

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

13th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Thursday, 25 May

Child Poverty and Parental Employment: Childcare

Introduction

The Committee is holding an inquiry into how to address child poverty through improving parental employment. A focus group (Glasgow) and number of visits have been held (to North Ayrshire and the Wester Isles). A call for views attracted 102 responses. Notes of the visits and individual responses are [available here under the Engagement tab on the inquiry page](#).

The focus group, visits and call for views have been used to shape the themes for oral evidence taking. Today the focus is on the main theme emerging from our engagement work – availability of affordable, flexible childcare. The other themes to be addressed in future meetings are:

- Employability programmes
- Fair and family friendly working
- Education and training
- Transport

Today's panel is the first of two on childcare. The Committee will hear from:

- Irene Audain, CEO, Scottish Out Of School Care Network
- Graeme McAlister, CEO, Scottish Childminding Association
- Matthew Sweeney, Policy Manager for Children and Young People, COSLA
- Jonathan Broadbery, Director of Policy and Communications, National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)

On June 8, the Committee will hear from childcare providers.

This paper provides context on current childcare policy and usage by parents before suggesting six themes for discussion from page 11 onwards.

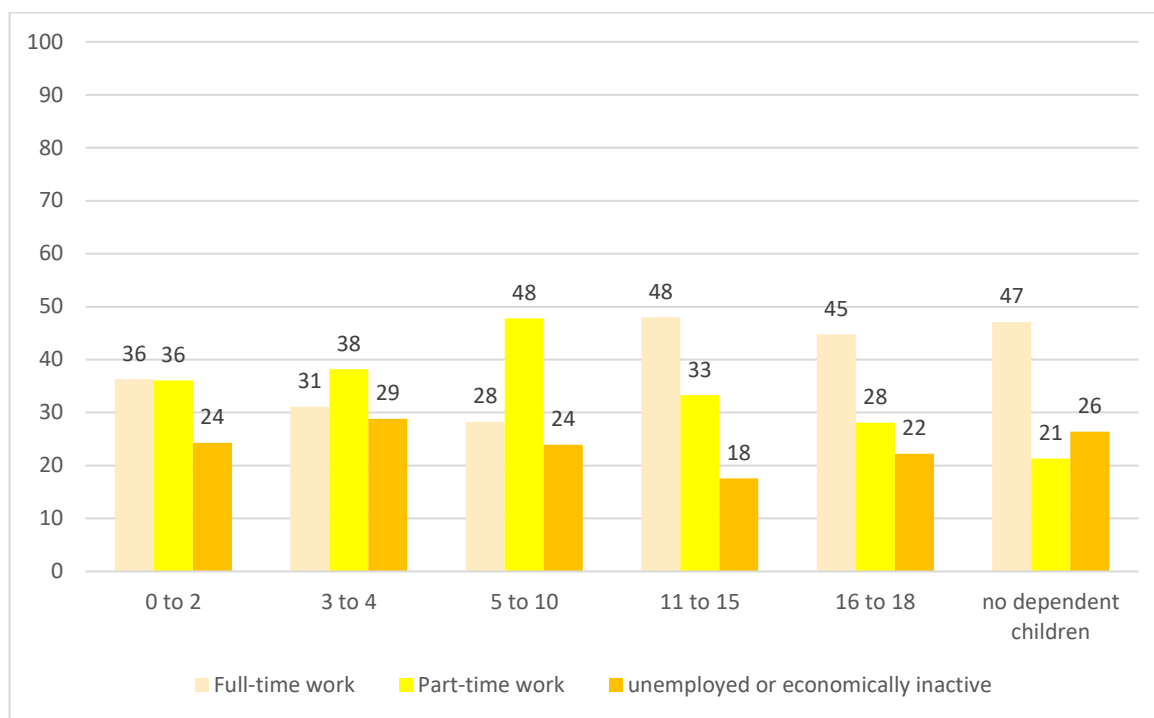
Context

In both the visits and the call for views childcare was raised as the main barrier to parents being able to improve their income through work. This issue is well recognised. For example, the [2019 Scottish Government consultation on Out of School Care](#) said:

“For parents to be able to take advantage of work, training or study opportunities, childcare needs to be affordable, accessible and flexible to meet their needs.”

Chart 1 below shows that mothers tend to work part time until their children are in secondary school. In 2022, median earnings for women working part time was £241.60 compared to £604.50 for full time ([ASHE](#)).

Chart 1: Percentage of mothers in work by age of child, Scotland, 2021.



Source: [ONS, Labour Force Survey](#). Employment measure includes those temporarily away from work, so 0 to 2 will include mothers on maternity leave. For UK as a whole, 31% of mothers of 1 year olds and 32% of mothers of two year olds work full time. Full time work is more than 30 hours.

The key themes on childcare from the Committee’s call for views were:

- Affordable, flexible childcare is critical to enabling parents to work, particularly single parents
- Finding childcare is particularly challenging for those who need specialised childcare, who need childcare outwith standard hours or who need to move relatively frequently for work

- Further expansion should be available to all families, although individual respondents also favoured a focus on working families
- The age group to focus on next should be school age and 1 to 2 year olds
- Pay and conditions for childcare workers are a barrier to recruitment and retention

(The annex to this paper is an extract from the call for views summary, focusing on childcare).

Childcare in ‘[Best Start Bright Futures](#)’

Best Start Bright Futures (BSBF) is the strategy for meeting the statutory child poverty targets and is clear that childcare policy is part of the approach:

“We are committed to supporting parents to access, sustain and progress in employment where this is their choice. We will do this through:

- A strengthened employment offer to parents,
- Connectivity and childcare to enable access to employment,
- Transforming our economy”

Current childcare offer

The current offer of funded childcare is 1,140 hours per year for:

- all 3 and 4 year olds, from term following third birthday.
- low income two-year olds from term following 2nd birthday ([Estimated 25%](#) of two year olds are eligible. [Eligibility](#) is similar to that for free school meals).

Around 14% of all two year olds, 100% of 3 year olds and 98% of four year olds attend funded provision ([Early Learning and Childcare statistics December 2022](#)).

An [evaluation](#) of the 1,140 hours provision, including impact on employment, will be published in late 2025. An interim report is due in spring 2024. An [initial survey after the expansion \(December 2022\)](#) looking at parents’ use of and views on Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) provision found generally positive views and high usage.

The Scottish Government provides around £1 billion per year to local authorities for the current system of funded early learning and childcare.

At present there is no general statutory duty on local authorities in Scotland, to provide school age childcare during term time or holiday periods. However, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 does place a duty on local authorities to provide such day care for school age children in need as is appropriate, before and after school and during

holidays.¹ Recent funding has included funding for pilot projects and holiday provision.

Pilot projects and ‘tests of change’ 2020-23

- £3 million in 2020-22 through the [Access to Childcare Fund](#). Eighteen pilot projects were supported to test innovative models and delivery funded school-age childcare for low-income families. Funding supported over 1,500 children in deprived communities although the impact of COVID restrictions significantly impacted projects’ ability to meet their aims.
- A further £1 million in 2022-23 to continue support for 10 projects.
- In 2022-23 an initial £1 million in four local authorities (Clackmannanshire, Dundee, Glasgow and Inverclyde), to start the early phasing in of community level systems of school age childcare. This has benefited 178 children in 136 families.

Holiday provision 2021 and 2022

In 2021 and 2022 Scottish Government invested £15 million and £10 million respectively in summer holiday programmes across all local authorities. The £10 million [summer programme 2022](#), supported the provision of free activities across all local authorities, focusing on low income families. An estimated 158,292 children and young people attended activities through this programme.

Funding in 2023-24

[£15m was announced in April 2023](#) to expand the delivery of school age childcare services, expanding on the ‘tests of change’ pilots and summer holiday provision. This includes:

- Continued investment in Access to Childcare projects and the Scottish Government’s ‘early adopter’ communities,
- Support to identify and fund new early adopter communities including in remote, rural areas,
- £4.5m ‘Inspiring School Age Childcare Spaces (ISACS) fund [announced in May 2023](#) to deliver improvements to the school estate that will support provision of school age childcare in the most disadvantaged communities,
- £2 million in partnership with the Scottish Football Association to support more after school and holiday club provision through local football clubs in deprived areas.

An [overview of the development of childcare policy since 2002](#) was provided in the Scottish Government’s strategic early learning and school age childcare plan.

¹ [See section 27 of the Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#): ‘in need’ means, disabled, affected by disability in the family, or unlikely to achieve a reasonable standard of health or development without services being provided.

Commitment to further expansion

Commitments to [further expansion](#) are:

- Develop a funded early learning and childcare offer for one and two year olds, focusing on those who need it most; and
- build a system of school age childcare, by the end of this Parliament, providing care before and after school, all year round, supporting parents and carers – particularly on low incomes – to have secure and stable employment. Those on the lowest incomes will pay nothing.

The exact timing, hours of provision, eligibility and income thresholds have yet to be announced. Policy development plans were set out in [Best Start – strategic early learning and school age childcare plan 2022 to 2026](#) (October 2022). Last year, the work on research, insights and engagement began, including mapping current provision for one and two year olds. From this year the Scottish Government will continue to develop the evidence base and start lived experience engagement to understand what families want and need for young children alongside work to evaluate different models of provision.

Forthcoming publications include:

- School Age Childcare Delivery Framework which will define action areas for the next three years, describe the approach and consider how the Scottish Government will measure and evidence the impact of early delivery. (A [draft framework](#) was published in 2019 and [progress report](#) in 2021)
- Children’s Charter – a national Children’s Charter for School Age Childcare has been co-designed with children from five schools and a young carers’ group. It will be used to ensure that when decisions are made about the system, considerations about what is really important to children are taken into account.
- Strategic Framework for Scotland’s Childcare Profession “to support a sustainable, diverse, highly skilled workforce”
- Update on the rates paid by local authorities to ELC providers due Autumn 2023
- A review of eligibility across childcare offers is currently being undertaken.

The general approach is to work in partnership and:

“we will be taking the time to get policy design and engagement on our future childcare offers right,” (Best Start, October 2022)

Childcare expansion in England

The [UK spring budget announced further expansion in England](#). In their submission to this inquiry, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) estimated that the budget would create Barnett consequential of:

- £24m in 2023-24
- £257m in 2024-25

- £422m in 2025-26

The majority of additional funding arises from childcare expansion which, in England, is focused on working parents. This will be phased in so that by September 2025 parents working more than 16 hours a week and earning less than £100k per year will be entitled to 30 hours of funded childcare from when their child is nine months old until they start school. Other parents are entitled to [15 hours a week funded provision for 3 and 4 year olds](#).

Other support for childcare costs

Parents in paid work can also get help with childcare costs from the UK Government. Parents can either claim:

- In [Universal Credit](#) and [Working Tax Credit](#): can claim back up to 85% of childcare costs up to a maximum of £646.35 per month for one child or £1,108.04 for 2 children. The [UK spring budget](#) announced that “by summer 2023” parents will be able to claim costs upfront rather than in arrears and that the maximum would increase to £951 per month for one child and £1,630 for two children.

Alternatively, they can claim:

- [Tax free childcare](#) for children under 11 years. Provides up to £2000 per year per child, or up to £4000 if a child is disabled. (UK government provides £2 for every £8 paid by the parent). Available to households earning at least the equivalent of 16 hours at national minimum or living wage.

Some employers still operate '[childcare vouchers](#)' – the UK government 'salary sacrifice' scheme, now closed to new applicants, that preceded 'Tax free childcare'.

Current childcare use

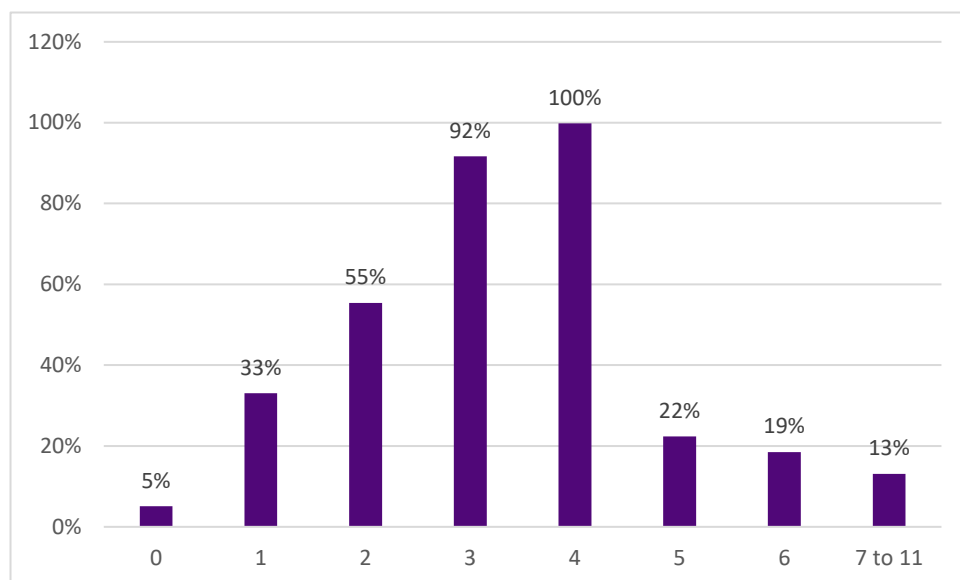
Most parents use a mix of funded, informal and paid-for childcare.

Currently, almost all 3 and 4 year olds attend a registered childcare service as do around half of two year olds. This is a mix of funded provision and that paid for by parents (chart 2, below).

Only around a fifth of 5 and 6 year olds attend registered childcare, and this drops to 13% of 7 to 11 year olds.

Children attending funded provision may also attend paid for provision and/or use informal childcare (such as grandparents) at other times.

Chart 2: Children attending registered childcare, including childminders by age of child. Scotland, December 2021.



Source: Care Inspectorate.

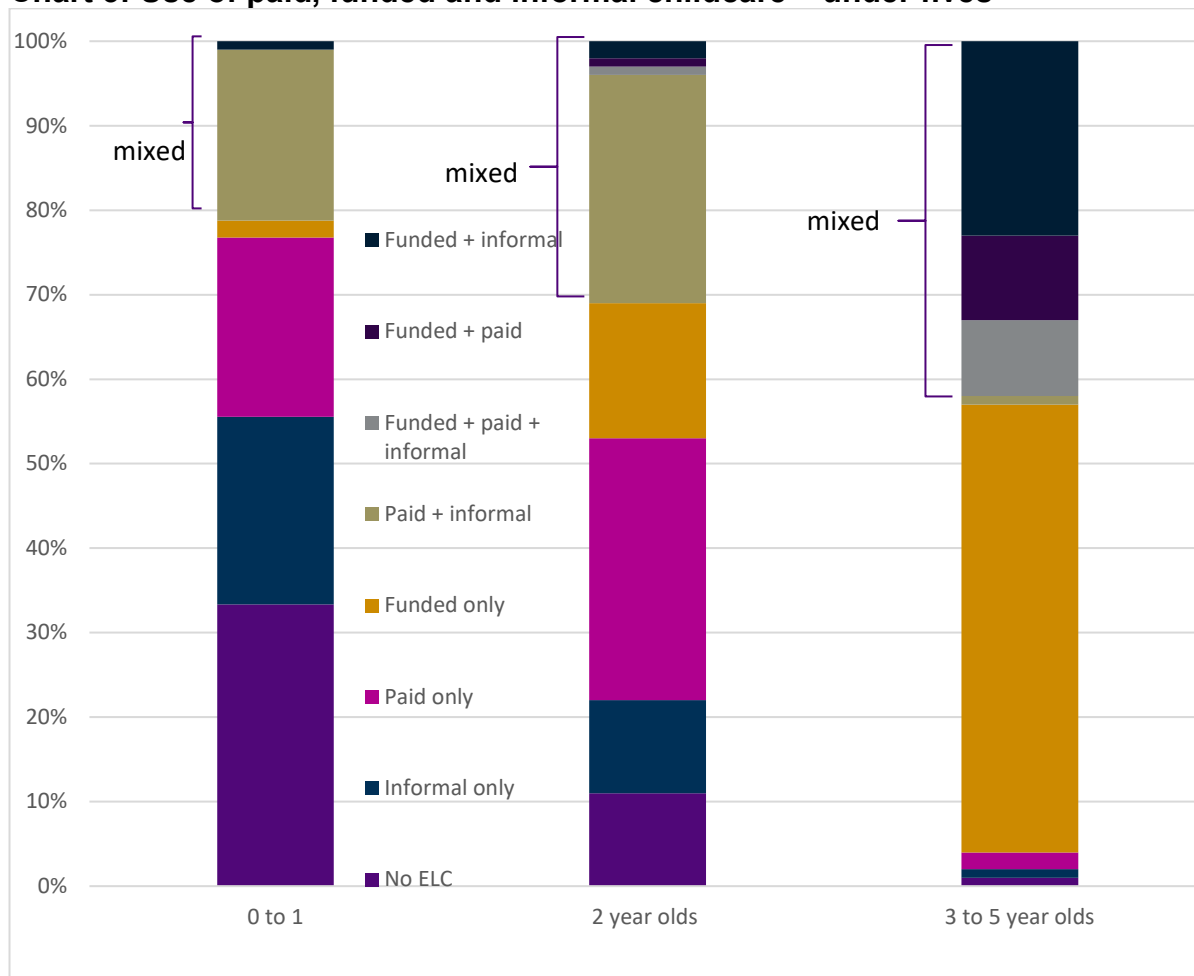
Pre-school

The childcare mix

Chart 3 uses data from a survey of parents to show how the mix of informal, funded and paid-for childcare changes as children get older. This illustrates both the impact of funded provision for 3 to 5 year olds and the importance of informal provision (such as grandparents).

- 0 to 1 year olds - a third aren't in childcare, a fifth use informal only, a further fifth only use paid for childcare and further fifth mix paid for and informal.
- 2 year olds – most provision is either paid (31%) or a mix of paid and informal (27%)
- 3 to 5 year olds – funded childcare dominates (53% only use funded childcare).

Chart 3: Use of paid, funded and informal childcare – under fives



Source: [Scottish Government \(2022\) Early learning and childcare. Parents' views and use](#)

Flexibility of funded hours

Lack of flexibility is clearly a problem for some, although survey data suggests this is an issue for a minority of parents.

The issue came up in our visits and in the call for views and this fits with findings of [qualitative research commissioned by the Scottish Government](#) (2022):

“Parents also often perceived the provision to be inflexible, with providers offering set days/hours which families had to fit in with, and no ability to swap a day if needed This issue was perhaps more relevant to local authority nurseries where parents felt it was a ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ type of offer, and that private nurseries could offer more flexibility in terms of the days offered. However, even with private providers participants noted issues with nurseries only offering fixed sessions within a day to maximise capacity”

Survey data suggest that this is likely an issue for a minority of parents. The [survey of parents in 2022](#) found that:

“Parents, on the whole, said they were satisfied with the flexibility they have been offered to use their funded hours in a way that meets their family’s needs: 88% of those with a three to five year old and 92% of those with a two year old were satisfied, with 58% and 74% respectively very satisfied. Ten per cent of those with a three to five year old and 5% of those with a two year old were dissatisfied.”

Amongst those that were dissatisfied, the main improvements requested were:

- Longer sessions on fewer days during the week (27%)
- Throughout the school holidays (24%)
- Shorter sessions on more days during the week (23%)

Similarly, the [Scottish Household Survey](#) (2021) found that most parents (72%) had no problems with funded ELC. The main issues raised were not enough hours (10%) and lack of flexibility (10%).

Amount spent on pre-school childcare

Working parents spend significant amounts on childcare, but the availability of funded hours significantly reduces the amount spent by parents with 3 to 5 year old children.

Chart 4: Average amount spent on pre-school childcare per month, by age of child and parents’ working pattern



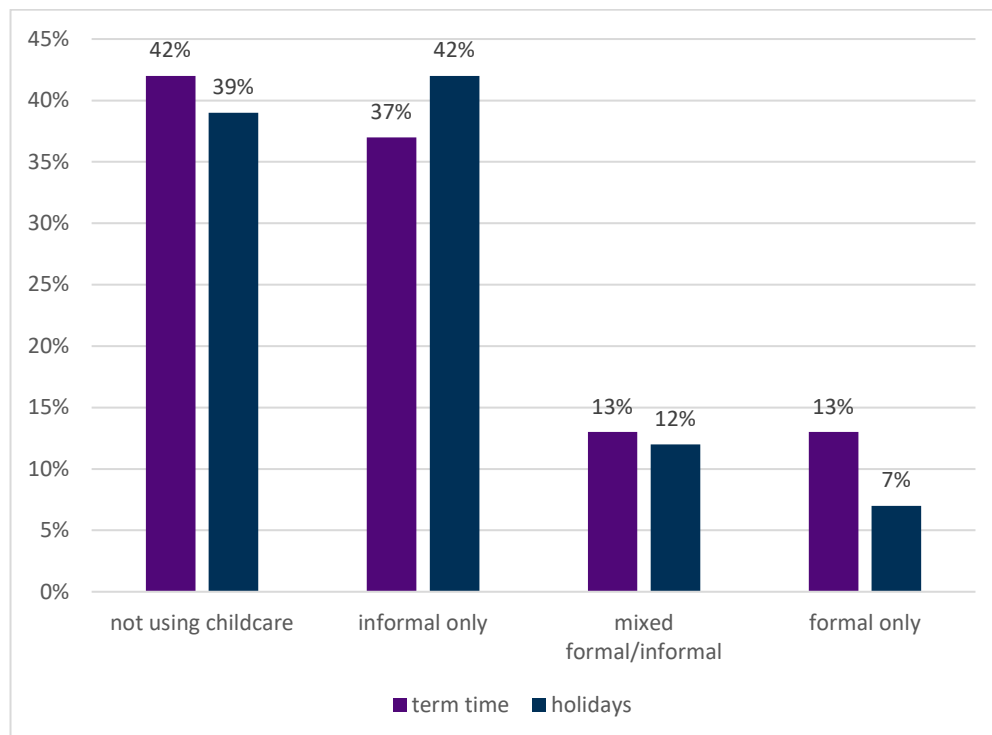
Source: [Scottish Government \(2022\) Early learning and childcare. Parents’ views and use](#)

School age

The majority of parents of school age children use childcare, but this is mostly informal childcare - especially grandparents. Only a minority of parents used formal care such as out of school clubs, breakfast clubs or holiday playschemes.

There is no funded offer, but parents may get help with costs through tax-free childcare or Universal Credit/Working Tax Credit.

Chart 5: School age childcare – use of formal and informal childcare in term time and school holiday.



Source: SPICe calculations based on [Scottish Government \(2019\) Out of School Care Parent Survey](#)

Workforce

There are just over 45,000 people working in childcare, mostly in the public sector. Most work full time, but in daycare there are many who work around 20 hours particularly in the voluntary/third sector. Childminding is entirely in the private sector. Childminders tend to be older than those working in daycare and work longer hours.

Table 1: Childcare workforce (2021)

	public	private	third	total
Total childcare staff	21,330	17,980	5,830	45,140
Daycare:				
total staff	21,330	14,020	5,830	41,180
median staffing levels	10	12	6	
median age of workforce	40	28	36	36
median hours worked	35	36	22	35
Childminding:				
total staff	0	3,960	0	3,960
median age of workforce		49		49
median hours worked		38		38

Source: [Scottish Social Services Council](#)

In children's daycare, overall staffing increased from 34,910 in 2018 to 41,180 in 2021, reflecting the expansion of early learning and childcare. Most of that expansion has been in the public sector – which has increased from 15,200 in 2018 to 21,330 in 2021.

The number of childminders has declined from 4,980 in 2018 to 3,960 in 2021.

Pay

The Scottish Government expects local authorities to fund providers to pay the [real Living Wage](#) (£10.90 per hour), for those workers delivering funded early learning and childcare.

For a 20 hour week that's £11,336 per annum (below NI and income tax thresholds). For 35 hours it's £19,838 (£17,534 after tax).

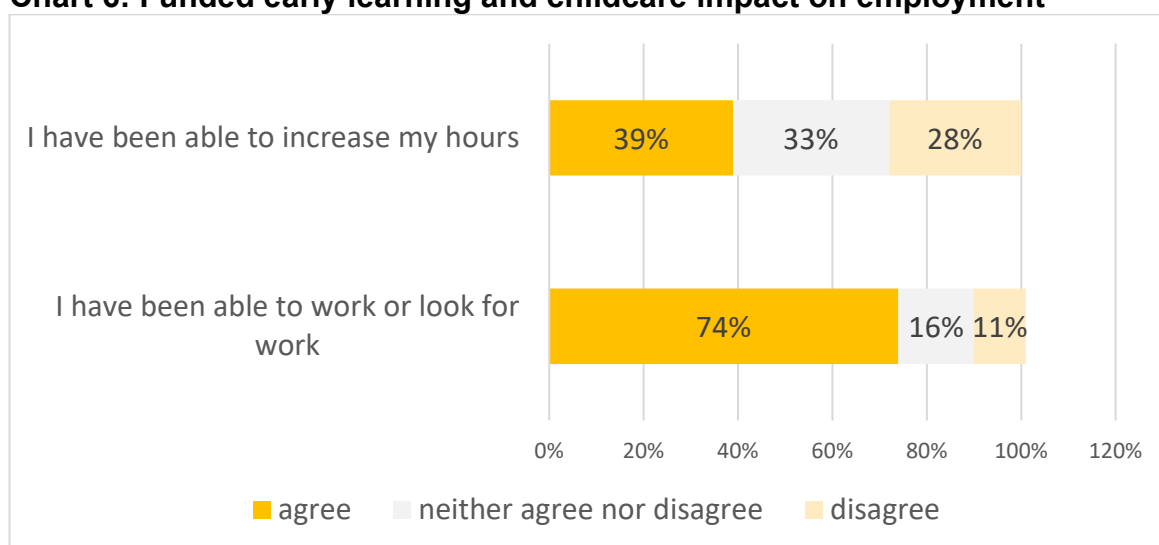
Suggested themes

Theme 1: Impact of funded hours

The interim evaluation of 1,140 hours is not due to be published until Spring 2024. However, members may wish to get views on any 'lessons learned' to date, particularly as the Scottish Government moves towards further expansion.

A [survey of parents' use of early learning and childcare published in December 2022](#) asked about the impact of funded provision. Nearly three quarters (74%) agreed they had been able to work or look for work and 39% agreed that they had been able to increase their hours.

Chart 6: Funded early learning and childcare impact on employment



Source: [Scottish Government \(2022\) Early learning and childcare. Parents' views and use](#). Base; all parents using funded ELC.

The survey found that 73% of parents using funded hours were using their full entitlement for 3 to 5 year olds. This drops to 52% of those entitled to funded hours for two year olds. (n.b only those on the lowest incomes are entitled to two year old funded hours, estimated at c.25% of two year olds ([SHS](#))).

The expansion has also altered the mix of services available. For example, [the submission from the Scottish Childminding Association](#) (SCMA) states:

“the manner in which the expansion of ELC was implemented has had a devastating effect on the childminding workforce”

Members may wish to discuss:

- 1. Overall, what are the key lessons from the 1,140 hours expansion that can inform plans for further expansion?**

Theme 2: Approach to further expansion

The Scottish Government is currently developing its policy for expanding funded childcare for 1 and 2 year olds and school age children. The [strategic priorities set out in October 2022 are:](#)

- Realise the benefits of the 1140 hours expansion
- Progress the expansion, including building a system of school age childcare and developing a new offer for one and two year olds
- Ensure delivery is supported by a sustainable, diverse and thriving sector and profession
- Ensure our ambitions are underpinned by the funding and outcomes frameworks, robust data and organisations that work together to regulate services and support quality improvement.

The intended outcomes are:

- Children’s development improves and the poverty-related attainment gap narrows
- Family well-being improves
- Parents’ and carers’ opportunities to take up or sustain work, training and study increase

The SCMA state in their submission that childminding “will be required to provide the infrastructure to deliver these ambitions.” They are in discussions with the Scottish Government on incorporating learning from their Community Childminding service into the offer for one year olds, developing the new system of wrap-around school-age childcare and the challenges for sustaining childminder businesses.

Our call for views emphasised the need to focus on school age. One parent said:

“Any extension of free or subsidised childcare needs now to be focused on school age childcare rather than early years... There is little point in encouraging parents, particularly mothers, back to work, training, studying because they can access early years childcare if when the child gets to primary school there is no sustainable or affordable childcare in place.”

In the Scottish Out of School Care Network (SOSCN) survey one parent said:

““The only way I can get work done is to change my working hours so that I can work while the child sleeps as much as possible. This means very early rises (5am or earlier) and weekend work. Over long periods of time, this is unsustainable due to wellbeing deteriorating and poor health.”

Members may wish to discuss:

- 2. What are witnesses views on the pace and scale of policy development for further expansion of childcare?**

3. **Are the policy aims clearly focused? To what extent should the priority of further expansion be enabling parents to work more hours? How would that affect the way the policy is designed?**
4. **The Scottish Government emphasises a partnership approach. Are witnesses happy with their level of involvement in the development of childcare policy?**

Theme 3: Eligibility

In expanding provision for one and two year olds the Scottish Government is planning to focus on “those who need it most”.

The expansion of school age childcare is focused on those on low incomes, and there is a commitment that “those on the lowest incomes will pay nothing”.

[Current eligibility for funded two year old provision](#) is, for example, net pay of £726 per month or less for those getting Universal Credit which is roughly 15 hours a week on real living wage of £10.90.

Focusing free provision on the lowest incomes is a different approach to the UK Government which is focusing on working families.

In the call for views, over a third of respondents felt that any expansion of childcare should be offered to all families in Scotland (16 organisations, 26 individuals). Prioritising working families was favoured by 18 individuals but only 2 organisations. Only a few said it should be focused on low-income families (5 individuals, 4 organisations).

Eligibility criteria can impact on behaviour. In particular, if eligibility is linked to certain earnings thresholds, parents may arrange their working pattern in a way to qualify for funded childcare.

Members may wish to discuss:

5. **Whether witnesses have views on what eligibility criteria would have the greatest impact on child poverty?**
6. **What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of focusing on the lowest incomes compared to a focus on working parents?**
7. **If income thresholds are to be used – how can we avoid that becoming a disincentive for parents to increase their earnings?**
8. **In our call for views, some asked for universal, free provision. Is that feasible for under 3’s and school age childcare?**

Theme 4: Childcare workforce

The Scottish Government is working on a Strategic Framework for Scotland’s Childcare Profession. Pay and conditions in the childcare workforce impact on

affordability for parents, the sustainability of services and the standard of living of parents who work in childcare.

The childcare sector itself is a potential source of employment, albeit one that has tended to be low paid. Recognising this, it is Scottish Government policy that all those providing funded early learning and childcare are paid at least the real living wage. The submission from SOSCN highlights how this has made unfunded provision less attractive and SCMA notes that: “only 13% of childminders can pay themselves the real living wage”

The SCOSCN’s submission highlights that the expansion of funded pre-school has made it more difficult to recruit and retain staff in Out of School Care. Their [Workforce Discussion Paper](#) (November 2022) states:

“financially sustainable, much-needed and used services are either unable to expand (to meet demand) or beginning to close due to a Scotland-wide lack of suitable individuals to work in SAC.”

The discussion paper describes the key issues:

- Better pay and conditions in the local authority pre-school sector
- Most jobs are part-time, term-time and low paid.
- Increased conditionality in Universal Credit pushes people out of part-time work
- Increased paper-work, bureaucracy and regulatory requirements
- Lack of professional recognition despite requirement for managers to have a degree level qualification in Childhood Practice

Among its recommendations for school age childcare are that:

“we do not think that parents should pay more through fees but that SAC should be better resourced directly from government in order to increase salaries.”

The submission from SCMA describes the recruitment difficulties in childminding – but also the potential for childminding to be a source of employment for parents. Childminders tend to be self-employed. The number of childminders declined from 4,980 in 2018 to 3,960 in 2021. The Scottish Government’s [‘Commitment to childminding’](#) (2021) acknowledged that:

“It is vital to recognise that childminders are self-employed lone workers in most cases, who are not just providing care. They are running a business, fulfilling obligations in respect of training, administration, and are responsible for marketing and finding families to support through the service they provide.”

The SCMA is leading two initiatives on childminder recruitment, which provided intensive childminder specific support in establishing their businesses.

- Scottish Rural Childminding Partnership March 2022, which so far has led to 43 new registered childminders and attracted wider interest from employability terms, Job Centres and the DWP.
- Scottish Childminding Partnership launched in February 2023 with a focus on urban area and aiming to recruit 115 childminders.

Members may wish to discuss:

- 9. How feasible is it to expand further given current problems with recruitment and retention? How can this be addressed?**
- 10. What is the potential for the childcare sector itself to provide high quality, well-paid family friendly working while still being affordable for parents?**
- 11. Funded early learning and childcare includes a requirement to pay at least the real living wage (£10.90 per hour). Should this be applied to the childcare expansion? What impact would that have?**

Theme 5: Children who need additional support

A strong theme in the Committee’s call for views was the difficulty of finding childcare for disabled children and those with additional support needs. The submission from Carers Scotland highlighted:

“The lack of available childcare can mean loss of employment with research indicating that nearly a third (30%) of parents of disabled children are not working, with 40% having been out of work for more than five years.”

A recent survey by SOSCN raised similar issues. One parent said:

“There is no childcare for children with significant additional support needs. This has huge impacts on us as a family. I have reduced my work hours to 0.5 but am at risk of having to fully give up work as there is no suitable childcare available both in the holidays and after school. Feel very stigmatised.”

When parents can get daycare, it can make a big difference. One parent described how daycare meant she could work:

“If my son couldn't get a place at my out of school care I would have to give my job up due to my son having autism, it's very difficult to find childcare or to get family & friends to watch my son as he is very challenging.”

The local authority has a statutory duty to provide pre-school and school age daycare for ‘children in need’ “as is appropriate” (section 27 Children (Scotland) Act 1995). The definition of ‘in need’ is:

- being in need of care and attention because—

(i)he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development unless there are provided for him, under or by virtue of this Part, services by a local authority;

(ii)his health or development is likely significantly to be impaired, or further impaired, unless such services are so provided;

(iii)he is disabled; or

(iv)he is affected adversely by the disability of any other person in his family;

(b)who is “looked after” by a local authority, shall be construed in accordance with section 17(6) of this Act.

The Scottish Government survey of parents in December 2022 found that availability for children needing additional support had increased between 2018 and 2022.

“around half (48%) of parents with a child with ASN had experienced difficulties accessing suitable provision in 2018, compared with 31% in 2022.

It found that most (85%) parents who used the provision were satisfied with it. Amongst the 9% of parents dissatisfied, the main reasons were:

- staff not fully / appropriately trained (33%)
- not enough support given (28%)
- poor communications with provider (18%)
- hours unsuitable (11%)
- slow diagnosis / provision of service delayed (9%)
- no key-worker available / lack of 1-1 support (9%)

For parents who do have difficulties, the impact can be profound. The survey describes how parent who was promised a ‘split placement’ between private and local authority nursery found that, on the day her daughter was due to start, no-one knew about the arrangement. “It was likely not possible” to arrange and she’d have to choose either private or funded:

“We obviously chose the private nursery as she is happy there and they are great helping her with her eating issues. I had zero faith the council nursery would help. This has cost us tremendous financial difficulty and we struggle every single month to pay our almost £900 a month bill” “(Two pre-school children, two parent household, both working, child(ren) with ASN).

Members may wish to discuss:

12. A [survey of parents in 2022](#) found that availability of suitable early learning and childcare for children with additional support needs had improved, but around a third (31%) of parents still had difficulties finding suitable childcare. How can that be improved further?

13. What are the challenges of delivering further childcare expansion for children with additional support needs?

Theme 6: Delivery Models

Currently there is a mix of private, voluntary and public sector provision. In school age care particularly, there is a reliance on private and voluntary sector provision.

Longer term trends in provision include:

- Increase of 34% in daycare workforce since 2011, and increasing numbers of staff with degree level qualifications
- Increasing provision by the local authority and small decrease in those run by voluntary or not-for-profit providers
- Decline of 29% in number of childminding services between 2016 and 2021 (Source: [Scottish Government, Best Start \(2022\)](#)).

Payment to providers

In [2022-23 the average rate paid](#) per child by local authorities to partner providers was:

- £5.77 for 3 to 5 year olds (range of £5.45 to £6.40)
- £6.40 for two year olds (range of £5.50 to £8.50).

In eight local authorities childminders receive a separate rate, averaging £5.31 for 3 to 5 year olds and £5.53 for two year olds.

The '[funding follows the child](#)' model was introduced in full from August 2021. It means that parents can choose to use their child's entitlement at any early learning and childcare provider that: meets the national standard, has a place available and is willing to enter into a contract with the local authority.

Developing infrastructure

The policy aim of expanding school age childcare is to build on existing infrastructure:

“Once we understand families' needs, we will ensure that we fully utilise existing services and infrastructure and only develop new services and infrastructure where that is needed” ([Scottish Government, Best Start Strategic plan](#))

The Scottish Government has recently announced a recurring capital grant of [£4.5m](#) to deliver improvements to the school estate that will support provision of school age childcare in the most disadvantaged communities.

The SCMA submission states that “SCMA has been in close discussion with the Scottish Government regarding the development of the new system of wraparound school-age childcare.”

Members may wish to discuss:

- 14. How should the 'partner provider' model develop as funded childcare expands?**
- 15. For many parents, the challenge is finding work that fits with school hours. What is the potential for closer integration between school and school age childcare (for example, provision on school premises, provision managed by the school)? What impact could that have on parents?**
- 16. What is the potential for childminders to provide a funded 'wrap-around' service alongside schools?**

Camilla Kidner
SPICe
19 May 2023

Annex - Summary of call for views: childcare

The Call for Views asked about changes needed to childcare in Scotland if more parents were to return to work or increase their working hours. This is an extract of the 'Call for views' summary already provided to members.

The one over-arching theme of nearly all of the responses was **how critical affordable, flexible and appropriate childcare** is to enabling parents to return to the workforce:

“Childcare is critical to enabling parents to enter and progress within paid employment. This is particularly true for mothers and single parents, over 90% of whom are women. The provision of affordable and flexible childcare often determines whether women have a job, what hours they work, and their earnings. The high cost of childcare means that paid work is simply unviable for many parents, particularly single mothers. In addition to paid work, childcare provision is also critical to enabling parents to access education or training opportunities which may improve their employment prospects in the longer term. (The Poverty Alliance)

Finding childcare is particularly challenging for those who need specialised childcare, who need childcare outwith standard hours or who need to move relatively frequently. For example the RAF Families Federation said:

“The mobility associated with military life may exacerbate this challenge as one family highlighted to us: ‘We are due to move to an area where the nursery connected to the station has a 20-month waiting list. This is longer than our average tour length!’

The particular difficulties for military families are also discussed by Forces Children Scotland.

Expanding free or subsidised childcare

Over a third of respondents felt that **any expansion of childcare should be offered to all families in Scotland** (16 organisations, 26 individuals). Prioritising working families was favoured by 18 individuals but only 2 organisations. Only a few said it should be focused on low-income families (5 individuals, 4 organisations).

Table 2: Which families should be the focus for any future childcare expansion?

	Individuals	Organisations
All families	26	16
Working families	18	2
Low income families	5	4
Parents on employability programmes	1	1
Other	6	13

The **need for increased hours of subsidised childcare for working parents** for children of all ages was a recurring theme. Examples included:

- “More hours for those who work fulltime would allow parents to go back to work fulltime.” (Individual)
- “Copy England, ensure that everybody gets a minimum of 15 hours childcare a week and those who work get 40 hours of free childcare (in England it is 30 hours).” (Individual)
- Providing childcare for more hours and with greater flexibility may allow all parents – including those in poverty – to better increase the number of hours they work.” (Fraser of Allander Institute)

For organisations there was more of an emphasis on **universal provision**. Comments included:

- the Scottish Government should be working towards a universal funded childcare entitlement of fifty hours per week.” (The Poverty Alliance)
- “All children and families should receive some level of subsidised childcare.” (Perth & Kinross Local Employability Partnership)

Priority age-groups

Respondents were asked to prioritise any expansion of childcare by age, Results were mixed, with priority being both 1 to 2 years and ‘over 3 years’.

Table 3: Which age should be the focus for any future childcare expansion?

	Individuals	Organisations
0 to 1 year	9	5
1 to 2 years	17	10
2 to 3 years	8	4
Over 3 years	18	8

Many organisations felt that **wholesale change was required**, rather than targeted expansion:

“In order for child poverty to be addressed through parental employment, largescale investment in childcare will be required. Provision must be expanded to cover all children from 6 months old so they have access to up to 50 hours free, accessible, flexible, high-quality child-centred care. Flexibility is key to ensure those parents with untypical working patterns can access childcare.” (GMB Scotland)

A strong theme was the need to extend this to **after-school or ‘wrap-around’ childcare**. For example one individual said:

“Any extension of free or subsidised childcare needs now to be focused on school age childcare rather than early years... There is little point in encouraging parents, particularly mothers, back to work, training, studying

because they can access early years childcare if when the child gets to primary school there is no sustainable or affordable childcare in place.”

However, **extending childcare to younger children** was also a priority. Save the Children noted that: “There is currently a disconnect between the end of statutory maternity pay and the Scottish Government funded hours.”

There were also a couple of respondents who felt that the system needed to be reformed so that **parents with young children could choose to stay home** for a longer period without financial or career detriment:

“For parents of the youngest children, up to 24 months, we believe they should have a choice, taking an example from Finland, parents there are paid an allowance if they wish to stay at home to care for their child, or they can access state subsidised nursery care at the end of parental leave.” (Scottish Out of School Care Network)

Types of childcare

The Call for Views asked which types of childcare best served the needs of parents seeking to return to work. Rather than a particular type of setting, the most common theme was the need for flexibility. Comments included:

- “Flexible childcare, this would accommodate irregular work schedules, allowing parents to drop off and pick up their children at any time of the day or night.” (individual)
- “Funded places at nursery, breakfast club, after school club and provisions in the evenings and weekends as well as school holidays.” (Individual)

Bellbank Project described their service:

“We offer a drop in/flexible system where parents choose the times they need dependent on their family circumstances which works really well for the parents. We also open throughout school holidays because not everyone works term time.”

Another recurring theme was the need to fund wrap-around childcare for those of school age. Many types of childcare setting were mentioned by respondents, but none predominated. Longstone After School and Breakfast Club reflect the views of many in their suggestion that the priority for childcare was:

“Providing support to families that follows the child through their childhood and education journey until they are old enough to be able to be safely left unattended by their parents. Key to this is creating a network of childcare options for families that allow parents to work normal work hours right through to secondary school. More support is required for out of school childcare provision i.e. breakfast clubs, after school clubs and holiday clubs. This needs to be affordable and accessible to all and cover from 7.30am to 6pm.” (Longstone After School and Breakfast Club)

There were also several comments relating to the **difficulties in finding appropriate childcare for children with additional needs**. The submission from Carers Scotland highlighted:

“The lack of available childcare can mean loss of employment with research indicating that nearly a third (30%) of parents of disabled children are not working, with 40% having been out of work for more than five years.”

Childcare Providers

The other themes brought out across the questions which relate to childcare settings were the need to appropriately fund all types of childcare setting, and the concern that there were not enough providers of childcare, particularly in rural areas.

Several submissions focussed on changes required to childcare providers. Suggestions made included:

- "Provide funding specifically for childcare workers' wage costs. We are full to capacity all the time with a waiting list but are now finding it extremely hard to secure grant funding for staff wages." (Bellsbank Project)
- "Early years educators should be paid the same as primary school teachers." (Pregnant Then Screwed)
- "Where we have more need than places available, we can't recruit or retain staff to expand. Where there has been a change in working status for some families, we have vacant places and at risk of having to close services. The school aged childcare sector needs to be funded by government payments for childcare at a realistic level, a level of funding that supports the workforce and the infrastructure." (First 4 Kids)

One respondent summarised the views of the majority when they stated that the following points would have the greatest impact on child poverty in Scotland:

“Extension of hours that childcare is provided. Parents who work shifts, early in the morning, later in the evening or overnight cannot access affordable, flexible, accessible childcare.

Provision of more free childcare to parents to enable them to work.

Enhance the terms and conditions of the childcare workforce and increase the number of people working in it.

Increase the number and locations of high quality childcare establishments.”
(Individual)