

The challenges of rural childcare provision, innovative models and the needs of agricultural families – highlights

This summary presents findings from interviews conducted in 2020 with childcare providers in rural and remote areas of Scotland, which explored issues that impact the financial sustainability of services.



There is a lack of choice for parents in rural areas. Whilst many providers struggle due to low numbers of children, others have long waiting lists. Successful services are often run collaboratively.



Parents in rural areas benefit from affordable childcare, longer days to fit around working hours, out-of-school care and additional sessions, but many rural providers lack capacity to offer this.



Parents have a range of jobs and working patterns in rural areas. It is often women who transport children to childcare settings, and this has an impact on their employability.



Agricultural families have busier and quieter times of the year, including lambing and the harvest, and would benefit from being able to book additional childcare when they need it.



There is a shortage of suitable facilities in rural areas, and sharing buildings with other groups can lead to additional costs and work for staff. Outdoor providers face further practical challenges.



Most children are driven to rural childcare services, with journeys varying from 15 minutes to an hour. In remote areas, this impacts accessibility and causes issues in the winter.



Providers face challenges in recruitment and in accessing training. Innovative childcare models, including outdoor nurseries, provide opportunities in rural areas and are popular with families.

The financial sustainability of rural childcare services is impacted by lower numbers of children and changes in demand, and challenges in childcare provision are connected to wider issues in rural areas.

COVID-19 has led to increases in demand in some rural areas due to the closure of other local settings, and additional financial costs.

