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Drivers and barriers to uptake of Early Learning and Childcare amongst 2 year olds



CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SKILLS



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1 Executive summary

Background

- 1.1 Increasing access to high quality, flexible early learning and childcare (ELC) is a key focus of early years' policy. Prior to 2014, 3 and 4 year olds were entitled to 475 hours per year of free pre-school education. However, the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 extended provision to 600 hours for all 3 and 4 year olds and for 2 year olds who were Looked After (including those in kinship care) and those whose parents were in receipt of out of work benefits. From August 2015, provision for 2 year olds was extended further, to those whose families meet the eligibility criteria for free school-meals, estimated to capture around 27% of the 2 year old population. The current estimate of eligibility¹ is around a quarter².
- 1.2 Free ELC has two main policy aims: to improve outcomes for children and to support parents (particularly mothers) into employment. While uptake of free ELC for 3 and 4 year olds has been almost universal, take up for eligible 2 year olds has been lower than anticipated: at the time of writing this report, the latest figures³ suggested that 7% of 2 year olds were registered. Since completing this research, annual statistics published in December 2016 suggest uptake has increased to 9% with around 1,000 more 2 year olds than the year before. However, this still remains lower than expected.

Research aims and objectives

- 1.3 In order to help improve the uptake of free ELC for 2 year olds, the Scottish Government commissioned research from Ipsos MORI to understand the practical issues that influence uptake rates, to allow policy to be tailored accordingly. The study examined:
 - parental awareness of ELC provision
 - why parents engage or do not engage
 - the profile of families engaging (or not) with the provision
 - the barriers and facilitators for local authorities and key delivery partners in promoting and achieving maximum uptake by eligible 2 year olds.

Methodology

- 1.4 The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, comprising in-depth interviews with 30 parents of eligible 2 year olds and 13 in-depth interviews with local authority stakeholders and key delivery partners across six different authorities.

¹ as at November 2016.

² this estimate will vary depending upon how many parents are in receipt of out of work benefits.

³ from the annual census taken in September 2015.

Setting the context

- 1.5 Estimates provided by local authority staff interviewed suggest uptake could be higher than indicated by the annual census taken in September 2015. The Scottish Government was aware of issues with the data collection methodology prior to this research being commissioned and is addressing this separately through a data transformation project which is seeking to ensure data capture reflects more widely the significant policy changes and meets user need.
- 1.6 The research among stakeholders highlighted the considerable variation in the way in which free ELC was being delivered across different local authorities. Differences existed in terms of the providers used (although local authority nurseries were the main providers in all areas), the degree of flexibility the session times offered, school holiday provision and whether it was possible to pay to top up provision.
- 1.7 In terms of promoting free ELC, the overriding message from stakeholders was the importance of personal contact between professionals and eligible families. While advertising plays a role, it alone was not seen as being conducive to engaging this group of parents – who are often vulnerable and lacking in confidence. Close partnership working among professionals was also considered crucial to ensure that all staff were advocates of free ELC and that momentum was kept up in terms of promotion.
- 1.8 Overwhelmingly, the greatest challenge for professionals in the promotion and implementation of free ELC lay in identifying all of those eligible for the provision. They talked about the difficulties associated with delivering targeted provision without having a list of those in the target group. Stakeholders frequently suggested that the DWP should be able to produce lists of all families with 2 year olds who were in receipt of the appropriate benefits. If this information was shared with local authorities, they could ensure that they engaged with all eligible families.

Parents' perspectives

- 1.9 Interviews were conducted with 30 individuals, including six couples who were interviewed together, so the research involved the parents of 24 different eligible 2 year olds. Of these 24 sets of parents:
 - eleven were unaware of the provision before the interview, but when they were told about it, they reacted very positively and it seemed likely that they would have used it if they had known about it.
 - one was unaware, and when told about it, indicated that they would not have used it.
 - eight were already aware of the provision, were using it⁴, and were very positive about it.

⁴ Or, in one case, were aware of it and planned to use it when their 22 month old child turned 2.

- four were aware of it but were not using it although only one had clearly 'rejected' it.

1.10 It is important to note that this information is provided to show the range of circumstances of those involved in the research and on which the findings are based – it is not a profile of the whole population and the sample was not intended to be statistically representative of the parents of all eligible 2 year olds.

Awareness of free ELC

1.11 Those who were aware of free ELC had typically found out through word of mouth from a friend or family member, or from personal contact with a health visitor or another professional who was in contact with the family, such as a midwife or family worker. It was rare for parents to be aware of any other form of communication promoting the free ELC.

1.12 Lack of awareness was not limited to those who were more 'isolated' (e.g. those in rural areas, parents who were new to an area, or those who did not have any friends or family with young children). Those who were unaware included those who had friends with children the same age, used local mother and toddler groups, and had regular contact with health visitors and other professionals.

Uptake of free ELC

1.13 Overall, views on the provision of free ELC for 2 year olds were very positive. Typically, parents who were aware of the provision had used it. These parents (predominantly single mothers⁵) saw clear benefits for their 2 year old and valued the opportunity the ELC gave them to take a break from childcare.

1.14 Only three couples said they would not use the provision. While all three couples recognised the potential benefits of ELC, they were happy to wait until their child turned 3 and felt they had no real need for childcare at this stage. None of the mothers was intending to work in the near future. Perhaps, in part, because they were couples (and, in two of the three, neither was working), none of them talked about needing a break from looking after a 2 year old or needing time to get other things done. In other words, there were no strong 'push' factors.

The benefits of free ELC

1.15 Parents identified a wide range of potential benefits of the provision. The main benefits were thought to be those related to a child's development (including social skills, behaviour, language and learning) and the chance for parents to catch up on other things such as household chores or to allow them the time to look for work or to study.

⁵ Based on those who participated in the research.

Concerns about using free ELC

- 1.16 It was clear that the perceived benefits of the free ELC provision far outweighed any concerns parents may have had. The main concern parents had was that, aged 2, their child may not be ready to spend time away from their family or be too young physically or mentally to be in a nursery environment. However, those who had used the provision for 2 year olds found their child adapted very quickly to the new environment.
- 1.17 Although not a big concern, it was mentioned that the provision of 600 hours per year, typically around 16 hours per week or 3 hours per day, meant it would be difficult to find work within these hours without having to pay for additional childcare. Additionally, there was a view that the hours offered by most nurseries were inflexible, and that only offering half day sessions in either the morning or afternoon, rather than giving parents the option on how to split the 16 hours per week, meant further difficulties finding work. However, there was an opposing view that the hours *were* flexible enough.

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1.18 The research with parents suggests that the major barrier to uptake is lack of awareness – rather than opposition to the concept, problems with the application process or dissatisfaction with the nature of the provision.
- 1.19 The key recommendations from the research are:
- the research confirms the need to improve the way in which uptake data is captured to reflect changes in policy and practice and to better meet user needs
 - the Scottish Government should work with DWP (and HMRC if required⁶) to allow data on eligibility to be shared with local authorities which would subsequently allow local authorities to target their promotion of free ELC
 - given the importance of personal contacts, local authorities should continue to focus their efforts on raising awareness among professionals likely to have contact with eligible families and supporting them to promote the provision effectively. Health visitors are in the best position to promote the provision to eligible families. Other relevant professionals include: early years workers; children and families social workers; nursery staff and primary staff (for those with older children); play initiative staff; local groups/services (e.g. Bookbug and Play, Talk, Read); and local DWP offices.
 - the language used in the promotion of free ELC should be positive and non-stigmatising, avoiding terms such as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘disadvantaged’.
 - promotion should focus on two key aspects: the learning and developmental benefits for 2 year olds (particularly language development and the social aspects such as ‘learning to share’) and providing reassurances that 2 is not too young for ELC.

⁶ HMRC data may be required in relation to parents’ receipt of tax credits.

2 Introduction and methods

Background

- 2.1 Improving and increasing access to high quality, flexible early learning and childcare (ELC) has been a key focus of early years' policy in Scotland in recent years. Prior to 2014, 3 and 4 year olds in Scotland were entitled to 475 hours per year of free pre-school education. However, the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 significantly expanded this, extending provision to 600 hours for all 3 and 4 year olds and for eligible 2 year olds i.e. children who are Looked After or subject to a kinship care or guardianship order ; and, those whose parents are in receipt of out of work benefits. From August 2015, provision for 2 year olds was extended further, to those whose families meet the eligibility criteria for free school-meals. An estimated quarter of 2 year olds are entitled to 600 hours per year (equivalent to 16 hours a week during term time) of free ELC⁷. The Scottish Government has pledged to increase hours of free provision for those children by the end of the current parliament (2020), from 600 hours to 1,140 hours a year.
- 2.2 The extension of free, formal ELC provision has two main policy aims: to improve outcomes for children and to support parents (particularly mothers) into employment. While uptake of free ELC for 3 and 4 year olds has been almost universal – 97% of all 3 and 4 year olds in Scotland were registered for places in 2015⁸ – take up for eligible 2 year olds has been lower than anticipated: it is estimated that only 7% of 2 year olds were registered, (according to the latest figures available at the time of writing). Uptake has also varied widely by local authority area – in ways which do not seem to be a simple reflection of higher eligibility rates in areas with higher levels of deprivation⁹.
- 2.3 In order to improve the uptake of free ELC for 2 year olds, the Scottish Government aims to identify the key barriers restricting uptake of places for eligible 2 year olds, and to identify practical lessons that might help to increase uptake. To this end, the Scottish Government commissioned Ipsos MORI to carry out research across Scotland with the parents of eligible 2 year old children, and with local authority stakeholders and key delivery partners. This report provides the findings from that research.

⁷ As at November 2016

⁸ Tables 4 and Appendix 2 of the Scottish Government's Additional tables on Early Learning and Childcare to accompany Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland, No.6: 2015
<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Children/Pubs-Pre-SchoolEducation>

⁹ Table 4 of the Scottish Government's Additional tables on Early Learning and Childcare to accompany Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland, No.6: 2015
<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Children/Pubs-Pre-SchoolEducation>

Research aims and objectives

2.4 The overall aim of this study was to understand the practical issues that influence uptake rates amongst eligible 2 year olds, to allow policy to be tailored accordingly. To do so, the study examined issues around:

- parental awareness of ELC provision
- why parents engage or do not engage (including exploring views about: the benefits of ELC for 2 year olds, for their parents and for other family members; the suitability of provision; the practical constraints on take-up; any stigma attached to the offer; and issues relating to parental employment options)
- the profile of families engaging (or not) with the provision
- what, if any, alternative childcare arrangements parents of eligible 2 year olds use – and why they use these instead of free ELC
- the barriers and facilitators for local authorities and key delivery partners in promoting and achieving maximum uptake by eligible 2 year olds.

Methodology

2.5 The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, comprising:

- in-depth interviews with 30 parents/guardians¹⁰ of eligible 2 year olds. The interviews were mainly carried out face-to-face, with the remainder carried out by phone
- 13 in-depth interviews with local authority stakeholders and key delivery partners, mainly carried out by phone (one paired depth interview was carried out face-to-face).

Interviews with parents

2.6 As the parents of 2 year old children who are eligible for free ELC are a relatively hard-to-reach audience, two methods of recruitment were employed: telephone follow-up of respondents who had taken part in the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) and in-street, face-to-face recruitment.

2.7 Initially, a sample was purposively drawn from the SHS re-contact database¹¹. Parents of 2 year old children (or those who had just turned 3) who seemed likely to be eligible for free ELC (based on their working status and benefits that they were in receipt of) were identified from the sample, sent an advance letter, and recruited by phone. However, there were difficulties recruiting individuals from this sample. There was a high level of non-contact (because of unobtainable phone numbers, people not

¹⁰ In total, 29 of the 30 participants spoken to were the parents of their 2 year old child, while one participant was a kinship carer. For the purposes of brevity and readability they will all be referred to as 'parents' throughout the remainder of this report.

¹¹ A database of respondents who have taken part in the SHS and agreed to be re-contacted for future research.

answering their phones, and people not responding to voicemail messages), and some of those with whom we did make contact were screened out because they were not in fact eligible for free ELC (e.g. because they were no longer in receipt of certain benefits). It was therefore necessary to supplement this approach with in-street, face-to-face recruitment.

- 2.8 The sample was not designed to be statistically representative of all parents of eligible 2 year olds. Rather it was designed to include parents in a broad range of circumstances in terms of awareness and use of free ELC for 2 year olds, working status, whether a single parent or a couple, local authority and urban/rural locations (see Section 4: Profile of the Research Participants for more details).
- 2.9 It should be noted that we had great difficulty finding parents who were aware of the provision but had not used it. We had originally intended that around two-fifths of the sample would be in this category. However, our recruiters found that most of the eligible parents that they spoke to were either using the provision or were unaware of it. In the end, we were only able to recruit four 'sets' of parents who were aware of the provision but had not used it and we had more parents who were unaware of the provision than we originally planned. While we cannot quantify the proportions in each category in the population in any statistically robust way, this does suggest that parents who are aware of the provision but not using it are relatively rare – and that lack of awareness is a bigger barrier to uptake than rejection of the provision.
- 2.10 Interviews were carried out with parents who indicated that they were the primary caregiver for their 2 year old child (in all cases, the child's mother). These were carried out as an individual interview, in pairs along with a spouse/partner, or in pairs with a friend who was also the parent of an eligible 2 year old. Overall, 23 interviews were carried out (sixteen individual depths, six paired depths with couples and one paired depth with friends), with 30 participants in total. The majority (15) of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, with the remainder conducted by telephone.
- 2.11 All interviews were conducted by members of the Ipsos MORI research team and took place between 21st September and 16th October 2016. Participants were given an incentive payment of £25 as a 'thank you' for their time.

Interviews with local authority stakeholders and key delivery partners

- 2.12 To help contextualise the findings of the research conducted with parents, 13 interviews were carried out with stakeholders across six local authorities. The professionals interviewed were mainly local authority early years leads, or health visiting team managers or leaders.
- 2.13 Stakeholders were recruited from a mix of local authorities (selected by the Ipsos MORI research team) in terms of the geographic area of Scotland, size and uptake levels of free ELC for 2 year olds (with estimates across the

six local authorities ranging from 4.5% to 11%, based on Scottish Government data).

- 2.14 All interviews with parents and stakeholders were structured around discussion guides (see Appendices A and B), designed by Ipsos MORI in consultation with Scottish Government. Interviews were audio-recorded (with participants' permission). The transcripts of recordings and interviewer notes were then systematically analysed to identify the substantive themes which emerged in relation to each section in the discussion guide and illustrative verbatim comments.

Interpreting the findings

- 2.15 Unlike survey research, qualitative social research does not aim to produce a quantifiable summary of population experiences or attitudes, but to identify and explore the different issues and themes relating to the subject being researched. The assumption is that issues and themes affecting participants are a reflection of issues and themes in the wider population concerned. Although the extent to which they apply to the wider population, or specific sub-groups, cannot be quantified, the value of qualitative research is in identifying the range of different issues involved and the way in which these impact on people.

3 Setting the context

- 3.1 This chapter provides context for the findings of the research with parents by describing the different ways in which ELC is being promoted and delivered across local authorities. It also covers the drivers and barriers to increasing uptake of free ELC for eligible 2 year olds from the perspective of professionals involved in its implementation and delivery.

Is uptake higher than estimated?

- 3.2 Estimates provided by the local authority staff interviewed suggest uptake could be higher than indicated by the annual census data taken in September 2016. The Scottish Government was aware of issues with the data collection methodology prior to this research being commissioned and is addressing this separately through a data transformation project which is seeking to ensure data capture reflects more widely the significant policy changes and meets user need.
- 3.3 If actual uptake is close to the local authority estimates, then there is less of a problem than was thought. Nonetheless, there is considerable scope (at least in many areas) to increase uptake still further and lessons learned about the drivers and barriers remain valuable.

Delivery of the provision

- 3.4 There was considerable variation in the way in which free ELC was being delivered across different local authorities. Local authority nurseries were the main provider in all areas but the extent to which private nurseries, third sector organisations and childminders were also involved in delivery varied. The use of childminders had been limited to date but was mentioned frequently as an option which authorities were looking to explore further. Stakeholders saw particular benefits in using childminders for eligible two year olds living in rural areas.
- 3.5 The degree of flexibility of the provision also varied across the authorities. In some, the 'traditional' model of free ELC provision (five three-hour sessions per week, either in the morning or afternoon, during term-time) was the only or main option available. Other authorities, however, were able to offer greater flexibility by giving parents the option of condensing the provision into, say, two full days, by offering provision during school holidays or by allowing parents to pay to top up their hours.
- 3.6 One important factor affecting delivery in each authority was the level of local, self-funded ELC provision for two year olds which had existed prior to the implementation of free ELC nationally. When free ELC for eligible 2 year olds was introduced, some local authorities had sufficient existing provision to accommodate all placements in the first year – while others had very little or no previous provision and needed more significant changes and

expansion of provision in terms of sourcing appropriate providers, undertaking building works and training staff.

How is ELC promoted?

Professionals

3.7 Free ELC for eligible 2 year olds was promoted by professionals, through advertising and through word of mouth. While practice varied by authority, health visitors were the main professional group promoting free ELC in all areas. Sometimes this would be through contacts they had with families who were considered more vulnerable and were having visits outside the core visiting schedule. In other cases, it was mentioned at the 27-30 month developmental check and, in one authority, letters were sent to all parents alongside the 27-30 questionnaire. It was acknowledged, however, that health visitors had many demands on their time and that there would always be some who were doing more to promote it than others. Other professionals involved in promotion included: DWP staff working in Job Centre Plus offices, social workers, early years workers, staff working in play initiatives, nursery staff and those involved in local groups such as Bookbug. One authority had also involved housing association staff in promotion as they are a group of professionals who have contact with many of the eligible families.

Advertising

3.8 The Scottish Government produced posters to advertise the provision. In addition to these, local authorities used their own modes of advertising. In some cases, this involved designing their own posters or leaflets which allowed them to put their own stamp on the way in which free ELC was marketed and meant they could include details of local providers. In others, adverts were placed in local newspapers or newsletters which were distributed to all households. Facebook had also been used to try to increase awareness and, in one local authority, banners were placed on refuse vehicles (as they were identified as being the one vehicle that would be in every street).

Word of mouth

3.9 Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of word of mouth, particularly when a parent has seen the benefits of ELC in their own child. As such, they felt it was important that both parents and nursery staff were encouraged pass on their experience of the benefits to others.

What works well in the promotion of ELC?

Importance of personal contact

3.10 The overriding message from stakeholders was the importance of personal contact between professionals and eligible families. While advertising plays

a role, it alone was not seen as being conducive to engaging this group of parents.

Posters are a very middle class thing.

Local Authority Early Years Manager

- 3.11 A large proportion of parents of eligible 2 year olds were considered to be vulnerable and often lacking in confidence and self-esteem. Even if they *had* seen free ELC advertised, without the input of professionals, they would be unlikely to make the decision to use it and to take the necessary steps to access the application form and apply. In part this relates to simply lacking the confidence to engage with any type of service but it is particularly pertinent when the service involves being separated from their child, which many may feel uncomfortable about – at least initially. For these reasons, stakeholders repeatedly stressed the importance of using established relationships (e.g. health visitors, early years workers and social workers), where trust has been developed, to work with parents to inform them of the potential benefits and help to alleviate any concerns they may have. Some parents also required support with the application process and this was provided by the relevant professionals where possible, although it was noted that there were not always the necessary resources to help as much as they would like in this regard,
- 3.12 Two local authorities were using additional personal contacts to ensure that all parents who submitted applications did then use, and continue to use, the provision. In one authority, all applications were followed up with a phone call from the Early Years Manager. She would discuss the options for placements and talk parents through the next steps. She would then personally attend on the first day they brought their child to the ELC provider. They felt that this approach was effective as they had few who did not attend or who discontinued. In the other authority, those who submitted applications but did attend were followed up and those who did attend but then missed a number of sessions were sent a personalised leaflet with a photo of the child and a reminder of what they had enjoyed doing the last time they attended. They felt that minimising discontinuation was important and suggested that it would be useful for the data collection processes to include discontinuation rates.

Maintaining awareness among professionals

- 3.13 For the existing personal relationships between professionals and parents to be best utilised, close partnership working *between* professionals was considered crucial. Those with responsibility for the implementation and delivery of the provision were cognisant of the numerous demands on the professionals involved in promotion and the potential for this to be something that ‘falls off their radars’. This, alongside the inevitable staff movement and turnover within teams, necessitated measures to ensure that all staff were advocates of free ELC and that momentum was kept up in terms of promotion. Such measures included: regular stakeholder meetings between

all professional groups involved, visits to ELC providers and teams of professionals (e.g. health visiting teams, DWP offices, housing association staff), networking events, monthly email updates to health visitors with up to date information on where places were available, checks to ensure posters and leaflets are still on display (if something has been up for a long time, those maintaining notice boards etc. can think it is no longer relevant and remove it). These were the most time consuming aspects of promotion but were where the greatest benefits were felt to be.

Language

- 3.14 In communicating with parents about free ELC, both via advertising materials and through personal contacts, stakeholders emphasised the need for the language used to be positive and non-stigmatising. For example, moving away from terms such as 'vulnerable twos' and focusing instead on the opportunities and benefits stemming from free ELC. Stressing the benefits in terms of early learning for the child was seen as particularly important.

What are the challenges in the promotion and implementation of ELC?

Knowing who is eligible for the provision

- 3.15 Overwhelmingly, the greatest challenge for professionals lay in identifying all of those eligible for the provision. They talked about the difficulties associated with delivering targeted provision without having a list of those in the target group. In particular, they felt it was challenging for health visitors (who have a heavy workload) to know where they should be directing their attention. If a family is eligible but not considered vulnerable enough to be having additional contacts with their health visitor, there is no easy way for a health visitor to identify them as being eligible and to approach them accordingly.
- 3.16 Stakeholders frequently suggested that the DWP should be able to produce lists of all families with 2 year olds who were in receipt of the appropriate benefits. If this information was shared with local authorities, they could ensure that they engaged with all eligible families. If the DWP cannot share this information, it was proposed that they could instead write to all those who are eligible. This would be a less desirable option, however, as it would not allow professionals to have the personal contact with families, which they feel is so important.

I mean the biggest way that we will be able to increase it any is to actually be able to identify who these families are that, at the moment, we're not aware that we're not targeting, because we think we are picking up most of the ones certainly that we're aware of...Well, I think they should get some agreement with DWP, that they can give us some information. That would be the first thing.

- 3.17 Related to DWP's unique position in having access to all eligible families, there was a sense that DWP staff could be doing more to promote ELC within job centres.

Reservations that the target group does not always match with need

- 3.18 In authorities where there was existing free ELC provision for 2 year olds, places had previously tended to be prioritised on the basis of need. There were concerns, particularly among professionals from these authorities, that the target group for free ELC did not always correlate with actual need. Some families who they felt were in need of free ELC were now not eligible, for example, if their income was just above the threshold. In these cases, they would often still provide places and fund them from local authority budgets.

Appropriateness of the provision for very vulnerable families

- 3.19 If a 2 year old is attending free ELC, this does not mean that they are not being supported in other ways. Participants pointed out that many of the most vulnerable families are instead using more intensive services where, for example, they attend small groups with their child and learn more about how to play and interact with them. For two key reasons, professionals would be reluctant to move children from these settings into free ELC. Firstly, the families' lives can be chaotic and they are often not at the point of being ready to attend mainstream services. The support they receive at these services helps to increase their confidence and prepare them for mainstream provision by the time their child is 3. Secondly, they felt that families were benefiting greatly from these services – where a parent attends a service *with* their child and is supported in parenting, there is a greater likelihood that the benefits will extend beyond the setting and into the home.
- 3.20 Currently, these services only tend to offer sessions once or twice a week. It was suggested that this model of provision could be expanded and be offered as a type of free ELC – families could attend for an increased number of hours (up to a maximum of the ELC entitlement) and could gradually begin to leave their child in the setting as both the staff and the parents felt that they were ready to do so.

Capacity

- 3.21 On the whole, having the capacity to offer places to all those who wanted them was not a significant problem for authorities. They might not always have been able to offer parents their first choice but were generally able to offer a similar placement in close proximity to the first choice or the option to wait until a place became available in their first choice provider. However, for one largely rural authority, which had very little in the way of existing

provision for 2 year olds, sourcing suitable facilities which were in walking distance for parents was a considerable and ongoing challenge.

Professionals' perspectives on the barriers faced by parents

3.22 Section 5 covers the barriers to free ELC among the parents who were interviewed as part of the research. However, professionals were also asked for their views on the barriers to parents – from their experience of promoting it. These barriers can be separated into those which are more practical in nature and those which relate to more personal or cultural reasons. It should be borne in mind that these are the experiences of a small stakeholders but they give an indication of some of the issues encountered by parents.

Practical reasons

3.23 The main practical barriers for parents which had been encountered by professionals were:

- lack of awareness – professionals felt that, until they have lists of all those eligible, there will always be parents who are unaware of the provision.
- transport – where places are not available within walking distance, transport issues can be a barrier. In more urban areas, buses might be available but the cost of bus fares can be off-putting. In rural areas, parents may have no means of travelling to a provider if they do not have a car.
- a misunderstanding that the child will lose their place if family circumstances change - while not necessarily a barrier to uptake as such, there were parents who thought that, if they took a place and then went on to find work that took their income over the eligibility threshold, their child would no longer be eligible. This might not prevent them from taking a place but it might stop them from subsequently looking for work.

Personal or cultural reasons

3.24 Personal or cultural barriers identified by professionals included:

- a lack of confidence to apply for, and attend, mainstream services
- enjoying and benefiting from other, more supportive, services (as described in paragraph 3.19 above)
- a feeling that their child is too young for ELC and/or that they do not want to be separated from their child for that length of time
- a perceived lack of need for free ELC if at least one parent is not working
- ELC not being the norm in the area – anecdotally, professionals had a sense of uptake being proportionately higher in more deprived areas and that this may be due to the fact it is more normalised.

- stigma – there was a view among professionals that there will always be a stigma attached to any targeted service. However, this was considered to have been less of an issue since provision had been extended to incorporate working families on low incomes rather than being solely for families not in work. Using positive language in the promotion of the provision was also seen as important in overcoming any stigma.
- cultural reasons – among some cultural groups (the Roma community, in particular, was mentioned), cultural norms can influence uptake. It can be more commonplace among some groups for children not to attend any ELC, even when they are 3 or 4.

4 Profile of the research participants

- 4.1 Figure 1 below shows the profile of the research participants. It is important to note that this is provided to show the range of circumstances of those involved in the research and on which our findings are based – it is not a profile of the whole population. As discussed in Section 2 (Background and Methods), the sample was not intended to be statistically representative of the parents of all eligible 2 year olds, rather it was designed to include a broad range of parents in different circumstances.
- 4.2 Interviews were conducted with 30 individuals, including six couples who were interviewed together, so the research involved the parents of 24 different eligible 2-year-olds. Each of the 24 symbols in Figure 1 represents one 'set' of parents (for ease, they are referred to simply as 'parents').
- 4.3 In addition to the characteristics shown in Figure 1, the participants in the sample lived in 12 different local authority areas¹² and four lived in rural areas.

Unaware but probably would use the provision

- 4.4 Eleven parents (shown in the top left quadrant) were unaware of the provision before the interview, but when they were told about it, they reacted very positively and it seemed likely that they would have used it if they had known about it.

Unaware but would not use the provision

- 4.5 One couple were unaware, and when told about it, indicated that they would not have used it (bottom left quadrant).

Using the provision

- 4.6 Eight parents were already aware of the provision, were using it¹³, and were very positive about it (top right quadrant).

Aware of the provision but not using it

- 4.7 Four parents were aware of it but not using it (bottom right quadrant).
- 4.8 It is worth noting that two of the four had not 'rejected' the provision. One was at college and had access to a childminder funded by the college (three days a week during term time). She said that when she enquired about free ELC at a council office (which she wanted to enable her to return to her part-time job), she was told by a member of staff that she was not eligible because she was already receiving free childcare from another source. It

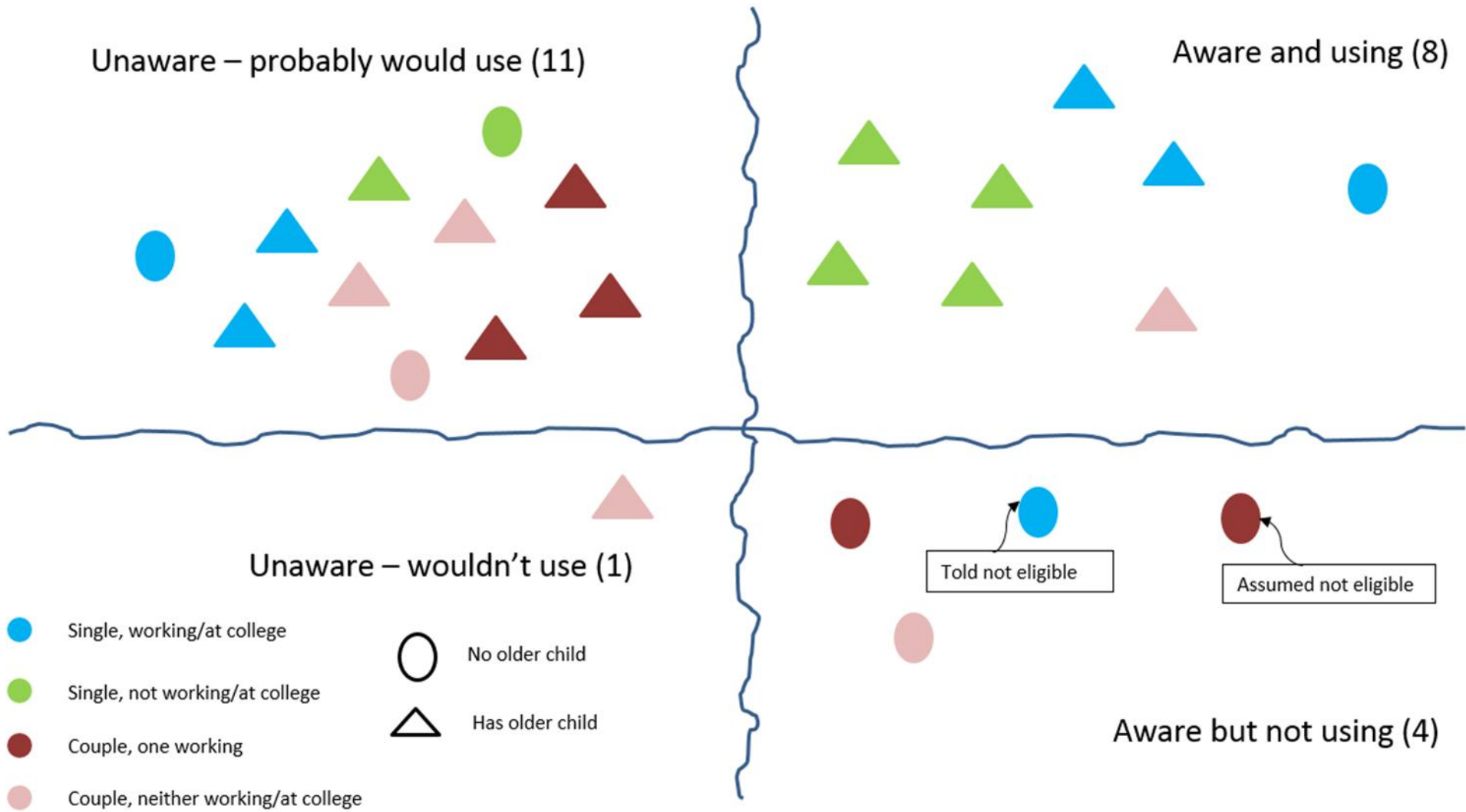
¹² Clackmannanshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Dundee City, East Ayrshire, East Renfrewshire, Fife, Inverclyde, Lanarkshire, North Lanarkshire, South Ayrshire, West Dunbartonshire and West Lothian.

¹³ Or, in one case, were aware of it and planned to use it when their 22-month-old child turned 2.

seemed to the research team that she should have been eligible and that this was a mistake or a misunderstanding.

- 4.9 The second participant had heard about it, but had assumed she was not eligible because of her partner's income. The household income was very close to the threshold and a proper assessment would have to be made to determine whether or not they were eligible. While it may be that they were not eligible, they would ideally have investigated it further.
- 4.10 A third couple in this bracket had only found out about the provision when their son was 2-and-a-half, and by that point were happy to wait until he was 3. It seemed that they *might* have used it if they had found out earlier.
- 4.11 There is therefore only one couple in the 'aware but not using' category who have clearly rejected the provision (their reasons are discussed in paragraph 5.11 below).
- 4.12 While, as noted above, the sample was not intended to be representative of all parents of eligible 2-year-olds, the lack of participants who were aware of the provision but rejected it (whether because of concerns and/or because they did not think it would be beneficial enough) reflects the difficulty we had in finding parents in this category. This does suggest that there are relatively few of them in the population.

Figure 1: Profile of the research participants



5 Parents' perspectives

Awareness of free ELC

- 5.1 Awareness of free ELC for 2 year olds was mixed among the parents who participated in the research.¹⁴ Those who were aware of it had typically found out through word of mouth, either from a friend or family member, or from personal contact with a health visitor or another professional who was in contact with the family, such as a midwife (where there was also a younger child) or family worker.

I only heard about [it] through a friend, so I went down to the nearest nursery just to ask about it and enquire and we went in and wrote the form out and basically [my daughter] started a few days after that.

Mother, aware and using

[I heard] through the midwife... I said what age [my son] was and she said I could get him in the nursery, how many hours that sort of thing.

Mother, aware and using

- 5.2 It was rare for parents to be aware of any other form of communication promoting the free ELC, though some parents thought they may have seen adverts on the sides of buses or information online or on television. Additionally, there was little awareness among participants of the Scottish Government poster promoting the provision. Some indicated that, if they had seen the headline of the poster "Is your 2 year old eligible for free early learning and childcare?", they would have assumed it was not for them – because it was only for 'vulnerable' children or dependent upon the working status of the parent(s).

I've not heard anything... Is that just for working parents?

Mother, unaware – probably would use

- 5.3 Indeed, some parents said they had been vaguely aware of having seen the provision advertised but it was not until friends or professionals had spoken to them about it that they understood what it was and that they were entitled to it. This reinforces the opinion of professionals (see paragraph 3.10 above) about the importance of personal contact in helping to promote ELC provision.

¹⁴ As noted in Section 2, the research was qualitative in nature and not designed to measure levels of awareness among all parents of eligible 2 year olds.

- 5.4 While word of mouth was the main way in which parents became aware of the free ELC, lack of awareness was not limited to those who were more 'isolated' (e.g. those in rural areas, parents who were new to an area, or those who did not have any friends or family with young children). For example, those who were unaware included those who had friends with children the same age, used local mother and toddler groups, and had regular contact with health visitors and other professionals.
- 5.5 The one kinship carer interviewed was not aware and she indicated that she had not received any communications regarding their entitlement.

I think there is a lot of people aren't aware. I mean [the Scottish Kinship Care Alliance] wasn't even aware of it, and I thought that they would get [information] from the Scottish Government at least¹⁵.

Kinship carer, unaware – probably would use

Uptake of free ELC

- 5.6 Overall, views on the provision of free ELC for 2 year olds and on ELC in general were very positive. Typically, parents who were aware of the provision had used it. These parents, who were predominantly single mothers¹⁶, tended to find the process of applying for a place straightforward (they were offered support by nursery staff or health visitors during the application process if required), saw clear benefits for their 2 year old and valued the opportunity the ELC gave them to take a break from childcare (the perceived benefits are discussed further below).
- 5.7 Among those who had previously been unaware of the free ELC, after being told about the provision and who was eligible, the dominant reaction was very positive – and parents indicated that they would use it, or would have used it if they had known in time.

The minute he turned 2 if I had known there was childcare and his [development] was fine, which it has been, I definitely would have considered it.

Mother, unaware – probably would use

- 5.8 Indeed, when those whose child was about to turn 3, or had recently turned 3, found out about the provision during the interview, there was a sense of frustration at an opportunity missed.

Well, personally [if I had known] I would have been dragging her down because she is hard work for me!

¹⁵ The Scottish Government may well have contacted the Scottish Kinship Care Alliance at some point, but this reinforces the point made by professionals (see paragraph 3.13) regarding the value of periodically reminding different stakeholder groups about the provision.

¹⁶ Based on those who participated in the research.

Mother, unaware – probably would use

Reasons for not taking up the provision

- 5.9 As outlined in Figure 1, only a small number of parents (three couples) said they would not use the provision. While all three couples recognised the potential benefits of ELC, they were happy to wait until their child turned 3 and felt they had no real need for childcare at this stage. None of the mothers was intending to work in the near future. Perhaps, in part, because they were couples (and, in two of three couples, neither was working), none of them talked about needing a break from looking after a 2 year old or needing time to get other things done. In other words, there were no strong 'push' factors.
- 5.10 Two couples had previously heard of the free ELC but decided not to use it. One mother was pregnant and not working and had only found out about the ELC provision when her child was 2 and a half years old. Her view was that she was happy to wait until her child was 3 before using ELC and had no plans to work until both her children were at nursery (aged 3 or 4) or school. She also raised concerns about how her child would have behaved if he had gone to nursery at 2 years old.

I'm worried about the nursery because he does socialise with adults quite a lot, so I'm just kind of scared in case he goes in and he is a bully.

Mother, aware – not using

- 5.11 The other couple who had rejected the ELC provision were both out of work and, as such, the mother felt they had less need to rely on other means of childcare. Further, she took her 2 year old to mother and toddlers' groups and felt he gained the benefit of socialising with other children there.

My thinking is I'm taking him to toddlers' [groups] so he's socialising and I don't work so I don't see why I should need to [use the provision]... He's still getting what he would get there in other places.

Mother, aware – not using

- 5.12 Another mother, again from a couple where neither was working, was previously unaware of the ELC provision but said that she did not think she would use it. Her older child had gone to nursery at 3 years old and she was happy to wait until then before sending her 2 year old. This would also allow her to spend more time with him while he was still young.

It's not really essential if I take that bit longer to do it.... He will have plenty of time to go to [nursery and] school, he's only wee once.

Mother, unaware – would not use

The benefits of free ELC

- 5.13 Parents identified a wide range of potential benefits of the provision, both for their child and themselves. The main benefits were thought to be those related to a child's development (including social skills, behaviour, language and learning) and the chance for parents to take some time off from their childcaring duties to catch up on other things. The benefits experienced by those who had used the provision were very much in line with the potential benefits identified by those who had not (yet) used it.

The benefits for children

- 5.14 The most important benefits of ELC perceived by parents were opportunities for the improvement of their child's social and language skills. It was a dominant view that ELC would provide the opportunity for their child to socialise with other children their own age, which would help improve their social skills: 'learning to share' was a common theme. This was particularly important for parents who did not have friends or family with young children.

Her speech really improved and so did her social skills as well, like playing with other kids like sharing and things like that, because obviously she didn't know how to share other than with me.

Mother, aware and using

I moved from England, so I don't have many friends, so it's just me and [my daughter]. I just thought it was great for her to have kids to play with and be able to socialise more, because it was all adults she was socialising with, my mum and her granny and her grandad, and there was never any kids to play with.

Mother, aware and using

- 5.15 The opportunity for children to develop their language skills was thought to be another key benefit of ELC. It was felt that being around others, in different social situations, would help their child learn to communicate more effectively. For parents who had used the provision, this was one of the most significant differences they had noticed in the child's development.

It gets them interacting with other kids. The language, their speech comes on and learning things, and nursery rhymes, [my daughter] was coming home and singing away to you. The advantages were that me and [my daughter] communicated better and we were singing away to things she had learned.

Mother, aware and using

[My daughter] definitely gained a lot from it, because you could just see like even with her speaking, her language development has just been amazing and she is so fluent when she speaks and I think

that's definitely helped in nursery, being around other kids her own age.

Mother, aware and using

- 5.16 There was a view that this was a particularly important benefit for children from larger families where there might be a tendency for other family members to finish the child's sentence for them – which impacted upon their speech development.

I think they do need an environment where there are other children. [My son's cousin] is a few months older than him and [my son's] speech is well behind his.

[My son] didn't get a word in with these guys that's why his was so bad when these two kept talking for him. But now that he is [three and] at nursery they can't get a word in.

Mother and father, unaware – probably would use

- 5.17 Parents also recognised the potential behavioural changes offered by ELC. It was felt that spending time in a nursery environment would have a positive impact upon their child's behaviour, such as getting used to routines. It would also allow them to spend time away from home and help lessen dependence on their parent(s).

It gets them to know that, knowing when you're getting dropped off you're still getting picked up, there is still somebody going to come and pick you up. It prepares them for interacting with people when you're not there, that you're not just always going to be there and rely on you the whole time.

Mother, aware and using

- 5.18 Other important, perceived benefits for children included the more general learning opportunities ELC provided. For example, at nursery children were regularly read to, which was felt to improve concentration, and given opportunities to try new activities and experiences, such as arts and crafts and outdoor activities, which they may not otherwise have had.

When I was learning with her she wouldn't have the concentration span, whereas she listens a lot more in nursery... I can sit and read her a full book now without her ducking away half way through it.

Mother, aware and using

Just even messing with the painting and all the rest of it. I'm not that great when they start pulling the paint out and flicking it all over the place, at least at the nursery you leave it to them to clean it up.

Benefits for parents

- 5.19 Overall, parents perceived the most important benefits of ELC to be those for children. However, several important benefits for parents were also raised, in particular, the time off it provided parents (to either take a break or catch up with chores etc.), or to work, train or study.
- 5.20 Being able to take a break from childcaring responsibilities was identified by parents as one of the main advantages of ELC. They appreciated the chance to take time off to relax and enjoy some 'peace and quiet'.

I got time to actually come home and have a coffee and think about things, and was able to get [doctors or hairdressers] appointments.

Mother, aware and using

- 5.21 The opportunity for time off was particularly appreciated by parents who had more than one child or other caring responsibilities. These parents reported that they were 'on their feet' for most of the day so any time off was highly valued.

I would probably find [the free ELC] quite useful, especially obviously since I'm caring for my partner as well, so I'm on the go constantly from the minute I get up to when I go to bed.

Mother, unaware – probably would use

I mean you don't realise how much even a couple of hours a day can do if you've got that child constantly, and usually for Kinship carers there is not a large support network round about them... That couple of hours makes a lot of difference in a week.

Kinship carer, unaware – probably would use

- 5.22 ELC also gave parents the opportunity to catch up on household chores, something that was felt to be challenging with young children in the house. Having this time to catch up on housework and other errands meant that, when their child was in the house, they were able to worry less and spend more time with them.
- 5.23 Another perceived benefit (particularly among those who had used the provision) was that it enabled parents to work, train or study. Parents who were not working highlighted the value of ELC in allowing them to look for work or to study. For those currently working part-time, ELC gave them the opportunity to increase their hours. While none of the mothers had intentions

of working full time, it was felt that the hours offered by the free ELC would at least enable them to look for part-time work.

I would up my hours... I think if he was in childcare I would [work] a wee bit more but I wouldn't do so much that I never seen him and somebody else was [raising my child].

Mother, unaware – probably would use

It was a big help for me just to get that college qualification. I've done quite a lot of courses as well while she has been in nursery, like my health and hygiene, health and safety, practical cooking courses. I've done quite a lot and got a lot of my [food hygiene certificates], so it's been helpful that way for me.

Mother, aware and using

Other benefits

- 5.24 For parents in particular circumstances, additional benefits of ELC were identified. Single, working mothers often relied on family members or friends to provide childcare. These parents felt that ELC lessened the burden upon others to provide childcare. This was particularly important for those with family members who had other responsibilities, such as work or other caring duties, or health issues.

If I'm working and there's nursery that day, it's giving [my mum] a break. She has my nephew was well, he is autistic, so my mum has him full time. It's hard for her.

Mother, unaware – probably would use

- 5.25 Spending time with other adults was seen as a benefit by those who did not have friends or family nearby. Along with the benefit of spending time with other children their age, ELC let them get used to spending time with other adults.

He is totally changed, he isn't the same boy as he was last year, that's because he went to the nursery. He wouldn't talk [to other adults]. So, nursery made him talk more with adults and all that as well, it wasn't just children.

Father, aware and using

- 5.26 Another benefit for parents new to an area was the ability to meet other parents. Along with a support network, which could provide advice about parenting and about services in the area, this allowed parents to make new friends and become more socially active.

When [my son] is at nursery now I've joined a couple of groups through the school and it's fab just to have adult time and speak to other adults.

Mother, aware and using

I actually went for a coffee this year with the mums that I would never have thought I would ever have.

Mother, aware and using

- 5.27 For parents with younger children, another benefit of ELC provision was the opportunity to spend time with these children while their 2 year old was at nursery.

[The ELC] is giving me a couple of hours' time out, like to spend with my son as well.

Mother, aware and using

Concerns about using free ELC

- 5.28 It was clear from speaking to parents, that the perceived benefits of the free ELC provision far outweighed any concerns they may have had. Indeed, in comparison to the benefits, only a small number of concerns were identified. These tended to be concerns about sending their child to ELC at a young age or the length and flexibility of the available hours.

- 5.29 One of the main concerns for parents was apprehension about sending their child to nursery at 2 years old. Parents worried that their child may not have been ready to spend time away from their family or be too young physically or mentally to be in a nursery environment. Some parents who had used the provision said they had these concerns before their child had attended.

I think just because 2 to me is young, she is still a baby at 2 and I thought, 'Oh no, I'm going to be handing my baby across'.

Mother, aware and using

- 5.30 However, this concern did not stop, nor would not have stopped, parents from using the provision. Parents, particularly first time mothers, acknowledged that they were probably being overprotective and didn't want to 'let go' of their child. These concerns were mitigated by reassurances from professionals, such as health visitors and family workers, about the benefits of ELC for 2 year olds and that staff at nurseries were trained to deal with children that age. Moreover, it was felt that the benefits outweighed any potential problems. Those who had used the provision for 2 year olds found their child adapted very quickly to the new environment without any problems.

I was a bit worried that way, but I got to actually stay with her for the first couple of days and after like the first full day, the first full day she sort of stuck to me, on the second day at the start she stuck to me and then she was off and on the third day I didn't see her for dust.

Mother, aware and using

The age of 2, being put into childcare, I think that is young. However, the good things overrun the bad things, well for me it did anyway.

Mother, aware and using

- 5.31 The other main concern identified by parents was that the provision of 600 hours per year, typically 15 hours per week or 3 hours per day, meant it would be difficult to find work within these hours without having to pay for additional childcare. Additionally, there was a view that the hours offered by most nurseries were inflexible, and that only offering half day sessions in either the morning or afternoon, rather than giving parents the option on how to split the 15 hours per week, meant further difficulties finding work. However, there was an opposing view that the hours *were* flexible enough.

If I was to work and he was in nursery [for just three hours], somebody would have to go and pick him up and stuff like that.

Mother, unaware – probably would use

It's only [morning] or the afternoon. So, like where can you go and work for three hours and then you've got to get back for your kids?

Mother, aware – not using

- 5.32 Other concerns were specific to those living in more remote or rural areas. Some parents thought there was a lack of childcare options in their local area and that travel costs were too expensive for them to be able to consider options further afield.

You've got to take them [to childcare] and there is a financial thing to that. You've got travel costs to get there... That is a big concern.

Kinship carer, unaware – probably would use

- 5.33 Parents were asked about a number of other potential concerns that people may have about childcare. They were first asked, unprompted, about any concerns they may have and then shown a series of statements on showcards, displaying potential concerns that people may have¹⁷. However,

¹⁷ It can be too long a day/too tiring for 2 year olds; It means young children spend too much time away from their parents/guardians; Two year-olds are better cared for in a home environment; The

other than the concerns discussed above, they generally disagreed or felt that the concerns listed did not apply to them

free hours offered are not long enough for parents/guardians to work; The start/finish times of childcare are not flexible; There is a lack of free childcare at different times of the day, at weekends or during school holidays; The places that offer free childcare are too far away from me; Travel costs are too expensive for me to take my child to childcare; The quality of the staff or management at childcare facilities is poor; It is confusing to know if my child qualifies for free childcare.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

- 6.1 Estimates provided by the local authority staff interviewed suggest uptake could be higher than indicated by the annual census taken in September 2015; and data capture needs to be improved to reflect changes in policy and to better meet user needs.
- 6.2 Notwithstanding issues relating to data, there is undoubtedly scope to increase uptake further and the research with parents suggests that it is lack of awareness that is the major barrier – rather than opposition to the concept, problems with the application process or dissatisfaction with the nature of the provision.
- 6.3 Our recommendations on improving the data, increasing awareness and effectively promoting the provision are discussed below.

Improving the data on eligibility, uptake and attendance

- 6.4 The research has confirmed the need to address data issues which would also enable more effective evaluations of what works, and what does not work, to increase uptake.
- 6.5 There is also a lack of data on whether uptake of the provision is sustained. Providers currently collect attendance data and this could be used to monitor attendance and discontinuation rates among eligible 2 year olds and assess the extent to which that is a problem.

Sharing data on eligibility

- 6.6 It was clear that the single biggest barrier for professionals in increasing uptake was not knowing who was eligible for the provision and not, therefore, being able to target their promotion of it as effectively as they could. We therefore recommend that, as a priority, the Scottish Government should work with DWP (and HMRC if required¹⁸) to allow data on eligibility to be shared with local authorities.
- 6.7 Local authorities do have data on who receives housing benefit so, as an interim or alternative measure, the extent to which receipt of housing benefit correlates with eligibility for free ELC could be assessed. If there is a high correlation, receipt of housing benefit could be used as a proxy and parents could be targetted accordingly.
- 6.8 Short of sharing data on eligibility, an alternative would be for DWP to send information to eligible parents on behalf of the Scottish Government or local authorities. However, given the importance of personal contact in encouraging uptake (discussed below), this is likely to be much less effective than data sharing.

¹⁸ HMRC data may be required in relation to parents' receipt of tax credits.

Promotion through personal contact and relationships

Who?

- 6.9 The research with both parents and professionals identified that personal contact and relationships – with health visitors and other professionals, and with friends who used free ELC – was key to promoting the provision and encouraging uptake.
- 6.10 Local authorities should therefore continue to focus their efforts on raising awareness among professionals likely to have contact with eligible families and supporting them to promote the provision effectively.
- 6.11 Health visitors are in the best position to promote the provision to eligible families. Although the timing of visits in the new universal pathway for health visiting is not absolutely ideal for this purpose, there is merit in ‘planting the seed’ well in advance about the availability and benefits of free ELC at the 13-15 month review.¹⁹ The 27-30 month review is somewhat too late, but could be used to catch parents who had not yet taken up the provision and give them and their children the opportunity to benefit from a few more months of free ELC. Other families will, of course, have more contact with health visitors and so there will be visits closer to 24 months at which to discuss the provision.
- 6.12 Other professionals and services who will have contact with eligible families and could be used to promote free ELC for 2 year olds include:
- early years workers
 - children and families social workers
 - nursery staff and primary staff (for those with older children)
 - play initiative staff
 - local groups/services (e.g. Bookbug and Play, Talk, Read)
 - local DWP offices.
- 6.13 In addition, parents who have taken up the offer can be effective ambassadors for it. Nursery staff could encourage them to let other parents know (through word of mouth and through social media) about the provision and how their 2 year old has benefited.

¹⁹ The 13 month vaccination programme also provides an opportunity for contact with most parents.

What messages?

- 6.14 Professionals emphasised the need for positive, non-stigmatising language in the promotion of free ELC: avoiding terms such as 'vulnerable' or 'disadvantaged'.
- 6.15 The research with parents suggested that two key aspects to focus on were the learning and developmental benefits for 2 year olds (particularly language development and the social aspects such as 'learning to share') and providing reassurances that 2 is not too young for ELC. Promotion materials could include case studies with parents talking about their experiences and saying, for example, 'I thought two was too young but...'
- 6.16 However, there is a balance to be struck between normalising the provision and promoting the benefits while at the same time making the eligibility criteria clear.
- 6.17 It is also worth clarifying to parents that they are not required to work and that they will not lose their entitlement if their circumstances change (e.g. if their income increases).
- 6.18 Finally, although the current number of hours was not generally thought to be too much for 2 year olds, it may become an issue when the entitlement increases to 1,140 hours a year – and at that stage it will be worth clarifying that it is not necessary to take up the full entitlement.

Appendix A

In-depth interviews with parents: discussion guide

DRIVERS AND BARRIERS TO ELC

INTRODUCTION (5 MINS)

- Introduce self, Ipsos MORI
- Thanks for taking part
- Duration of interview/group – it won't take any longer than one hour
- Explain that Ipsos MORI is an independent research company. We've been asked by the Scottish Government to speak to parents about their childcare arrangements and their views on the childcare available in their area for 2 year olds.
- As with any research we do, everything you say will be completely confidential. We'll write a report for the Scottish Government but we won't use your name or write anything that could identify you. And we won't tell anyone what you, as an individual, said.
- Recording – will be transcribed for research team's use only, securely stored and deleted after project.
- CHECK CONSENT TO RECORD
- Ground rules for pairs/groups – one at a time for recorder; moderator role – ensure cover everything and everyone gets chance to have a say.
- Any questions?

BACKGROUND ON PARTICIPANT'S CIRCUMSTANCES (5 MINS)

So to start with, I'd like to begin by learning a bit more about you and your family. Can you tell me a little bit about...

- **Who you currently live with?**
 - PROBE: Ages of all children in home
- **And are you working at the moment? [IF YES: And how many hours do you work a week?]**
- **As I mentioned, we're particularly interested in childcare for 2 year olds, so I'd now like to talk about you and [CHILD'S NAME] - can you tell me about a typical week in the life of you and [CHILD'S NAME]?**
 - PROBE: current formal and informal childcare arrangements; whether there is family nearby; partner/spouse's employment status
- **Over the next couple of years, as [CHILD'S NAME] gets older, how do you think your typical week will change? What will the main changes be?**
 - PROBE: any plans for / changes to childcare arrangements; finding work; living arrangements?

AWARENESS OF ELC ELIGIBILITY (10-15 MINS)

I'd now like to talk a bit about your thoughts on the types of childcare that are available for young children.

NOT AWARE OF FREE ELC

- **First of all, what do you know about the different types of childcare that are available in this area?**
 - PROBE: availability; easy/difficult to get a space; local authority or private nurseries, playgroups, childminders; cost; opinions on the different types available.
- **[IF NOT PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED] And does [CHILD'S NAME] attend any childcare at the moment?**
- **[IF ATTENDING OTHER CHILDCARE] Can you tell me a little bit more about the childcare [CHILD'S NAME] is going to just now?**
(DOUBLE CHECK THAT CHILD IS NOT RECEIVING FREE ELC PROVISION)
 - PROBE: cost; hours; location; how did you hear about it; what is good/bad about it, if anything?
- **Are you aware of any free childcare that [CHILD'S NAME] would be able to go to?**
 - PROBE: what have you heard about it, how did you hear about it, what do you understand about the provision (hours, location etc.)

SHOW PARTICIPANT SG ELC POSTER AND BRIEFLY EXPLAIN PROVISION OF ELC FOR ELIGIBLE 2 YEAR OLDS

- **Have you seen this poster anywhere before? Where? Have you heard anything about this before?**
 - PROBE IF POSTER HAS JOGGED SOME MEMORY OF IT : which aspects were you aware of / not aware of? Where have you heard about it?
- **What questions would you have after seeing poster?**
- **And what do you think about this?**
 - PROBE: is this something that you would use - why/why not? Any advantages / disadvantages for [CHILD'S NAME]? Any concerns about this? Would you have any other questions about this – what else would you like to know? Who do you think this would appeal to (if not them)?

- **More generally, how do you tend to find out about the things that are happening for young children (for example, mother and toddler groups, toddler classes) in your local area?**
 - PROBE: word of mouth, posters in GPs/other places, health professionals. Refer to any groups etc that were mentioned above when they were discussing what their typical week looks like and ask how they found out about them.
- **How much contact do you have with your health visitor or any other professionals who are involved with you and your family?**
- **And have any of these people ever talked to you about the types of childcare or other activities for young children that are available in your local area?**

AWARE OF FREE ELC BUT HAVE NOT TAKEN IT UP

- **First of all, what do you know about the different types of childcare that are available in this area?**
 - PROBE: availability; easy/difficult to get a space; local authority or private nurseries, playgroups, childminders; cost; opinions on the different types available.
- **And are you aware of any free childcare that [CHILD'S NAME] would be able to go to?**
 - [IF AWARE, PROBE: what have you heard about it, how did you hear about it, what do you understand about the provision (hours, location etc.)]

SHOW PARTICIPANT SG ELC POSTER AND BRIEFLY EXPLAIN PROVISION OF ELC FOR ELIGIBLE 2 YEAR OLDS

- **Have you seen this poster anywhere before? Where?**
 - PROBE: which aspects were you aware of / not aware of? What questions would you have after seeing poster? Who could you ask? Who do you think this would appeal to (if not them)?
- **What did you think about it when you first heard about it?**
 - Did you think it sounded like something that you would use - why/why not? Any advantages / disadvantages for [CHILD'S NAME]? Any concerns about it? Was there anything else you wanted to know?

- **When you heard about this provision of free childcare for two year olds, did you try to find out any more about it?**
 - IF NO PROBE: Why was that? Would you know who to ask if you did want to find out more?
 - IF YES PROBE: what did you try to find out more about – e.g. eligibility, availability of places, how to apply; how did you find out more about it - easy / difficult to find more information; did you get the information you needed?
- **And did you apply for a place?**
 - PROBE IF YES: how did you decide where to apply? how easy/difficult was application process; would anything have made it easier; did you have all the information you needed; how helpful were any staff at the childcare facility that you dealt with?
- **Most parents in Scotland have not taken up the offer of free childcare for 2 year olds, so we're interested to find out why that might be. Can you tell me some of the main reasons why you didn't take up the offer?**
 - IF SAY DON'T NEED IT, EXPLORE WHY NOT
 - PROBE FULLY: Any concerns about this - not suitable for child, too young for ELC, quality of childcare in local area; would rather look after child myself; don't know how to apply; available hours/time of day childcare offered not suitable; travel costs/difficulties; costs; type of childcare offered; offering of 600 hrs not enough; stigma?
- **What, if anything, would have encouraged you to take up the offer?**
 - PROBE IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED: More flexible hours; more hours; location; better facilities; easier to apply?
- **Do you think there would be any advantages / disadvantages for [CHILD'S NAME] if they attended the childcare?**
 - PROBE BRIEFLY: learning and social skills; spending time with other children; different environment, toys, play, care, practical help with feeding, toilet training, facilities etc.
- **Will you be sending [CHILD'S NAME] to nursery or another type of childcare when they are three or four years old?**

HAVE TAKEN UP FREE ELC

- **First of all, what do you know about the different types of childcare that are available in this area?**
 - PROBE: availability; easy/difficult to get a space; local authority or private nurseries, playgroups, childminders; cost; opinions on the different types available
- **I believe you are currently taking up the offer of free childcare for two year olds. Can you tell me how you first became aware of it?**
 - PROBE: Where/what/who; how useful was information?
 - Did you see or hear any (other) adverts about it, or hear anyone else talk about it? PROMPT: posters, radio, newspapers, website, GP, health visitor

SHOW PARTICIPANT SG ELC POSTER

- **Have you seen this poster anywhere before? Where?**
 - PROBE: What questions would you have after seeing poster?
- **Can you remember what your first thoughts were when you heard about it?**
 - PROBE: any advantages and disadvantages (for [CHILD'S NAME], for them, for their partner, siblings, others); any concerns?
- **When you first heard about it, did you try to find out any more?**
 - IF YES PROBE: what did you try to find out more about – e.g. eligibility, availability of places, how to apply; how did you find out more about it - easy / difficult to find more information; did you get the information you needed?
 - IF NO PROBE: why was that? Was that because you felt you had enough information already or because you weren't sure how to find out more?
- **And what were some of the main reasons you took up the offer?**
 - PROBE: Benefits for child (education, play, social); siblings; friends were doing it; time off – e.g. to look for work; look for courses, training, education, look after other family; housework; meet friends/family; time for other support, e.g family, parenting, employment and training support; relax.
- **[IF NOT PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED] And can you tell me how you went about finding and choosing a nursery/provider?**
 - PROBE: what sources of information did you use; how much choice was there; how did you decide which one to choose; did you ask anyone else for advice?

- **How did you find the process of applying for a place?**
 - PROBE: easy/difficult; did you have all the information you needed; did you need any support/help from anyone; would anything have made it easier; how helpful were any staff at the childcare facility that you dealt with?

PERCEPTIONS OF BENEFITS (10-15 MINS)

ASK ALL

I now going to ask a few questions about the potential benefits of childcare.

- **In general, what do you think the benefits of childcare are/might be?**
 - UNPROMPTED AT START THEN PROBE ON GENERAL BENEFITS FOR: two year-olds, parents, siblings, is there anyone else who might benefit?
- IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED: **And what do you think the benefits are/might be for your two year-old? For yourself? For your partner? For your other children? For others?**
- IF TAKEN UP FREE ELC: **Have there been any unexpected benefits as a result of [CHILD'S NAME] attending childcare?**
- **I'm going to read out some things that people sometimes say are potential benefits of childcare for 2 year olds – though this doesn't necessarily mean they are true. Can you tell me which of these you think are the most important and those that are the least important to you:**

READ OUT THE FOLLOWING CARDS AND SORT INTO THREE PILES – MOST IMPORTANT, LEAST IMPORTANT, NEITHER/NOR:

- *It can help young children improve their language and learning skills*
- *It can help improve young children's social skills*
- *It can help improve young children's behaviour*
- *It allows young children to spend time with other children*
- *It allows young children to spend time with other adults*
- *It helps better prepare young children for school, when the time comes*
- *It gives young children the opportunity to use different toys, books and outdoor equipment*
- *It gives young children the opportunity to try new activities and experiences*
- *It allows parents to work, train or study*
- *It allows parents to work more hours*
- *It allows parents to get access to other support services, such as a parenting class*
- *It allows parents to access support with finding a job or support to get on a course*
- *It gives parents a break*
- *It reduces the burden on other family members or friends who may provide childcare*
- *It gives parents a chance to meet other parents in the area*
- *It gives parents the time to do household chores*

- *It gives parents time to spend with their other children*
 - PROBE: why important/not important; would free ELC help achieve this in general/for you/your child
- **Can you think of any other benefits of childcare: In general? For [CHILD'S NAME]? For you?**

PERCEPTIONS OF DISADVANTAGES (10-15 MINS)

And now I'm going to ask some questions about the potential problems of childcare.

- **So, in general, what do you think some of the problems of childcare are/might be?**
 - UNPROMPTED AT START THEN PROBE ON GENERAL PROBLEMS FOR: two year-olds, parents, siblings, others
- IF HAVE NOT ALREADY MENTIONED: **And what do you think the problems might be for your two year-old? For yourself? For your partner? For your other children? For others?**
- IF TAKEN UP FREE ELC: **Have there been any unexpected problems that have happened as a result of [CHILD'S NAME] attending childcare?**
- **So again, like we did for the benefits, I'm going to read out some things that people sometimes say are potential problems of childcare – though this doesn't necessarily mean they are true. Can you tell me which of these you think are the biggest problems and those that are less of a problem for you in your local area:**

READ OUT THE FOLLOWING CARDS AND SORT INTO THREE PILES – BIGGEST PROBLEMS, NOT A PROBLEM, NEITHER/NOR:

- *It can be too long a day/too tiring for 2 year olds*
- *It means young children spend too much time away from their parents/guardians*
- *Two year-olds are better cared for in a home environment*
- *The free hours offered are not long enough for parents/guardians to work*
- *The start/finish times of childcare are not flexible*
- *There is a lack of free childcare at different times of the day, at weekends or during school holidays*
- *The places that offer free childcare are too far away from me*
- *Travel costs are too expensive for me to take my child to childcare*
- *The quality of the staff or management at childcare facilities is poor*
- *It is confusing to know if my child qualifies for free childcare*
 - PROBE: why a problem
- **What other concerns, if any, do you have about childcare: In general? For [CHILD'S NAME]? For you?**
- **What do you think about the fact that this free childcare is only available to some two year-olds?**

- PROBE: why do you think this is; does it make you more or less likely to want to take it up; does it create any problems; do they think there would be any 'stigma' attached to going (because it is mainly available to people who are unemployed or on low incomes)

UPTAKE OF FREE ELC (5 MINS)

Finally, I'd like to ask you a few things about the uptake of free childcare for two year-olds in Scotland and how you think it could be improved, if at all.

- **So far the uptake of free childcare for two year olds in Scotland has been much lower than expected – why do you think this is?**
 - PROBE: lack of awareness; lack of nurseries/facilities; stigma; parents do not want to use childcare; inflexible times/hours; not enough hours
- **What do you think would encourage more parents and guardians to take up the free childcare entitlement of two year olds?**
 - PROBE: improved advertising; more/improved nurseries/facilities; more flexible times/hours; increased eligibility; increased hours; improve application process
- **IF NOT TAKEN UP FREE ELC: What would make the biggest difference to you, personally?**
- **And what do you think would be the best ways to let parents and guardians know about the free childcare entitlement for two year-olds?**
 - PROBE: TV, radio, posters on buses, social media, doctor's office etc; clarity/level of information provided.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE (IF TIME)

- **So to finish off, just for fun, what would the ideal nursery or Early Learning Centre look like to you?**
 - PROBE: where would it be, what facilities, what age children, what hours, what staff, what other features?

CLOSE

That's all of the questions I wanted to ask you today. Before we finish off, is there anything else you would like to say or ask that we haven't covered?

THANK AND CLOSE.

Appendix B

In-depth interviews with stakeholders: discussion guide

DRIVERS AND BARRIERS TO ELC

Discussion guide for local stakeholders – V1

INTRODUCTION (5 MINS)

- Introduce self, Ipsos MORI
- Thanks for taking part
- Duration of interview – around 45 minutes
- Explain that Ipsos MORI is an independent research company. We've been commissioned by the Scottish Government to undertake research to explore the drivers and barriers to the uptake of free ELC for 2 year olds.
- Explain anonymity and the limits to this

- Recording – will be transcribed for research team's use only, securely stored and deleted after project.
- CHECK CONSENT TO RECORD
- Any questions?

BACKGROUND ON THEIR ROLE AND INVOLVMENT IN ELC FOR 2 YEAR OLDS (10 MINS)

Could you briefly tell me a little bit about your background and your current role?

And in relation to the introduction and implementation of free ELC for certain 2 year olds, what has your role/involvement been?

Overall, how do you feel the initiative has gone in your area?

PROBE: What have been the main challenges?

What has worked well?

How has the scheme been promoted in your area?

PROBE Who has been involved?

How do you advertise?

Where do people get information?

How does your application process work?

PROBE: Is there support with registering or applying?

DATA ON LEVELS OF UPTAKE (5 MINS)

Do you know what the level of uptake has been in your LA and how that compares with other areas? GIVE THEM THE FIGURES WE HAVE IF THEY DON'T KNOW/HAVE CONFLICTING INFORMATION

Is this higher or lower than you expected?

Do you know if this has changed much over time or what the most recent figures are?

Do you know which particular groups of parents are taking it up/not taking it up?

PROMPT: different localities? Different circumstances (e.g. working parents)? Single parents? Those with other children? Where do you get your information on uptake?

Where do you get your data on uptake from?

PROBE: do you use national data published by the SG or your own local data?,

Are you confident in the accuracy of your local data?

IF NO: do you know if any steps have been taken to improve it? How could it be improved?

What (further) data on uptake would you find most useful?

BARRIERS TO UPTAKE (10 MINS)

What do you think the main barriers to uptake are?

PROBE:

- awareness
- application process
- nature of the provision
- practical/logistical issues

Are there different barriers among different groups of parents?

Are there any myths/misunderstandings that need to be overcome?

What questions and concerns do parents raise when they first hear about it?

If parents don't take up the offer having found out a bit about it – do you know why this is?

GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES (10 MINS)

What do you think has worked well in your area in relation encouraging uptake?

PROBE awareness
 application process
 nature of the provision
 overcoming practical/logistical issues

What lessons have you learned over time?

Have you had to adapt your marketing approach/targeting strategy/models of delivery due to lower than expected uptake?

PROBE: what did you change and why?

Is there anything that was tried that didn't work well?

Have you worked with any other partners or agencies locally?

Are you aware of anything that's been done in other LAs that's worked well? In England?

Has there been any unintended consequences of the scheme that you are aware of?

PROBE: effects on other providers, services, etc?

INCREASING UPTAKE (10 MINS)

What steps do you think would be most effective in increasing uptake?

PROBE awareness
 application process
 nature of the provision
 overcoming practical/logistical issues

What do you think should be the priority?

Who needs to be involved?

What could be done at a Scotland-wide level?

What support would help

PROBE at a national level
 at a local level

Is there anything else you would like to say?

THANK AND CLOSE

How to access background or source data

The data collected for this social research publication may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact socialresearch@gov.scot for further information.



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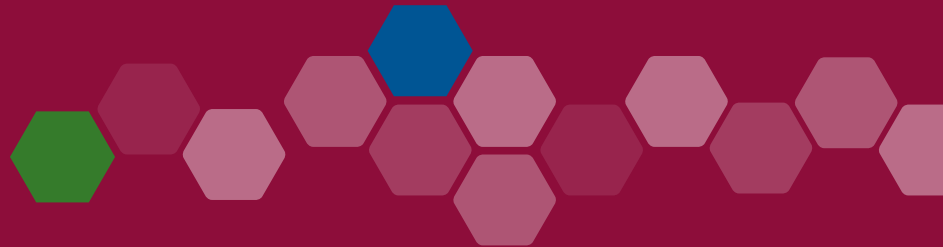
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