry College
Coleg Cambria	Covers the north east of Wales. The main campuses are located in Connah's Quay, Northop and Wrexham	The college formed in August 2013 as a result of a merger of Deeside College and Yale College
Grŵp Llandrillo Menai	Covers north west Wales including Môn, Gwynedd, Conwy. The main campuses are located in Bangor, Rhos-on-Sea and Dolgellau	Formed in April 2012 as a result of a merger of Coleg Llandrillo and Coleg Menai
Coleg y Cymoedd	Aberdare, Llwynypia, Nantgarw, Rhymney, Ystrad Mynach	Formed in August 2013 as a result of a merger of Coleg Morgannwg and Ystrad Mynach College
Gower College Swansea	Gorseinon, Swansea	Formed in August 2010 as a result of a merger of Gorseinon College and Swansea College
NPTC Group	Brecon, Llandrindod Wells, Llansamlet, Newtown, Pontardawe, Port Talbot	Formed in August 2013 as a result of a merger of Neath Port Talbot College and Coleg Powys
WEA Cymru YMCA Community College	All-Wales	Formed as a result of a merger between WEA south and Coleg Harlech WEA north

4.7 Stakeholders noted that these mergers had, at times, resulted in provision of some courses being relocated to other campuses within the same institution. Learners enrolled onto these courses were then required to travel to an alternative campus in order to continue with their studies. Campuses within the same institution can often be located relatively far away from each other even in relatively urban areas. For example travel time between the Barry and Cardiff campus of Cardiff and Vale College is at least 30 minutes each way. The logistics and potential financial implications of studying at an alternative campus can therefore present challenges for some learners. Some stakeholders noted that changes to the location of some

courses from one campus to another had led to some students discontinuing with FE.

Attitudinal barriers

- 4.8 Young parents' attitudes towards education can influence decisions to engage in FE and can serve as barriers to continuing in learning. The impact of the *Care to Learn Report* (Riley et al., 2010) notes that many young parents may simply not want to continue their education even if all other barriers have been removed. The authors suggest that this reluctance may be due to negative prior learning experiences such as being marginalised or bullied. This is supported by the findings of a literature review conducted by Nelson (2011) which assessed the most effective strategies to re-engage young people NEET. The review cites evidence that pupils' disaffection with school impacts on decisions to pursue further learning and can affect career ambitions. Swann (2013) indicates that pupil disaffection with school varies according to social class – with those from a lower social class more likely to be disaffected. The research found no evidence that levels of disaffection were influenced significantly by gender or by language of provision (i.e. Welsh/English medium education).
- 4.9 Although the review by Nelson (2011) focused on young people generally, wider research has found that attitudinal barriers to FE are particularly prevalent among teenage parents. For example, this is evident in the findings of research conducted by Evans and Slowley (2010), which involved in-depth qualitative interviews with 38 teenage mothers from across the UK. The interviews focused on understanding barriers experienced by young mothers trying to re-engage with education. The research found that poor experiences of school before pregnancy negatively influenced teenage mothers' motivation to return to education. These negative experiences may include issues such as school exclusion, being bullied or poor attainment. Furthermore, the research outlined that young women who have children in their teens tend to have had poor experiences of education before becoming pregnant. Following their pregnancy, teenage parents reported either being stigmatised when pregnant, resulting in a reluctance to access mainstream

education, or being ‘unofficially’ excluded for being pregnant by being asked to leave school for ‘health and safety reasons’.

Transport

- 4.10 The availability and cost of transport are cited as significant barriers to entering or continuing in FE for some young people. These issues are more likely to be a barrier for young people living in rural areas (Spielhofer et al., 2010).
- 4.11 Spielhofer et al. (2010) also reported that the majority of teenage parents who took part in their research considered the availability of public transport to their place of learning to be an important factor when deciding what to do after completing Year 11. However, the report concludes that the availability of transport is no more of a barrier for teenage parents than it is for other young people who participated in the research.
- 4.12 A number of those interviewed as part of this study however, challenged the view that barriers linked to access to transport were common to all young people, and instead were of the opinion that parent learners face greater transport challenges than non-parent learners. For example, one FEI representative explained that learners cannot use the free student transport facilities they provide if they are accompanied by a child.⁵ Additionally Evans and Slowley (2010) found that public bus companies may limit the number of buggies allowed on a bus, therefore potentially posing a challenge for parent learners seeking to use public transport. These issues could serve as significant barriers for learners who depend on these modes of transport not only to travel to college but also to take their child to their childcare setting (see also section 5 below).
- 4.13 A study conducted by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) (DBIS, 2013) found that transport costs were a barrier to entering or continuing in FE for many young people. NIACE worked with 124 learning providers to collect interview data from 2,000 adults and young people about the barriers to learning they experienced. The cost of transport, among other financial constraints was

⁵ FEI provided transport is not available in all colleges in Wales. Furthermore, in cases where student transport is provided by the FEI, the catchment area of the service is limited and therefore is not available to all students.

found to be a barrier for more than one in 10 of those interviewed. Moreover, Spielhofer et al. (2010) found that teenage parents were slightly more likely to report the cost of transport to be a barrier compared with other young people of the same age.

- 4.14 Data from previous research on existing financial support programmes also provides a measure of the extent to which transport costs prevent young people entering, or continuing FE. An evaluation of financial support for students in FE in Wales (Bryer, 2015) indicates that transport accounted for the largest single expenditure for students aged 16 to 18 and overall accounted for 28 per cent of Financial Contingency Fund (FCF) spend.

Financial issues

- 4.15 Some of the most common barriers that young parents face when entering or continuing in FE appear to be linked to financial issues, such as the cost of transport (as discussed above) and paying for course fees (Nelson, 2011). Affordability of the course was an issue raised during stakeholder interviews as part of this study. It was noted that parent learners often prefer to study part-time courses as opposed to full-time courses in order to manage their time and commitments as parents and learners. However, funding to support part-time FE courses is not always available.⁶ Learners wishing to enrol onto a part-time FE course are required to fund the course fees themselves. The course fees, on top of the additional costs associated with raising a child, often makes FE less affordable for parent learners compared to non-parent learners.
- 4.16 Spielhofer et al. (2010) also reported that lack of sufficient finance was the most commonly identified constraint on young people's learning choices. This is supported by a Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013) publication which noted that one in six young people interviewed experienced financial difficulties. These financial issues included the cost of course fees, being able to afford to live while learning and losing entitlements to some benefits. This latter

⁶ If you are 19 and over and studying part-time, you might be charged tuition fees. However, further education colleges offer free or discounted tuition to learners from low income families, disabled learners or for learners on benefits.

issue was raised by stakeholders who contributed to the current research. One stakeholder noted that the take up of full-time courses, for example, can impact on eligibility for benefits such as Job Seeker's Allowance.

- 4.17 Although the findings outlined above relate to most FE students, there is evidence to suggest that financial barriers are more of an issue for young parent learners. For example, Spielhofer's et al. (2010) research found that teenage parents were more likely to experience financial barriers than other young people and many said they would have continued into FE after completing Year 11 had they received more financial support. Furthermore, student parents are often less likely to receive financial support from their families when compared to other students (NUS, 2014). The study does not outline why this may be the case. However, views expressed by some stakeholders suggest that parent learners, especially those over the age of 19, are often living independently away from their parents' home. As a result they are often less likely to receive the same degree of direct support (financial or otherwise) from their parents as younger learners who may still be living at home.
- 4.18 In Wales there are a number of financial schemes available that can offer support to young parents who wish to continue with, or return to FE. These schemes include the Financial Contingency Fund (FCF), the Welsh Government Learning Grant (WGLG)⁷ and the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). These programmes are available to all students who meet the eligibility criteria. A further discussion of these schemes is presented in section 5 of this report.
- 4.19 Although financial support is available to young parents wishing to enter, or continue in FE, the literature highlights a number of barriers that young people experience when applying for financial support. Examples of these barriers include a lack of clarity in the application process and a lack of awareness of the grants that are available to students (Bryer and Williams, 2013). Section 5 provides a more detailed discussion of the ease of access for learners to this financial

⁷ The Welsh Government Learning Grant (WGLG) was formerly titled the Assembly Learning Grant (ALG).

support, including levels of awareness of the support and how information about existing support is provided to students.

Overview of barriers

4.20 The discussion outlined above illustrates that there are many complex and inter-related barriers faced by learners wishing to access FE in Wales. The wider literature on barriers to learning indicates that these are not unique to parent learners, however these barriers are often more challenging for parent learners to overcome than they are for most non-parent learners. One barrier, however, that is unique to young parents is the need to access childcare; this is considered in more detail in the following section.

5. To what extent do childcare demands prevent young parents in Wales entering, or continuing, FE?

- 5.1 This section discusses the current and potential future demand amongst FE learners for childcare support. It also considers the childcare-related challenges faced by FE learners who are parents and the extent to which these pose challenges in terms of accessing FE.
- 5.2 When reviewing suitable childcare options that will enable FE parent learners to access the learning of their choice, a number of factors need to be considered. These include cost and affordability as well as availability and accessibility of childcare.
- 5.3 Within the last 10 years, a significant amount of research has been conducted in the UK examining the barriers that parents face in accessing affordable and high quality childcare. The evidence gathered suggests that childcare is a key barrier to young parents entering or continuing in FE. A report published by Barnardo's (Evans and Slowley, 2010) concludes that childcare provision is one of the most important factors in encouraging young mothers back into education. The report outlines a number of factors that influence young mothers' willingness to use childcare, such as the location of the childcare and concerns about leaving children with strangers. The wider literature on childcare in FE cites a range of other barriers. The following sections provide a discussion of the main barriers to childcare.

Cost and affordability of childcare

- 5.4 The literature reviewed identifies the cost of childcare as one of the most prevalent barriers to accessing learning for parent learners (IES, 2009; Spielhofer et al., 2010). The affordability of childcare is also identified as being 'problematic' for student parents and Spielhofer et al. (2010) report that over half (54 per cent) of the teenage parents included in their study felt that improvements to the affordability of childcare would encourage them to participate in education.

- 5.5 A study undertaken by Cordis Bright (2014)⁸ identifies four Local Authorities in Wales that have particular issues with affordability of childcare for parents and carers who are in study or training (Neath Port Talbot, Newport, Torfaen and Wrexham). In three of these four authorities, the findings are based on the increasing number of parent learners who state that childcare is too expensive or is unaffordable (Neath Port Talbot, Newport and Torfaen). In Wrexham the findings are based on a suggestion that actual, or perceived, childcare costs may be a barrier to young parents taking up learning in the first place.
- 5.6 Section 6 of this report outlines the funding support that is currently available to enable FE learners who are parents to access or continue in FE. This support includes the Financial Contingency Fund (FCF), the Welsh Government Learning Grant (WGLG) and the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). The majority of FEI student services' representatives interviewed were of the view that existing financial support programmes provide sufficient support to meet the needs of learners who apply for support to cover the costs of childcare (see also section 7).
- 5.7 However, the literature suggests there could be a number of reasons why, even with the financial support schemes in place, the affordability of childcare remains a barrier to some student parents. One reason for this is that there appears to be a number of hidden costs associated with childcare such as retainers, registration fees and the number of children (NUS, 2009). For parent students, these hidden costs may not always be covered by the financial support available to them.
- 5.8 Furthermore, the support provided through the FCF often covers a proportion of students' childcare costs and consequently student parents are still required to contribute to some of the costs of childcare (FCF, 2013). Individual FEIs can use their discretion as to the proportion of applicants' childcare costs that can be covered by the FCF. The evaluation of the Adult Learning Grant (ALG) (Bryer and Williams, 2015) notes that FCF recipients often use their WGLG (FE) funds to cover their remaining childcare costs.

⁸ Cordis Bright (2014). Childcare gap analysis for Wales. Welsh Government.

- 5.9 The Cordis Bright (2014) study also identifies additional costs that can often be associated with providing childcare for disabled children and those with special educational needs.

Availability of childcare

- 5.10 In addition to the issues of affordability of childcare, the evidence highlights a number of other barriers to childcare. One issue that appears to be a significant barrier is the availability of suitable childcare. A survey conducted with young people (Spielhofer et al., 2010), of which 76 were teenage parents, found that almost a quarter of teenage parents who participated in the research rated the availability of childcare as the most important influencing factor when deciding what to do after completing Year 11.
- 5.11 Evans and Slowley (2010) reported that young mothers' willingness to use childcare is strongly influenced by its location. The study concluded most young parents considered childcare that was on or near a campus to be the most convenient. Five of the 14 FEIs in Wales currently offer on-site crèche facilities, however, these are not always available at all campuses supported by these FEIs. This may therefore place a limitation on the type of course that parent learners, who are reliant on on-site crèche provision, can access.
- 5.12 The survey conducted as part of this study suggests that in the majority of cases (with the exception of Bridgend College and NPT College) the on-site crèche facility spaces provided by individual FEIs meet demand for these facilities among their learners.
- 5.13 Cordis Bright (2014) note that all Local Authorities in Wales can identify at least one location where there is a gap in childcare provision. The study outlines that challenges linked to the availability of childcare are more prevalent in rural areas and for individuals who rely on specialised transport and care provision for children with a disability or special education needs (SEN). The study concludes, however, that generally, the location of childcare provision is less important for parents and carers than other aspects of childcare, such as cost, skilled staff, opening times or flexible care. This is in contrast to the findings of Evans and Slowley (2010)

outlined above and the views of some stakeholders who consider the location of childcare to be an important aspect in ensuring that the childcare available is also accessible.

Accessibility of suitable childcare

- 5.14 Even in cases where affordable childcare is available parent learners may still face challenges accessing services that are suited to their needs. Within the literature reviewed, suitable childcare is defined as flexible childcare arrangements (IES, 2009) – e.g. childcare that fits around the student parents' timetables.
- 5.15 The literature cites many factors that have an impact when referring to accessibility of suitable childcare such as the flexibility of the childcare arrangements and the location of the childcare (whether it is located on or near the learning site). Additionally, the literature cites a shortage of suitable childcare for particular groups such as for older or disabled children (NUS, 2009) and for babies below two years of age (C2L, 2010). This is cited as a UK-wide issue as opposed to a matter that is specific to Wales.
- 5.16 Many of the challenges associated with accessing suitable childcare are based around transport issues. As noted elsewhere in this report, transport challenges are often more prevalent for those located in rural areas. However, transport challenges can also be faced by those wishing to travel with their child on public transport or on student transport services organised by the FEI. These can be challenges faced by individuals in urban and rural areas. During interviews with FEI representatives, it was noted that young children are not always allowed to accompany their parents on student transport services provided by individual colleges. In cases where this rule is imposed alternative transport arrangements are required which present additional costs and logistical challenges for parent learners who wish to access on-site crèche facilities and are also reliant on college or public transport to get to their place of learning.
- 5.17 Interviews with stakeholders revealed other challenges likely to face these parent learners. The first is timing. Those interviewed noted that parent learners who rely on childcare near where they live, as opposed to where they learn, often face the

challenge of getting themselves to the college in time after dropping their child off and returning to the childcare provider in time after finishing their day at the college. The extent to which individual parent learners experience these challenges are varied and are influenced by individual circumstances including where they live in relation to the college and the childcare provider. It was noted that this challenge is typically greater in rural areas compared to urban areas.

5.18 Parent learners who have children of different ages often face the logistical challenge of coordinating their time at the college with drop-off and pick-up arrangements of children in different settings. For example, parents who have children in school as well as childcare nurseries are often required to drop their children off at more than one location at different times. Pembrokeshire College noted that they have addressed this challenge to a large extent by providing 'school run' transport for older siblings of children who access the on-site crèche facilities available at the college.

5.19 To a lesser extent, trust issues have been cited as a barrier to childcare. One study found that three per cent of parents with children under five were concerned about trust when making decisions about using formal childcare (IES, 2009). As a result, these parents would prefer to either look after their children themselves or leave them with family members. It should be noted, however, that these concerns were expressed by a very small proportion of parents who contributed to the IES study.

5.20 The challenges outlined above serve to illustrate that parent learners continue to face a number of barriers to accessing childcare even if availability and affordability barriers are removed.

Demand for childcare

5.21 FEIs surveyed and interviewed noted that demand from learners for childcare support fluctuates to some degree from year to year; although most agreed that demand for childcare support had declined slightly during recent years. Of the five FEIs that provide on-site crèche facilities four noted that the provision adequately meets demand for childcare provision amongst their learners.

- 5.22 There were some regional variations in these views. Two colleges located in west Wales noted that demand from learners for onsite childcare facilities was greater than supply. One of these colleges was also of the opinion that current facilities did not adequately meet the current demand for childcare provision among its learners.
- 5.23 A number of the colleges that currently provide on-site crèche facilities also noted challenges in ensuring that the facilities remained commercially viable. These challenges stemmed mainly from relatively high staff overhead costs and a low take up of places. Some had addressed these challenges by providing childcare places to non-learners (i.e. commercial rate paying clients) as well as learners. The financial challenges of supporting on-site crèche facilities has led to the closure of some facilities (e.g. the Ammanford campus in Coleg Sir Gâr) and led to decisions not to include crèche facilities as part of new campus facilities (e.g. the newly developed Cardiff campus of Cardiff and Vale College).
- 5.24 The availability of other childcare provision in an area also impacts on levels of demand for on-site crèche facilities. Indeed, FEI representatives noted that not all parent learners require the childcare provision to be near their place of learning and many prefer accessing provision that is close to home. The availability of childcare nearer to home may also alleviate some of the other 'logistical' challenges associated with accessing childcare (see below). However, it was reported that increasing demand for, and availability of, childcare in the community can reduce the demand for and commercial viability of on-site crèche facilities. One FEI also noted that their on-site crèche facilities faced competition from other local childcare provided by the Welsh Government Flying Start programme.
- 5.25 The FEIs which do not provide on-site childcare facilities support parent learners by providing support to eligible parents (through the FCF) to enable them to access childcare from commercial providers of their choice. Most FEIs were also of the view that the current childcare support they provide through FCF largely meets current demand.

Section summary conclusions

- 5.26 A number of factors influence the demand and take-up of childcare amongst parent FE learners in Wales. These in turn serve as potential barriers to accessing or continuing in FE. Cost and affordability are often the main barriers. However, even where cost barriers are removed by the financial support available through FCF, the availability of suitable childcare can remain a barrier in some cases. Logistical challenges such as the location of the provision, transport to and from the provider as well as coordinating childcare provision times with learning times, add further barriers for parent learners to access suitable childcare.
- 5.27 Evidence outlined above indicates that, in the majority of cases, current on-site crèche facilities (where available) provided by individual FEIs adequately meet the demand for childcare places from learners. Many of the affordability barriers of childcare have also been addressed through the financial support available through the FCF. These findings suggest that increasing the availability of childcare provision alone is unlikely to increase the demand for childcare and the take up of FE courses unless other barriers to childcare are also addressed. If further initiatives are to be introduced to increase the demand for childcare to enable potential parent learners to access FE opportunities, then they are likely to require a focus on the accessibility barriers associated with childcare alongside availability and affordability barriers.

6. How many young parents are accessing support that is currently available?

- 6.1 This section presents data relating to two key Welsh Government funding schemes that are available to support young parents to enter or continue in FE. Financial Contingency Funds (FCF) are provided to further and higher education institutions in Wales for the purpose of establishing discretionary funds to assist those students who need extra help to meet costs and to provide emergency payments to assist in cases where a student may be considering leaving their course of study because of financial problems. FCF eligibility criteria specifies that certain groups are to be prioritised for funding, including students with children (especially lone parents) and students who need extra help with childcare costs.
- 6.2 FCF data is available by category of expenditure, including childcare. However, the data is only available for the age groups 16-18 and 19 and above which means it is not possible to analyse funding allocated to those aged up to 25.
- 6.3 The Welsh Government Learning Grant (WGLG) is an income-assessed grant that was introduced to encourage people aged 19 and over and living in Wales to continue with their education. Young parents with childcare costs are not specifically noted as a priority group for this fund. No data is available on the category of expenditure; it is therefore not possible to tell what percentage – if any – of the WGLG was spent on childcare. The data is also only available for the age groups 19-21 and 22-49, so it is not possible to analyse the grant funding allocated to those aged up to 25.
- 6.4 This data is supported by the views gathered during interviews with stakeholders such as FEIs, Welsh Government and the NUS.

Financial Contingency Funds

- 6.5 FCF data was published by Welsh Government until 2012/13. Data for 2014/15 has been compiled from individual FCF returns submitted by FEIs to Welsh Government.⁹
- 6.6 From 2004/05 to 2014/15, between £6,468,000 and £7,000,000 has been allocated each year to FEIs for distribution. In many years there has been an underspend, ranging from £71,000 to £386,000 (there was a slight overspend 2003/04 and 2007/08 and the data for 2013/14 is incomplete and has therefore been omitted).

Table 2: Total Financial Contingency Funds allocated to FEIs and distributed by FEIs

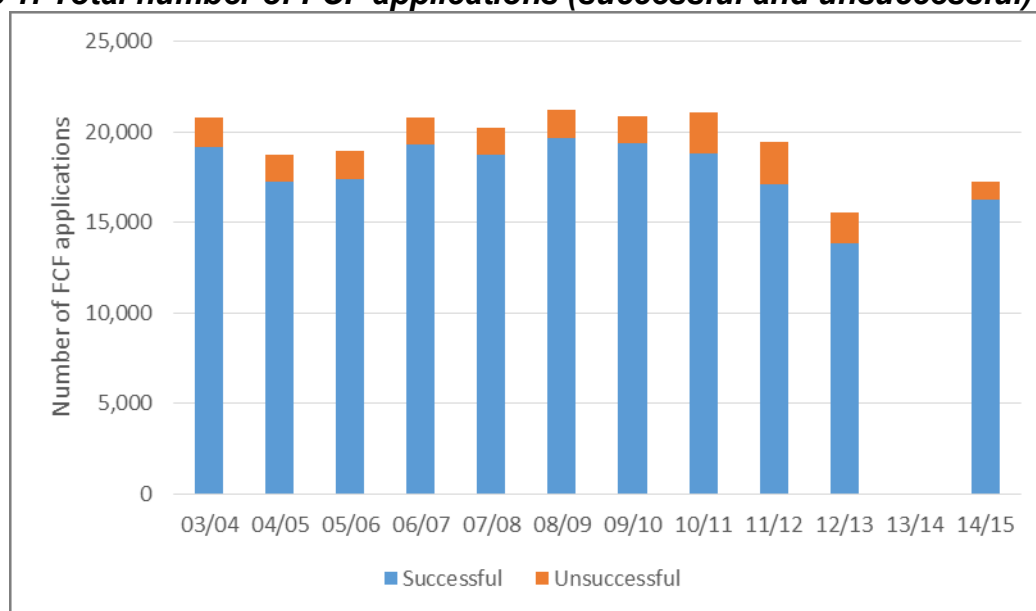
	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11	11/12	12/13	14/15
Amount distributed by institutions (£000s)	6,624	6,341	6,841	7,018	6,341	6,738	6,753	6,804	6,929	6,614
Total allocated to institutions (£000s)	6,957	6,468	7,000	7,000	6,500	7,000	7,000	7,000	7,000	7,000

Source: Welsh Government statistical releases, Financial Contingency Funds in Wales, 2002/03 - 2012/13 and FCF returns 2014/15.

- 6.7 In general, the total number of FCF applications (including unsuccessful applications) was fairly steady between 2004/05 and 2010/11, with a fall in applications in recent years (see Figure 1). The number of successful applications has followed a similar pattern, varying between 13,825 and 19,685, with successful application figures lowest in recent years; at 13,825 in 2012/13 and 16,272 in 2014/15.

⁹ Welsh Government statistical releases, Financial Contingency Funds in Wales, 2002/03 - 2012/13 <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/financial-contingency-funds/?tab=previous&lang=en>. Data for 2013/14 and 2014/15 is compiled by Arad Research from individual further education institutions' FCF returns.

Figure 1: Total number of FCF applications (successful and unsuccessful)



Source: Welsh Government statistical releases, Financial Contingency Funds in Wales, 2002/03 - 2012/13 and FCF returns 2014/15.

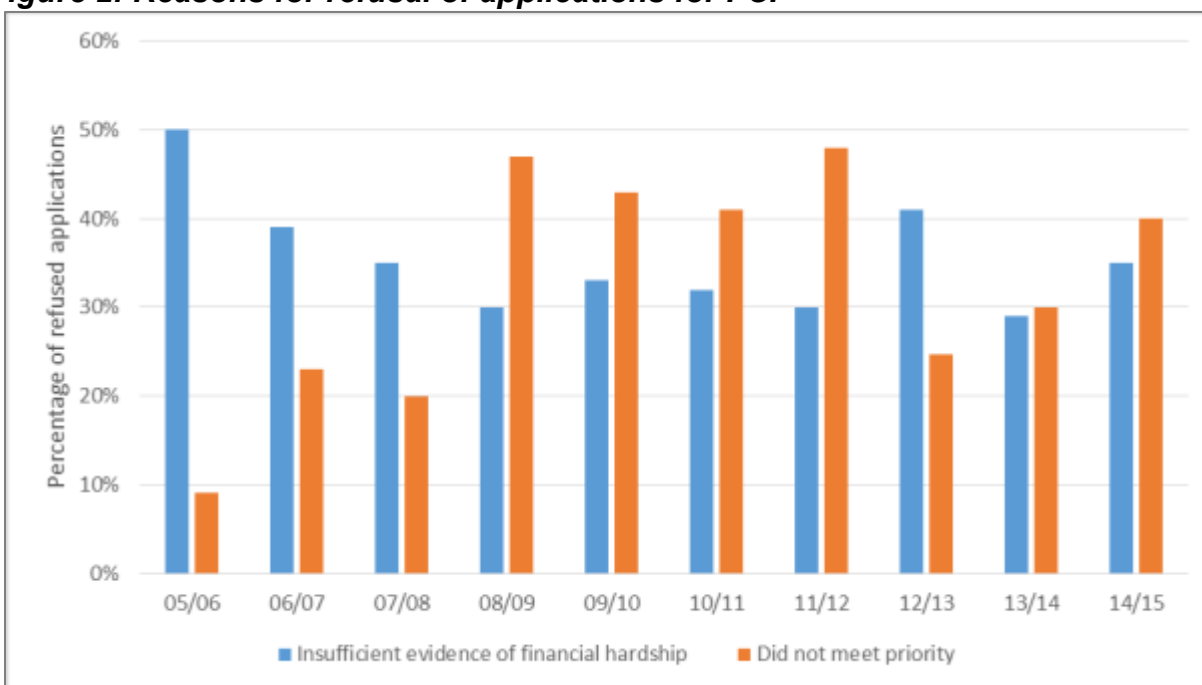
6.8 The percentage of applications refused support has remained fairly low, at between seven and 12 per cent until 2013/14 and reaching six per cent in 2014/15. Reasons for support not being provided are usually insufficient evidence of financial hardship, or that the application did not meet FCF priorities (student parents and support for childcare are priorities identified by Welsh Government). In recent years, the percentage of applications rejected for other reasons has been as high as 37 per cent, but in the majority of cases, the 'other' category includes applicants who applied for funding but did not start their course. In addition, in 2013/14 one FEI noted a large number who had 'too high an income' for FCF funding, which could have been coded as insufficient evidence of financial hardship. Only in rare cases are applications rejected because FCF funds are exhausted.

6.9 FEIs were asked in the survey questionnaire to note the number of FCF applications for childcare support that had been unsuccessful during the 2014 – 2015 academic year. The responses provided indicate some differences across institutions. Four of the nine FEIs who responded to this question, noted that they had no unsuccessful applications for childcare support. Among the FEIs who had

students that made unsuccessful FCF applications, two had fewer than 10 and unsuccessful applications among the remaining three ranged from 11 to 36.

6.10 A Figure 2 illustrates reasons for unsuccessful applications were largely due to applicants not meeting the financial hardship criteria. A few examples were given of parents not taking up their course and therefore the FCF support because they could not access suitable childcare provision. No examples were given of applications being unsuccessful due to lack of available funds.

Figure 2: Reasons for refusal of applications for FCF



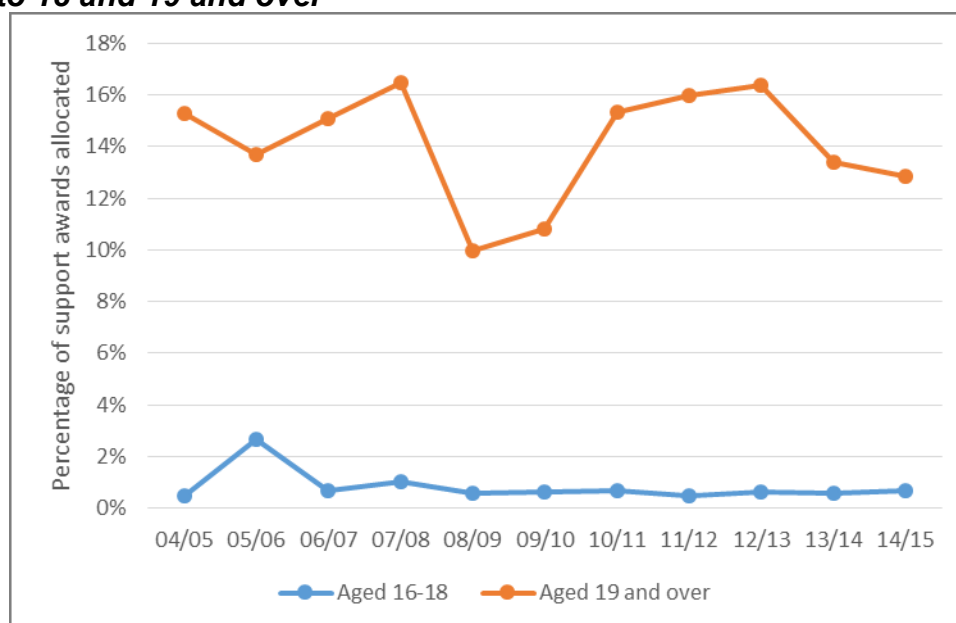
Source: Welsh Government statistical releases, *Financial Contingency Funds in Wales, 2002/03 - 2012/13 and FCF returns 2013/14 and 2014/15.*

6.11 With regard to the age profile of those allocated funding, a slightly higher percentage of 16-18 year olds are allocated funding compared to those aged 19 and over; an average of 61 per cent compared to an average of 39 per cent. The percentage of those allocated funding in both age groups has altered slightly between 2003/04 and 2012/13; the percentage allocated to those aged 16-18 has reduced marginally from 62 per cent to 54 per cent and the percentage allocated to those 19 and over has increased marginally from 38 per cent to 46 per cent.

However this trend was reversed in 2014/15, with the percentage allocated to those 16-18 returning to 68 per cent and the percentage allocated to those 19 and over returning to 32 per cent.

6.12 It is also possible to analyse FCF data specifically allocated to support the costs of childcare (Figure 3). Firstly, the percentage of total FCF awards to support the costs of childcare is fairly low. Hardly any awards are allocated to those aged 16-18; only around one per cent of total awards allocated to those aged 16-18 are to support childcare costs. For those aged 19 and over, between 10 per cent and 16 per cent of total awards are allocated for childcare and this figure has fluctuated over the past 10 years. Actual application numbers similarly vary, ranging from 990 to 1,830 for those aged 19 and over.

Figure 3: Percentage of total FCF childcare support awards allocated to learners aged 16 to 18 and 19 and over

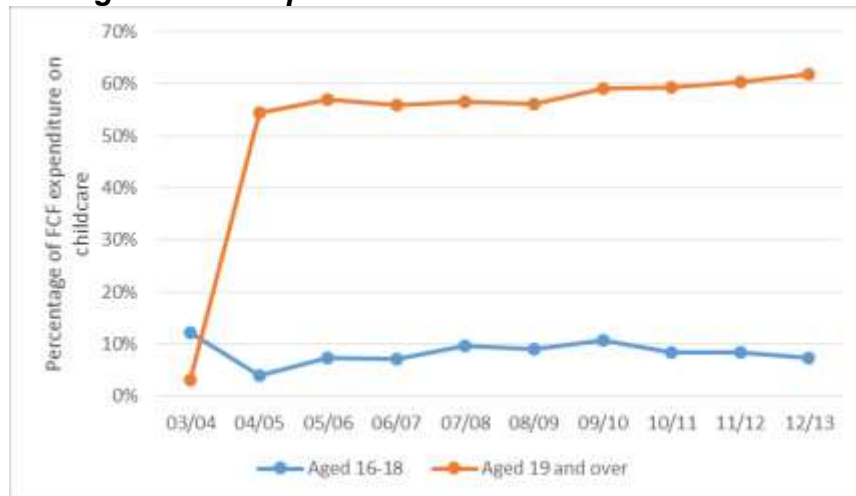


Source: Welsh Government statistical releases, *Financial Contingency Funds in Wales, 2002/03 - 2012/13 and FCF returns 2013/14 and 2014/15.*

6.13 However, as Figure 4 shows the proportion of FCF expenditure that is allocated to childcare is much higher than the number of awards, particularly for those aged 19 and over. FCF expenditure on childcare awards for those aged 19 and over has

risen slightly from 55 per cent of total FCF expenditure in 2004/05 (just over £1.7m) to 66 per cent of total FCF expenditure in 2014/15 (just over £2.7m).

Figure 4: Percentage of FCF expenditure allocated for childcare



Source: Welsh Government statistical releases, Financial Contingency Funds in Wales, 2002/03 - 2012/13 and FCF returns 2013/14 and 2014/15.

6.14 There is some regional variation in the percentage of FCF awards allocated for childcare. Since 2009/10, FEIs in south east and mid Wales have seen a steady decline in the percentage of awards to support the costs of childcare. The percentages in the north and south west regions were steady until 2012/13, but have fluctuated in recent years. By 2014/15, FEIs in north Wales distributed a significantly higher proportion of awards to support childcare compared to the other areas (14.7 per cent compared to a maximum of five per cent in other regions).

6.15 The percentage of total expenditure allocated for childcare has been fairly similar in the south west, south east and mid Wales regions, rising slightly until 2014/15. Expenditure has been significantly higher in north Wales (peaking at 66 per cent compared to a high of 44 per cent in other regions). However, interpreting the data accurately over time can be challenging as institutions have merged over the years and there is sometimes significant variation in awards and expenditure between FEIs in each region.

Table 3: FCF allocation on childcare support within individual FEIs:

Name of College	Percentage of FCF spend on childcare support (2014 – 15)	Percentage of FCF applications for childcare support (2014 – 15)
Coleg Y Cymoedd	68%	16%
Coleg Sir Gar	67%	12%
Grwp Llandrillo Menai	48%	N/K
Pembrokeshire College	46%	57.9%
Bridgend College	40%	5.89%
NPTC Group	30%	20%
Cardiff and Vale College	27%	7.5%
Coleg Ceredigion	26%	7%
Gower College Swansea	25%	N/K
Coleg Gwent	19.4%	1.95%
WEA YMCA Community College Cymru	15%	14.5%
St David's Catholic College	0%	0%
The College Merthyr Tydfil	N/K	N/K
Range	0-68%	0-57.9%
Average	34.3%	14.3%
Median	28.5%	10.0%

Source: Arad survey of FEI student services in Wales (2016).

6.16 This data therefore shows that a significant percentage of FCF expenditure supports the costs of childcare; the percentage of awards allocated for childcare are somewhat lower, indicating that the amount of support 'per allocation' under the childcare category is high relative to other categories. However, it is not possible to determine what proportion of this expenditure is allocated to young parents under 25. In addition, the number of childcare funding awards has not been increasing steadily over recent years, suggesting that the demand has not increased noticeably in recent years. Applications are usually rejected because of insufficient evidence of financial hardship or because they do not meet the fund priorities, which include childcare and young, lone parents.

Stakeholder views on FCF funding

- 6.17 Representatives from FEIs and the Welsh Government confirmed that a high percentage of FCF funding is allocated for support with childcare, with FEIs tending to put aside a set amount (such as 50 per cent) for childcare support. They noted that the trend in application numbers and expenditure varies slightly from year to year. They also confirmed that, although they may prioritise learners aged 16-19, not many learners in this age group require support with childcare and therefore most of the FCF childcare funding is allocated to those 19 and over. The Welsh Government provides guidance to FEIs on the priority groups for FCF funding. However learners who receive funding have flexibility in terms of where they spend the funding they receive; for instance, there is no requirement for learners to spend FCF funding allocated to support childcare on accessing on-site childcare facilities. Learners are free to access childcare from another provider.
- 6.18 FEI representatives also noted that FCF funding is allocated on a 'first-come, first-served' basis and some stakeholders noted that this means most of the funding available to support childcare is allocated by October each academic year. This leaves little scope for new mid-year funding applications for childcare support. However, representatives also noted the additional complexities associated with administering support for childcare through FCF. It is quite common for parent learners to leave their course early for a variety of personal reasons. This releases some of the childcare funds allocated to the early leavers which can be used to fund the needs of other learners. In some cases this can be the childcare cost support needs of other parent learners or other eligible learners who require financial support.
- 6.19 Some stakeholders noted that 'unknown' factors such as early leavers make it difficult to accurately predict and therefore budget the allocation of FCF expenditure at the start of the year. Although funds released by early leavers can be allocated elsewhere, the opportunity to do so does not always arise within the same academic year. It was also noted that those in FEIs who are responsible for FCF, often err on the side of caution when allocating the funds in order to avoid an

overspend. It was claimed that the combined factors of a generally cautious approach and unknowns in terms of released funds often leads to a net underspend.

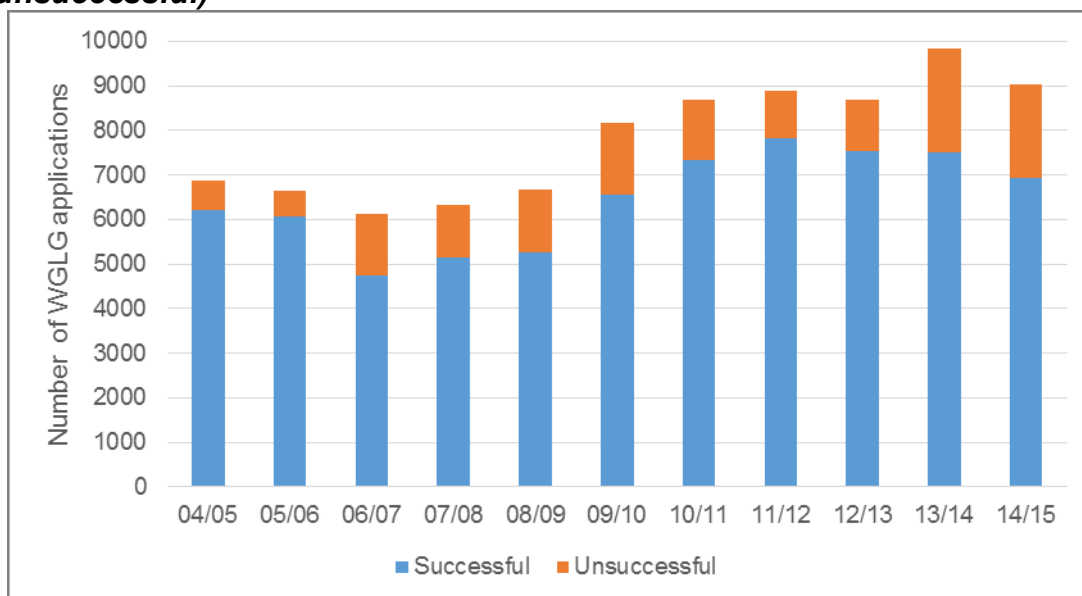
- 6.20 Overall most representatives were of the view that FEIs are not currently struggling to fund applications for childcare support through the FCF. However, many expressed concerns about the future allocation and availability of FCF funding, noting that childcare support can be provided through the FCF only if funding is maintained in coming years.

Welsh Government Learning Grant

- 6.21 Over the past 10 years, the total amount of applications (including unsuccessful applications) for a Welsh Government Learning Grant has increased, from 6,645 in 2005/06 to 9,045 in 2014/15 (peaking in 2013/14 at 9,845). As Figure 5 illustrates the total amount of successful applications also increased from 6,065 in 2005/06 to 7,825 in 2011/12, but decreased to 6,930 by 2014/15. This means that the percentage of applications which were rejected had reduced from 23 per cent in 2005/06 to 12 per cent by 2011/12, but increased again to 24 per cent in 2013/14 and 23 per cent in 2014/15.¹⁰
- 6.22 These figures demonstrate that there is a growing demand for WGLG funding among students, but it is not possible to determine whether any of these students are young parents and/or need support with childcare costs specifically. The recent increase in unsuccessful applications suggests that there is demand for funding which cannot be met through the WGLG, but the data does not provide the reasons for rejection or the reasons for which funding was requested.

¹⁰ Welsh Government statistical releases, Welsh Government Learning Grants Awarded to Welsh Domiciled Students in Further Education, 2002/03 – 2014/15.

Figure 5: Number of Welsh Government Learning Grant applications (successful and unsuccessful)

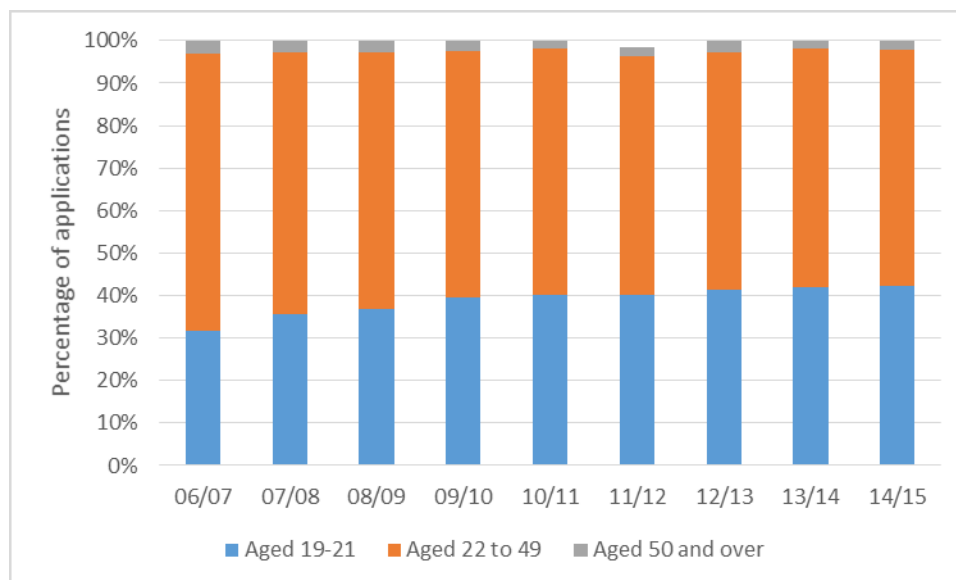


Source: Welsh Government statistical releases, *Welsh Government Learning Grants Awarded to Welsh Domiciled Students in FE, 2004/05 – 2014/15*.

6.23 Between 2006/07 and 2014/15, the percentage of the Welsh Government Learning Grant allocated to those aged 19-21 increased from 32 to 42 per cent (before 2006/07, the grant was available to those under 19). The percentage allocated to those aged 22-49 fell from 65 to 56 per cent (Figure 6).¹¹

¹¹ StatsWales, Applications for Further Education Welsh Government Learning Grants by LEA, academic year, mode of study and outcome of application. The data for 2011/12 includes a particularly high number of unknown applicant ages and so the age categories represent 99 per cent of total applications that year.

Figure 6: Percentage of successful Welsh Government Learning Grant applications by age group



StatsWales, Applications for FE Welsh Government Learning Grants by LEA, academic year, mode of study and outcome of application.

6.24 The majority of the Welsh Government Learning Grant is allocated to those studying full-time. Between 2004/05 and 2014/15, the percentage of the grants allocated to those studying full-time fluctuated between 85 and 90 per cent and the percentage allocated to those studying part-time fluctuated between eight and 12 per cent. A very small percentage (between zero and six per cent) of study modes are unknown.¹²

Marketing and awareness of current funding opportunities

6.25 The extent to which young parents are accessing support available to them depends largely on their level of awareness of this support. The amount and nature of marketing of the different funding schemes is an important factor in ensuring good levels of awareness among target groups.

6.26 Previous evaluations of financial support schemes have outlined the different approaches that FEIs adopt to market the funding available. For example, the evaluation of FCF (Bryer, 2013) notes that FCF is marketed in a number of ways

¹² Welsh Government statistical releases, Welsh Government Learning Grants

such as via posters, leaflets, TV screens in college communal areas and texting students with information about FCF. The evaluation also explains that in some FEIs, FCF is marketed by the activities that it can fund, such as the 'bus pass scheme' or the 'free lunch voucher', and hence the support is not known as FCF. Despite these marketing techniques, the evaluation of FCF (Bryer, 2013) noted that quite a number of FEIs relied heavily upon tutors to refer students to FCF.

6.27 In terms of marketing for the Welsh Government Learning Grant, the evaluation of ALG (Bryer and Williams, 2015) outlines the wide range of marketing methods adopted by FEIs to promote WGLG. These methods include providing information and application packs for WGLG to potential students during open days, interviews, enrolment days and start of term induction sessions.

6.28 The marketing approaches for FCF and WGLG outlined above appear to be largely focused on current learners or potential learners who have already taken the first step of enquiring about FE. The evaluation of ALG (Bryer and Williams, 2015) suggested that a different marketing approach needs to be deployed in order to reach the general public who may only be thinking about returning to FE and have not yet enquired. It notes the importance of working with organisations who support potential returners to FE such as Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus to reach this target group (see also paragraph 6.30).

6.29 Despite the fact that FEIs do market the funding available to students, the literature suggests a lack of awareness of this support. For example, the ALG evaluation report (Bryer and Williams, 2015) noted that some students who took part in focus groups had not heard about the grant. Furthermore, a Wales report by NUS (2014) noted that only four in 10 students found it easy to understand what financial support they were entitled to.

6.30 These findings from the literature relating to learners' awareness of available support are echoed by stakeholders interviewed during this study. Amongst those working within student support services in FE institutions, there is a general concern that the information, advice and support available to young parents in relation to FE course options is not always available and accurate. Significantly,

this concern about the lack of information also applied to the funding available for young parents in relation to FE courses. Some FEIs expressed concern that there is a lack of awareness of the availability of income support among young parents. One FEI in particular noted that Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales advisers are not always aware that parents can access income support to attend a FE course. Student support service teams therefore feel that poor information and guidance provided by such organisations may be a barrier preventing young parents from seeking learning opportunities. If additional support for parent young learners were to be introduced, then the general consensus was that this support should be directed towards increasing awareness of opportunities available.

- 6.31 Some student support services noted that methods for communicating information about funding sources to young parents are not as effective as they could be. One representative noted that FEIs are uncertain about how much FCF funding will be allocated for childcare each year and whether this funding is guaranteed for future years; this means that the current approach to promoting and raising awareness of the FCF childcare support available is more cautious. In addition, this representative noted that they are occasionally invited by charitable organisations (who support teenage parents back into employment education or training) to deliver presentations to young parents outlining the support and opportunities available to them to access FE courses. However, it was noted that applications for courses very rarely emerge from these presentations. Another representative noted that previous initiatives in the local area actively went out to find young parents to try and engage them in education, training and employment; such initiatives have not necessarily continued and therefore fewer young parents may be aware of the funding support opportunities that are currently available.

7. How many additional parents could be helped to access, or continue, in FE if support was offered in Wales?

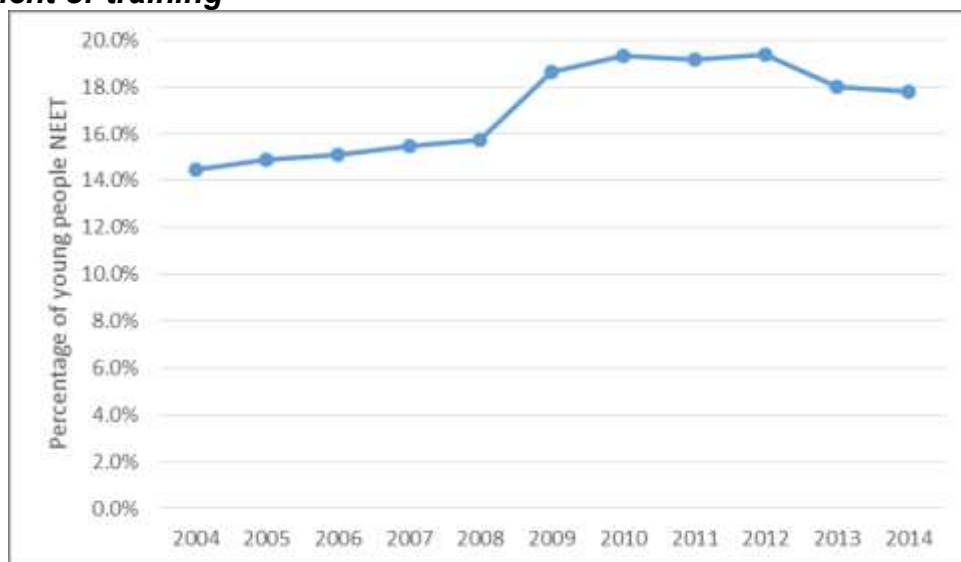
- 7.1 This section provides an overview of data trends in Wales in relation to young parents. It also provides an overview of the demand for childcare support amongst young parents, based on interviews with FE stakeholders and relevant literature.

National trends

- 7.2 Figure 7 presents the total estimated number of young people aged 16-24 who are NEET in Wales. The estimated number gradually rose from 50,000 in 2004 to 72,300 by 2012, then reduced slightly to 66,800 in 2013 and 65,900 in 2014. This means that the estimated percentage of young people NEET rose from 14.5 per cent in 2004 to 19.4 per cent by 2012, reducing slightly to 18 per cent in 2013 and 17.8 per cent in 2014. This trend applies to both young people NEET aged 16-18 and aged 19-24.¹³
- 7.3 These trends demonstrate that the number and percentage of young people NEET in Wales rose following the 2008 economic downturn but have started to fall in recent years (though not to their pre-2008 levels as yet).

¹³ StatsWales, Estimated 16-24 year olds not in education, training or employment by gender, economic activity and age groups.

Figure 7: Estimated percentage of young people 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training

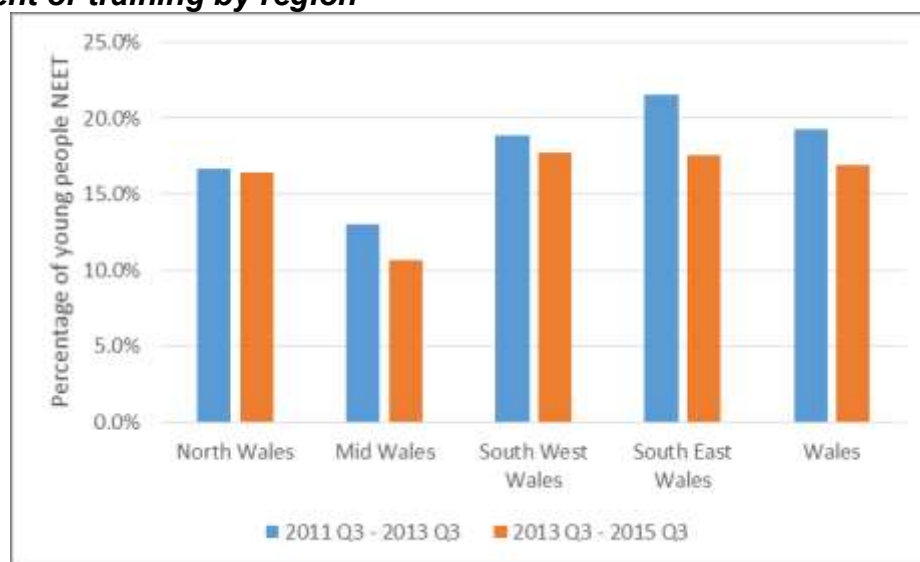


Source: StatsWales, Estimated 16-24 year olds not in education, training or employment by gender, economic activity and age groups.

7.4 According to Welsh Government analysis (data sourced from the Annual Population Survey), the percentage of young people aged 16-24 who are NEET is lower in mid Wales than in north, south west or south east Wales. The percentage of young people NEET in south-east Wales was higher than the national average between the third quarter of 2011 and the third quarter of 2013, but has reduced between the third quarters of 2013 and 2015 and is now closer to the national average. All regions have seen a decrease in the percentage of young people NEET (Figure 8).¹⁴

¹⁴ Welsh Government data tables, Young people not in education, employment or training (based on Annual Population Survey data) <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/young-people-not-education-employment-training/?lang=en>

Figure 8: Estimated percentage of young people 16-24 who are not in education, employment or training by region

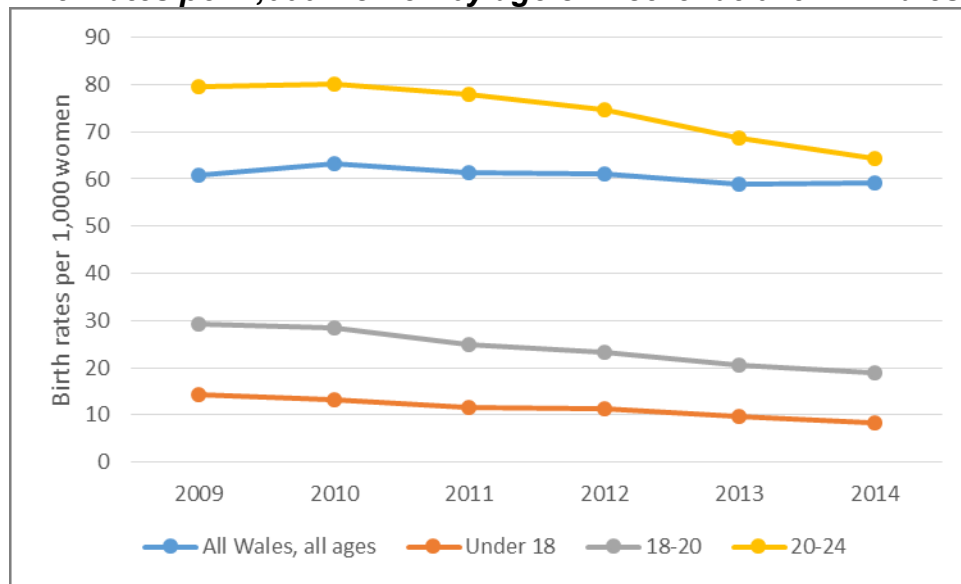


Source: Welsh Government data tables, *Young people not in education, employment or training*.

7.5 Trends in the numbers and rates of young parents in Wales in recent years are also revealing. Birth numbers and rates for young mothers in Wales have steadily decreased since 2009, see Figure 9. The number of births for mothers aged under 24 has reduced steadily from 11,863 in 2009 to 8,970 in 2014. Birth rates (per 1,000 women) have also reduced for this young age group during the same time period; the rate for those under 18 has decreased from 14.3 to 8.4, the rate for those aged 18-20 has decreased from 29.3 to 18.9 and the rate for those 20-24 has decreased from 79.6 to 64.3. In comparison, the birth rate for women of all ages in Wales has only marginally decreased from 60.9 to 59.1. Similar reductions in birth rates have been seen in England.¹⁵

¹⁵ Office for National Statistics, *Births by Area of Usual Residence of Mother, UK*.

Figure 9: Birth rates per 1,000 women by age of mother at birth in Wales



Source: ONS, *Births by Area of Usual Residence of Mother, UK 2009-2014*.

8. Are there specific barriers for parents wishing to enter Welsh-medium FE or wishing to make use of Welsh-medium or bilingual childcare?

- 8.1 In approaching this question it is useful to consider the context and scale of Welsh-medium and bilingual provision across the FE sector. Recent research has highlighted the relative shortage of Welsh-medium and bilingual provision in FE. The evaluation of the Welsh-medium Education Strategy (Duggan et al., 2016) noted that in 2013/14, only 1.7 per cent of education activities in FEIs was through the medium of Welsh. Other research has also underlined the continued impact of a 'historic lack of Welsh language provision in some institutions' (Duggan et al., 2014) which presents barriers and limits the choice of Welsh-medium study for the general learner population and not only for learners who are parents.
- 8.2 The literature review, data analysis and stakeholder interviews undertaken to date have not identified any additional specific barriers faced by parents wishing to enter Welsh-medium and bilingual education. The literature review and stakeholder interviews with Welsh Government representatives did however, identify gaps in the provision of Welsh language childcare.
- 8.3 Interviews with Welsh Government representatives refer to gaps identified in the provision of Welsh language childcare in half of the Local Authority areas in Wales. The childcare gap analysis for Wales report (Cordis Bright, 2014) supports this finding. The report, which presents analysis of childcare gaps across Wales based on the 2014 Local Authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments (CSAs), draws together 22 CSAs to provide an overall view of the childcare market. Within the report, it states that 13 of the 22 Local Authorities referred to geographical variation in levels of Welsh language provision available within their Local Authority area. These Local Authorities included Blaenau Gwent, Bridgend, Caerphilly, Carmarthenshire, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Merthyr Tydfil, Neath Port Talbot, Powys, Torfaen, Vale of Glamorgan and Wrexham. The findings are based on views of parents and carers surveyed within these Local Authority areas who noted that they had difficulties finding Welsh or bilingual

childcare provision. These parents and carers noted that they had to travel further or find childcare providers located outside their Local Authority area in order to access Welsh or bilingual care provision.

- 8.4 The importance of the availability of Welsh-medium and bilingual childcare was also stressed during interviews with Welsh Government representatives. It was noted during these interviews that Welsh or bilingual childcare provides the first entry point for young children to access Welsh-medium and bilingual education.
- 8.5 Even in areas where there is Welsh language childcare provision available through Cylchoedd Meithrin¹⁶, it is unlikely that these are available as full day programmes – creating potential logistical challenges for anyone in full-time work or education (HE or FE).
- 8.6 FEI stakeholders interviewed were of the view that the availability of Welsh language childcare was likely to be more of a challenge in geographical areas where Welsh is not the predominant language. However, these views could not be accompanied by any further evidence to support or challenge these claims.

¹⁶ Cylchoedd Meithrin are Welsh medium playgroups for children aged two to school age.

9. How does existing support available for young parents wishing to access FE in Wales compare to other regions of the United Kingdom?

9.1 This section presents a summary of the financial support available for young parents wishing to access FE in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Where available, any research or evaluation of these funding schemes, in terms of their impact and effectiveness in supporting young parents to both access and stay in FE, is presented. The section concludes with a summary of how this support compares, and contrasts to, what is currently available in Wales.

Support available in England

9.2 In England the Care to Learn scheme is targeted specifically towards young parents. Care to Learn was rolled out nationally in 2004/05 with the aim of narrowing education inequalities and increasing the number of mothers aged 16-19 in education, employment and training. It supports those under the age of 20 to continue in, and return to education (in school or FEIs) after the birth of their child. The scheme provides funding for childcare and also assists with the cost associated with travelling to the childcare facility. The scheme provides up to a maximum of £160 per child per week (£175 in London).

9.3 The most recent evaluation of Care to Learn was published in 2010 and reported that in 2008/09 approximately 16 per cent of young parents received Care to Learn funding support. Around 50 per cent of the recipients were aged 17 or 18 years and 22 per cent aged 19 years (Riley et al., 2010)¹⁷. Key evaluation findings included:

- Care to Learn was crucial in allowing the young parents who received the support to continue their education;
- Those young parents who stay in education after the original course funded by Care to Learn often progress to higher level learning (i.e. learning at a higher level than the course they originally received funding for) and

¹⁷ The evaluation authors had to estimate these proportions based on indicative figures p.7 http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/1373/1/care_to_learn_report_23-09-10.pdf

- Care to Learn has an important role in reducing the proportion of young parents who are NEET. This is notable both in the short term (in the year after Care to Learn was originally received), but also in the medium term (the reduction in NEET was sustained 40 months after Care to Learn was originally received). Before starting learning in 2008/09, 69 per cent of the young parents supported were NEET. However, by the spring of 2010 only 27 per cent were NEET, This fall of 42 percentage points suggests that Care to Learn is an effective way of reducing the proportion of young parents who are NEET.
- 9.4 Evans and Slowley (2010), in their Barnardo's-commissioned review of interventions to support teenage mothers to access education, found that Care to Learn was an effective financial incentive to those wishing to continue their education and recommended that the model should be rolled out in other UK nations. Reflecting on the 2011 research conducted with recipients of Care to Learn (which reported that 77 per cent of respondents could not attend learning without Care to Learn), NUS Wales (2014) recommended a targeted childcare scheme for FE students to improve access for young parents.
- 9.5 Student parents aged 19 years or older in England can also access the Adult Discretionary Learner Support Fund (DLS). The DLS fund was introduced in 2010, following the decision to withdraw the Educational Maintenance Allowance and merged the budgets of the Discretionary Fund and Adult Learning Grant (ALG) with the aim of creating a fund that better targeted and focused on individuals who are financially disadvantaged and in need of support for childcare, transport, books, equipment and other ad-hoc essentials whilst in learning. Management of the fund is devolved to providers with a funding allocation based originally on the number of ALG numbers in 2009/2010. The fund has three budget headings, with providers free to distribute funds across them:
- I. 20+ childcare support funds: under this element adult parents aged 20 years and over are targeted for support with their childcare needs to encourage them to re-engage, start or continue with their learning.

- II. Hardship funds: these funds are designed to assist vulnerable and disadvantaged adult learners with the costs of books, equipment, tools, stationery, transport, fees and other associated costs linked to their learning.
- III. Residential scheme: the scheme aims to help disadvantaged learners who are on specialist courses at providers where daily travel is not feasible and where the provision the learners are accessing is not available locally.

9.6 A 2013 review of the DLS found that there were high levels of awareness of the fund amongst learners; it was also valued by providers and stakeholders who regarded it as providing a vital source of support for disadvantaged adult learners (DBIS, 2013). A survey of 388 learners found that 72 per cent of respondents had received help with fees, while around a quarter had received help with childcare or with travel. Other forms of assistance were accessed less but the vast majority of those interviewed thought that the support had been sufficient to meet their needs. Furthermore participants in focus groups who had received support for childcare felt it was crucial and without it would not have been able to start their course.

Support available in Scotland

- 9.7 Bryer and Williams (2015) note that Scotland appears to have the most generous system of support for adult learners. Total spend on student support in FE within the 2012/13 financial year was £97 million, a sharp increase on the previous year when spend was £86 million, this also includes some support for students aged below 18 years. In addition, in terms of fee remission, full-time students in FE do not have to pay fees for courses, provided they meet Scottish residency requirements.
- 9.8 FE bursaries, administered by individual colleges are available for students aged 18 years and older to support the holder or any dependent of the holder.

- **Lone Parents' Grant (LPG):** an income-assessed grant (up to £1,305 per year) that is paid to students who are single, who are bringing up a child on their own or who are legally responsible for younger siblings (SAAS, 2015).
- The **Lone Parents' Childcare Grant (LPCG):** Students eligible for the LPG may also be eligible for the LPCG. The LPCG is available to students bringing up a child or sibling on their own to help towards the cost of registered or formal childcare costs. The maximum grant is £1,215 each year. The LPCG is not discretionary (ibid.).
- The **Discretionary Childcare Funds:** All students aged 16 and over in further and higher education may apply for financial help with formal registered childcare expenses. Payments are made at the discretion of institutions and are based on an assessment of need (Bryer and Williams, 2015).

9.9 No recent evaluations of the funding schemes could be identified.

Support available in Northern Ireland

9.10 In Northern Ireland, student parents between 16 and 20 years accessing both further and higher education courses can access the Care to Learn (NI) scheme. The maximum assistance available for all costs including travel, associated with registered childcare, is up to £165 per week for each child (Department for Education and Learning, 2015).

9.11 Up to 2014/15, the FE Award Arrangement has made a limited number of discretionary awards to any student attending FE. Those in receipt of an award, over the age of 20 years, are eligible for help with their childcare costs (FE Award Section, 2014).

9.12 There is also support for young student parents not in FE: mothers who are pregnant or have had a baby whilst of compulsory school age or have chosen to stay in school during years 13 (16 and 17 year olds) and 14 (17 and 18 year olds) may be eligible for support from the School Aged Mothers Project based on a needs assessment (Evans and Slowley, 2010). The Childcare Grant is available

for student parents accessing Higher Education (Student Finance Northern Ireland, 2016).

Comparison with Wales

- 9.13 As noted by Bryer and Williams (2015) the support available for young parents wishing to access FE in Wales differs to other regions of the United Kingdom, in that support is offered through a number of schemes but does not specifically target young parents. NUS Wales (2014) comment that: “where England has targeted support for young parents in FE, discretionary funding in Wales ends up shouldering this burden with 42 per cent of the fund in 2010/11 being spent on childcare provision” (p.1).
- 9.14 However despite the differences in targeting, the evidence base suggests a common theme between the support available in Wales and across other regions of the UK in terms of the level of students’ awareness and understanding of the support available. For example both the evaluations of Care to Learn in England (Riley et al., 2010) and the ALG in Wales (Bryer and Williams, 2015) report that lack of awareness of the respective funding schemes is commonly cited as a barrier to take up. Furthermore, NUS Wales (2014) report that only four in 10 students found it easy to understand what financial support they were entitled to.
- 9.15 Although the schemes in both Wales and England appear to have a reasonable level of marketing, the literature suggests a need to increase this marketing in order to increase students’ awareness of the financial support available to them. For example, in their evaluation of the ALG, Bryer and Williams (2015) note that marketing is mostly focused on potential learners who have already taken the first step of enquiring about FE. The report suggests a need to increase marketing of the ALG which is targeted across the general public who may only be thinking about returning to FE but have not yet enquired. Riley et al. (2010) recommended that there may be more work to be done around increasing awareness and marketing of Care to Learn for some groups of young parents who are not otherwise in touch with support workers, teenage parent midwives, and/ or health

visitors. Similarly, there may be more young fathers who would benefit from the scheme who are not currently aware.

- 9.16 The ALG evaluation (Bryer and Williams, 2015) reported that some students in Wales found the application process for support relatively straightforward while others found it difficult. Similarly some young parents in England were put off by the Care to Learn application process (Riley et al., 2010; Evans and Slowley, 2010).

10. Conclusions and recommendations

- 10.1 The findings of this study outline that the availability of childcare provision is one of a number of challenges or barriers faced by young parents who wish to access or continue in FE in Wales. Suitability, affordability and accessibility of available childcare are also specific challenges to parent learners. There are other inter-related barriers faced by learners – including transport, course availability and attitudinal barriers – which, collectively, form a complex and multi-faceted picture.
- 10.2 The evidence gathered during this study indicates that affordability along with accessibility of childcare appear to be the most significant challenges faced by aspiring parent learners. However, the evidence also indicates that financial support available through the FCF appears to meet most childcare support applications currently made by parent learners.
- 10.3 Welsh-medium and bilingual provision in the FE sector remains relatively low which places limitations on the choices of study areas that are open to learners in some parts of Wales. There do not appear to be any additional barriers faced specifically by parent learners who wish to study courses through the medium of Welsh. There is evidence however to suggest some regional variations in the availability of Welsh-medium childcare.
- 10.4 Over recent years demand for childcare support amongst FE learners of all ages in Wales has remained relatively constant. It would also appear that demand for childcare amongst FE learners is likely to fall in the near future due to a combination of reduced teenage pregnancies and a greater focus and uptake of courses among 16 to 19 year olds (as opposed to take up of courses among over 19 year olds from whom most of the demand for childcare is generated).
- 10.5 Most of the FEIs interviewed were of the view that current childcare support, provided through FCF, meets the demand for student applications for FCF to support the costs of childcare, although there were some regional variations in

the views presented. These factors suggest that an additional national childcare support initiative or pilot project is not required at the present moment.

- 10.6 However, although demand for childcare support is likely to remain steady or possibly fall, the proportion of FCF allocated to each FEI that will be available to support childcare may also fall as demands on FCF for other financial support (e.g. transport costs for all students) increase. If the future availability of FCF for childcare were to fall at a faster rate than the demand for childcare support, then this may be a cause for concern. This could be further compounded if future allocations of FCF from the Welsh Government were to be reduced.
- 10.7 Five of the 14 FEIs in Wales currently provide on-site crèche facilities on at least one of its campuses. In the majority of these cases, the current provision of on-site crèches adequately meet their parent learner demand. The findings indicate that in most cases, ensuring the financial viability of these crèche facilities can be challenging. Fluctuating take-up of childcare places during the academic year, and competition from other local childcare providers have been cited as some of the main issues that face those managing these childcare settings in FEIs.
- 10.8 The support available for young parents wishing to access FE in Wales differs from other regions of the United Kingdom. In other UK nations there are financial support programmes in place aimed specifically at young parent learners. This is not the case in Wales where young parents in FE are supported through discretionary funds such as FCF, which is available to eligible FE students who require financial support. Whilst the current allocation of FCF appears to meet current demands for childcare in FE, this may change if the other demands on the funds increase or the allocation levels decrease.
- 10.9 It remains largely unknown at the present moment how many young parents there are who are not currently engaged in FE because of the barriers posed by the availability, affordability and suitability of childcare provision. It also remains unclear how many young parents who do not access FE, would be encouraged to do so if they were aware of all the support facilities that are currently

available to them. The findings of this study do however indicate that the quality of information provided to, and the level of awareness among young parents of the support available to them to access FE may not be as high as it could be.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

This study has concluded that current discretionary funding arrangements appear to meet the needs of FE parent learners who require support with the costs of childcare. As such, and based on the evidence reviewed from various sources, we recommend that an additional pilot programme is not required at this moment in time.

Recommendation 2

FEIs rely largely on their FCF allocation to provide the childcare support that their parent learners require. The Welsh Government should therefore consider continuing with the allocation of these funds to FEIs to enable individual institutions to support the childcare needs of their learners.

Recommendation 3

Further efforts or initiatives may be required to improve the way information about available support is shared with young parents in order to raise their awareness of the financial support opportunities that are currently available to them. This should support young parents in making informed decisions about accessing or continuing in FE.

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Annex A

Copy of survey questionnaire issued to student support services

Student Support Services Survey

Introduction

The Welsh Government has commissioned Arad to carry out research into the possible barriers to entering FE for young parents with childcare needs.

To support this research we would be grateful if you could spare a few minutes to respond to the following questions. Individual responses will only be used for the purpose of this research study and will not be passed on to any third party. Overall survey findings will be included in a report which will be presented to Welsh Government officials in April 2016.

If you have any further questions or queries relating to this short questionnaire or the wider research study, please contact Stuart Harries on 029 20 440 552

Thank you in advance for your support.

Student Support Services Survey

Name of your Further Education Institution

2. Name of college

Student Support Services Survey

Number of young parents

3. Do you hold data on the number of students at your institution with dependent children?

4. If 'Yes' are you able to provide the number of students (aged under 25) with dependent children?

☐

Y

e

s

☐

N

o

5. If known, please provide the following data:

The total number of students with dependent children at your institution.

The total number of students aged under 25 with dependent children at your institution.

Student Support Services Survey

On-site crèche facilities

6. Does the college provide on-site crèche facilities to support students who are also young parents?

☐☐

Y
e
s

N
o

☐

Don't
know

If yes please provide some details in the box below

7. Which of the following statements best describes the current situation at your college?

Demand for on-site childcare provision is greater than supply at our college.

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Don't know / Not applicable

Please provide any comments if you wish.

The provision of on-site crèche facilities adequately meets demand from students for childcare provision.

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Don't know / Not applicable

Please provide any comments if you wish.

Demand from students for on-site childcare facilities is increasing.

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Don't know / Not applicable

Please provide any comments if you wish.

Student Support Services Survey

Financial support for young

8. Please provide details of any financial support schemes that are available to students with dependent children at your institution?

Wales-wide support programmes available at your institution

Support initiatives available which are only available at your institution

Other

9. Of the total Financial Contingency Funds (FCF) spend within your FEI:

What percentage in the last year was spent on childcare?

What percentage of FCF applications (in the last year) were for childcare support?

Other comments

10. If known, how many of these applications for support towards the costs of childcare were unsuccessful?

Student Support Services Survey

Further discussions

As part of our research we are keen to hold further discussions about the demand from students for support towards childcare costs. If possible we would also like to discuss any other relevant data you hold. Would you be prepared to take part in a discussion with a member of our research team? If so, please provide contact details below.

11. Contact details

Your name

E-mail

Phone

Student Support Services Survey

Diolch - Thank you

Thank you for answering these questions

If you have any further questions or comments to share with us please contact Stuart Harries on 029 2044 0552

Annex B

Datasets used during this study

Financial Contingency Fund Data

Welsh Government statistical releases, Financial Contingency Funds in Wales, 2002/03 - 2012/13

<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/financial-contingency-funds/?tab=previous&lang=en>

Financial Contingency Fund Returns for 2013/14 and 2014/15, compiled by Arad Research from individual FE institutions' returns to Welsh Government.

Welsh Government Learning Grants Data

Welsh Government statistical releases, Welsh Government Learning Grants Awarded to Welsh Domiciled Students in FE, 2002/03 – 2014/15.

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Annex C

Stakeholders and institutions interviewed:

Maxine Thomas	- Pembrokeshire College
David Brooks	- Coleg Y Cymoedd
Felix McLaughlin	- Cardiff and Vale College
Debbie Baker	- Cardiff and Vale College
Lisa Johnson	- Grwp Llandrillo Menai
Ebbie Ferguson	- National Union of Students (NUS) Cymru
Greg Walker	- Colegau Cymru
Nerys Howells	- Welsh Government
Anne Pound	- Welsh Government
Lucy Evans	- Welsh Government
Megan Hopkins	- Welsh Government
Owain Lloyd	- Welsh Government

Group discussion during the Student Services' network meeting with:

David Brookes	Coleg y Cymoedd
Rosemary Denham	NPTC Group
Chris Smith	Coleg Gwent
Denise Ryan	Bridgend College
Heather Ferguson	Wise Wales
Jessica Rumble	Wise Wales
Jamie Davies	Coleg Sir Gar
Ffion Evans	Coleg Ceredigion
Greg Otto	Coleg Cambria
Karen Senior	Coleg Cambria
Sian Hughes	Coleg Gwent
Phillip Wyn Roberts	Grwp Llandrillo Menai
Felix McLaughlin	CAVC
Anne Pitman	Gower College Swansea
Sian Hughes	Welsh Government
Katy Burns	Colegau Cymru