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# Alignment of the Childcare Offer for Wales to the Foundation Phase

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## Alignment of the Childcare Offer Wales to the Foundation Phase

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In conjunction with  
NatCen Social Research

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

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## Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
Childcare Offer	30 hours a week of government-funded early education and childcare for working parents of three- and four-year-olds, for up to 48 weeks of the year.
CIW	Care Inspectorate Wales – the independent regulator of social care and childcare in Wales.
CSA	Childcare Sufficiency Assessment – carried out every five years by local authorities to identify gaps in childcare provision.
Cylch meithrin	A cylch meithrin is a Welsh-medium playgroup (plural: cylchoedd)
Cwlwm	Childcare Wales Learning and Working Mutually – a consortium of the five main childcare organisations in Wales.
EILA	Early Implementer Local Authority.
Flying Start	Welsh Government programme providing support in Wales' most deprived communities for children (0-3 years) and their families.
Foundation Phase	The developmental curriculum for all three to seven-year-olds in Wales.
FPN	Foundation Phase Nursery - a minimum of 10 hours a week of funded early education for three and four-year-olds during term time, from the term following a child's third birthday. Also referred to as early education entitlement and funded early education.
Maintained provider	A local authority funded nursery, they can be standalone nursery schools or attached to a primary or infant school.
NDNA	National Day Nurseries Association.
Non-maintained provider	A childcare setting operated by a private, voluntary, or independent childcare provider.
PACEY	Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual School Census.
Rising Threes and Rising Fours	Children who are going to turn three at some point in that school year (sometimes referred to as FPN1). Rising Fours are children who will turn four at some point in that school year (FPN2).

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report is one of three additional papers produced alongside the main evaluation report of the early implementation (first 12 months) of the Childcare Offer in Wales, conducted by Arad Research and NatCen Social Research between July 2017 and October 2018.
- 1.2 This report focuses on the alignment of the funded childcare element of the Offer to the Foundation Phase element of the Offer. The Foundation Phase is the developmental curriculum for all three to seven-year-olds in Wales delivered in maintained and funded non-maintained settings. It is designed to provide a play-based approach to teaching and learning. 'It encourages children to be creative, imaginative and to have fun while making learning more effective'.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.3 Foundation Phase Nursery (FPN) is defined as the part-time education for three and four-year-olds before entering compulsory education at the age of five. It is the provision of FPN, alongside the provision of funded childcare, that makes up the 30-hour Childcare Offer. Local authorities are required to provide FPN to all children from the term after the child's third birthday until they start full-time primary school education. Therefore, some children will receive five terms, some four terms and some three terms of FPN, depending on when they were born.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.4 The evaluation focussed on the influence that the introduction of the childcare element of the Offer might have on current FPN delivery and whether the current delivery of the FPN element would influence the implementation of the childcare element of the Offer. The aim was not to evaluate the Foundation Phase as this has been evaluated previously.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.5 Specific themes explored as part of the evaluation included:
- whether childcare providers have substituted the delivery of FPN in favour of delivering funded childcare places;

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government (2018) [How is my child doing in the Foundation Phase? A guide for parents](#). p. 3. [Accessed 31 October 2018]

<sup>2</sup> Welsh Government (2018) [Foundation Phase provision for three- and four- year olds: Guidance for local authorities](#). p. 2. [Accessed 31 October 2018]

<sup>3</sup> [Foundation Phase evaluation reports](#) and [An independent stocktake of the Foundation Phase in Wales](#) (2014) [Accessed 31 October 2018]



- whether parents were foregoing their child's FPN place in order to access funded childcare; or
- whether children were not accessing the funded childcare element of the Offer and only accessing the FPN element.

- 1.6 The views of childcare settings on delivering the FPN and/or the childcare element of the Offer, and challenges that have emerged regarding parental choice and childcare are also discussed.
- 1.7 This report is informed by desk-based research, interviews with childcare providers, parents and sector stakeholder organisations (see Annex A for details), as conducted to inform the evaluation of the early implementation of the Offer in Wales. The report discusses potential outputs, outcomes and impact of the childcare element of the Offer on the FPN element.
- 1.8 The rest of this section provides the background, with an overview of the Offer and of Foundation Phase delivery across the seven early implementer local authorities (EILAs).
- 1.9 Section 2 presents an overview of the methodology and highlights the areas investigated to ensure a full understanding of the alignment of the childcare element of the Offer on FPN.
- 1.10 Section 3 discusses the evaluation findings. The alignment of the childcare element of the Offer to FPN, childcare providers' views on the potential for changes in the delivery of FPN and the impact of the funded childcare on parental choice are discussed.
- 1.11 Section 4 presents the conclusions and Section 5 proposes recommendations for consideration as the Childcare Offer is implemented across Wales.

### **The Childcare Offer**

- 1.12 The Welsh Government has committed to provide a total of 30 hours a week of government-funded early education and childcare during term time and 30 hours a week of childcare for nine of the 13 weeks of school holidays.

- 1.13 During school term time, children supported by the Offer are entitled to at least 10 hours of FPN and up to 20 hours of funded childcare. The combination of the FPN and funded childcare provision, makes up the 30 hours of funded education and childcare included in the Offer.
- 1.14 The childcare element of the Offer targets three- and four-year-old children whose parents earn on average a weekly minimum equivalent to, or more than, 16 hours at the national minimum wage or national living wage.
- 1.15 The ratio of FPN to childcare funded hours available to eligible children is dependent on the number of FPN hours already provided in each area. The hours of FPN provision available varies between local authorities (and in some cases between FPN providers within the same local authority). As such, the number of childcare hours available to make up the 30 hours of the Offer also varies across and within local authorities.
- 1.16 The intended outcomes of the Offer include:
- Parents have more employment choices.
  - Parents have increased disposable income.
  - Parents can make an informed choice about using formal childcare.
  - Childcare sector grows in response to increased demand and take-up of formal childcare.
- 1.17 Annex B provides further detail on the outputs and outcomes for the Offer
- 1.18 Local authorities in Wales are required to provide a minimum of 10 hours a week of funded FPN for all three- and four-year-old children during term time.
- 1.19 Ensuring the childcare element of the Offer complements the FPN element was identified as a key critical success factor for the Offer's delivery.
- 1.20 Since September 2017 the Childcare Offer has been available in the seven early implementer local authorities (EILAs), which included all, or part of, the following local authorities;
- Anglesey and Gwynedd (joint working)
  - Blaenau Gwent
  - Caerphilly

- Flintshire
- Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Swansea.

1.21 Applications for the funding of childcare places under the Offer began in June 2017, for children to take up places from September 2017. The number of children who accessed the Offer during the first year of roll out across the seven EILAs was 4,101.<sup>4</sup> The whole of Blaenau Gwent local authority was included from the outset. Initially, the Offer was available in parts of the other authorities, with additional areas added to expand the availability of the Offer to more children in November 2017 and January 2018.

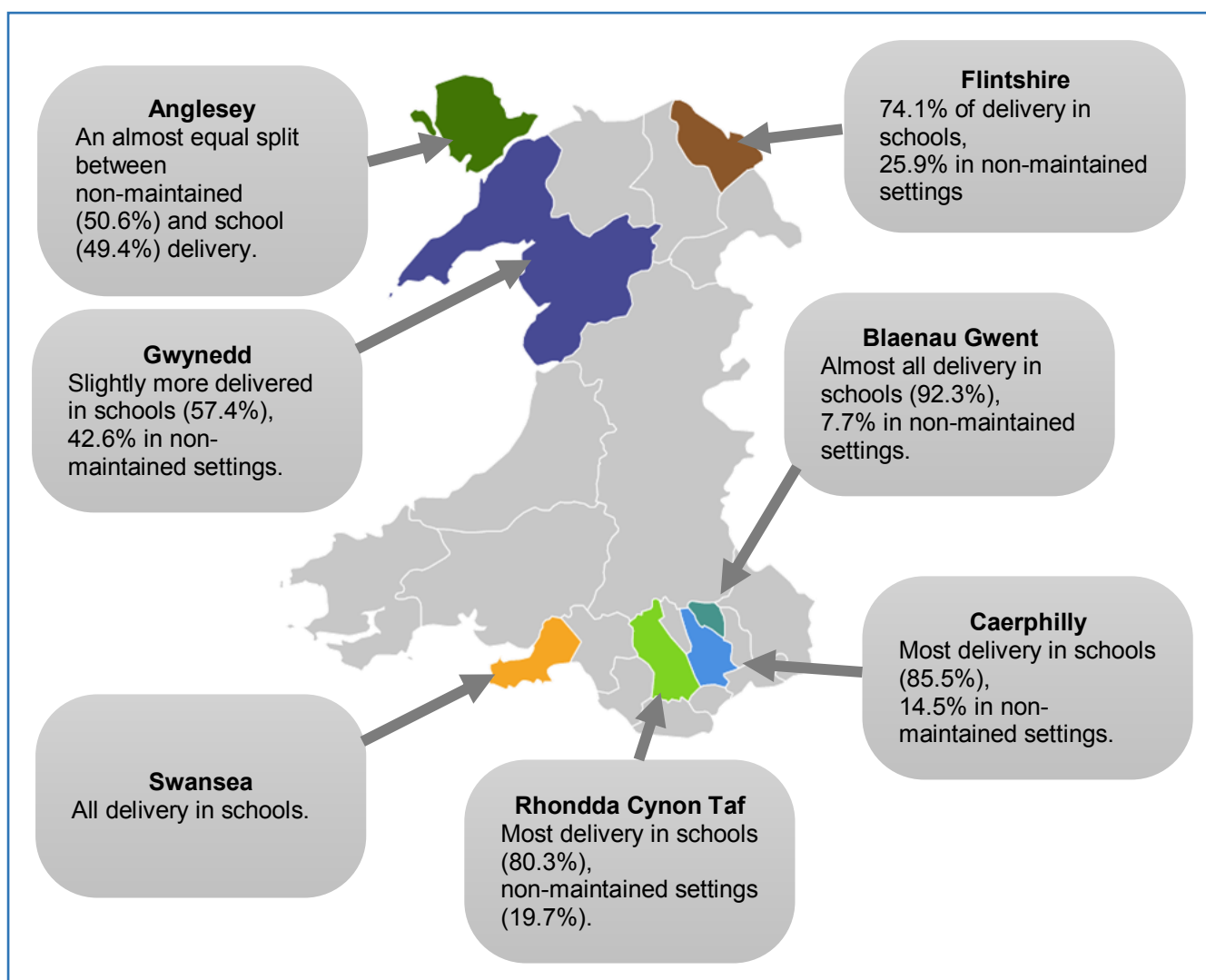
#### **Current FPN delivery in the EILAs**

1.22 It is important to clarify the current delivery of FPN across the seven local authorities engaged in the early implementation of the Offer. Figure 1.1 presents the FPN delivery models for each EILA. Table 1.1 contains further detail of the characteristics of FPN delivery for each of these EILAs, including the hourly rate paid for non-maintained providers to deliver FPN.

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<sup>4</sup> Welsh Government monitoring data.

**Figure 1.1. Delivery of Foundation Phase Nursery Provision across the early implementer local authorities (EILAs), (2016-17).**



Source: 2017 Child Sufficiency Assessments. Map created in Piktochart

1.23 Figure 1.1 shows the variation in the current delivery of FPN for three and four-year-olds across Wales, with there being a noticeable difference between north and south Wales. For instance, non-maintained settings in Anglesey and Gwynedd make up almost half of the delivery for the Foundation Phase, with just over a quarter in non-maintained settings in Flintshire. Whereas in south Wales non-maintained settings deliver a much smaller proportion; ranging from Rhondda Cynon Taf with just under a fifth of provision to Swansea where all FPN provision is delivered in schools.

**Table 1.1. Foundation Phase delivery across EILAs**

<b>EILA</b>	<b>Number of Non-Maintained settings*</b>	<b>Number of Maintained settings*</b>	<b>Total number of settings offering Foundation Phase</b>	<b>Average hourly Foundation Phase rate for non-maintained providers**</b>
Anglesey and Gwynedd	Anglesey – 32 Meithrin and 10 playgroups Gwynedd – 62 Meithrin; 1 playgroup; 3 full day care	Anglesey – 41  Gwynedd – 89	238	Anglesey - £2.10 Gwynedd - £1.49
Blaenau Gwent	2	24	26	£3.43
Caerphilly	12	71	83	£4.24
Flintshire	60 (22 day care and 38 sessional)	21	81	£2.92
Rhondda Cynon Taf	25 (6 day care and 19 sessional)	102	127	£5.00
Swansea		79	79	No non-maintained providers
<b>Total</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>427</b>	<b>634</b>	

Sources: \*Childcare Sufficiency Assessments (2017).

\*\*Cwlwm (2018) Local authority funding to Foundation Phase non-maintained providers<sup>5</sup>

- 1.24 Funding for the Foundation Phase is drawn from the block funding allocated to local authorities. Individual local authorities then determine the pay awarded to FPN providers.
- 1.25 Data is limited but suggests that the hourly rate paid to FPN providers varies from £2.50 to £4.47 an hour per child across local authorities, with a median of £3.00. Also, some pay a different rate to maintained and non-maintained settings.<sup>6</sup>
- 1.26 However, FPN funding is not necessarily paid at an hourly rate and a range of methods are used to determine the payment. For example, a flat rate per week per

<sup>5</sup> Cwlwm (2018) [Local authority funding to Foundation Phase non-maintained providers](#). Additional material presented to the Children, Young People and Education Committee, 28 June 2018. (item 3.3)

<sup>6</sup> [Note from the Cabinet Secretary for Education to the Children, Young People and Education Committee](#), provider in a letter dated 28 June 2018, (Evidence number FI CCF 07).

child, a flat rate per child per term, funding of staff to meet the required ratios, or funding for a set number of places.<sup>7</sup>

- 1.27 The Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC)<sup>8</sup> reports the registered number of FPN pupils in January of each year. This data suggests that the take-up of FPN is very high (89 per cent and 98 per cent of three- and four-year-olds respectively). When applying for the funded childcare element of the Offer, parents are asked whether their child is accessing FPN or whether they intend for their child to access FPN. Monitoring data suggests that FPN attendance amongst those taking up the Offer is lower than the registered number of FPN pupils recorded on PLASC; between 28 per cent and 89 per cent across three early implementer local authorities in year one of the Offer (data not available for all EILAs). This difference may be explained by some parents accessing the Offer, not fully understanding, or being aware of what FPN is and therefore not completing the registration forms, used to inform the monitoring data, correctly.
- 1.28 Annex C includes further information on the delivery of FPN across the EILAs, along with information about levels of uptake informed by each EILA's 2017 Childcare Sufficiency Assessments (CSAs).

### **Flexibility Pilots**

- 1.29 In December 2016 the Welsh Government published an evaluation of FPN flexibility pilots.<sup>9</sup> The aims of the Flexibility Pilots were to:
- i. Test the flexibility options across the Foundation Phase in the maintained and non-maintained funded settings;
  - ii. Identify issues that may surface for local authorities and settings as a result of providing or trying to provide greater flexibility;

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<sup>7</sup> Children, Young People and Education Committee (2018) [Childcare Bill, further information requested by committee.](#) [Accessed 22 October 2018]

<sup>7</sup> [PLASC is an electronic collection of pupil and school level data provided by all maintained sector primary, middle, secondary, nursery and special schools in January each year.](#) [Accessed 23 October 2018]

<sup>8</sup> Welsh Government (2016) [Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilot Scheme : Final Report 2016.](#)

iii. Consider how those issues can be addressed through low-cost/no cost solutions;

iv. Gain a better understanding of whether increased flexibility makes a difference to parent's ability to access the Foundation Phase for their child.

1.30 The independent evaluation concluded that there is a need to carefully consider who benefits from increased flexibility. It notes that increased flexibility for parents may potentially increase pressure on school staff and may potentially negatively impact on children. Whilst many of the forms of flexibility were felt to be working very well, and there was very little evidence of any negative impact on children, it is vital that future implementation of flexible provision is sensitive to these issues.<sup>10</sup> The Childcare Offer evaluation findings support this (see main evaluation report of the Childcare Offer for Wales for further detail).

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<sup>10</sup> Welsh Government (2016) [Evaluation of the Foundation Phase Flexibility Pilot Scheme](#) : Final Report 2016

## 2. Methodology

2.1 A mixed methods approach was undertaken to gather feedback about the alignment of the funded childcare element of the Offer to the Foundation Phase element of the Offer. The monitoring and administrative data submitted to the Welsh Government by each EILA were examined and the range of fieldwork outlined in Table 2.1 undertaken.

**Table 2.1. Fieldwork informing the alignment of the Childcare Offer for Wales to the Foundation Phase**

Participant	Method	Number of respondents	When
Welsh Government Officials	Telephone and face-to-face interviews	11	Throughout the evaluation period
All EILA Childcare Offer team representatives	Face-to-face interviews	1-4 staff in each EILA; 18 interviews	Autumn 2017; Early 2018 and September 2018
Key stakeholder organisations*	Telephone and face-to-face interviews	14	July to September 2018
Participating Childcare providers	Telephone interviews	150	March to September 2018
Participating parents	Online survey	555	May 2018
Participating parents	Telephone interviews	36	August/September 2018
Non-participating parents	Telephone interviews	21	August/September 2018

Note: further information on the methodology can be found in the main evaluation report's methodology section.

\*Annex A contains the list of stakeholders interviewed.

### Logic framework

2.2 The logic framework (Annex D) outlines the evaluation questions and the sources of evidence used to assess the extent to which activities aimed at aligning funded childcare with FPN influenced the outputs and outcomes achieved.



### **3. Findings**

#### **Current FPN provision**

- 3.1 A quarter of the childcare providers interviewed, that are delivering the childcare element of the Offer, are also currently funded to deliver FPN.
- 3.2 Many stakeholders and EILA Offer teams commented that in their view, although the legislative bases for Childcare and Education are different, further joint working and understanding between the two, within the Welsh Government and local authorities, would be beneficial; particularly in respect to aligning the FPN and childcare elements of the Offer. Progress in this direction has already been achieved, including the appointment of an Alignment Officer within the Welsh Government FPN team during the roll out of the Offer. The views expressed by stakeholders and EILA Offer teams suggest that progress towards improved alignment of this nature may need to continue in order to encourage more joint working practices between early education and childcare providers.
- 3.3 Parents' understanding of how the childcare element of the Offer and FPN work together appears mixed. For example, one parent participating in the Offer noted that she 'wasn't sure how it [the Offer] worked with the Foundation Phase'. Whereas another commented that 'it was clear that the offer was made up of the Foundation Phase and childcare. However, this parent was also of the view that the allocation between the two elements could be clearer e.g. 'they could say there is 12.5 hours in nursery and 17.5 of childcare under the Offer'. However, it is noted that a universal communication and marketing campaign across Wales, which includes specific hours for each element of the Offer would not be possible as the hours of FPN vary between each local authority. Yet there is potential for individual local authorities to ensure the split of hours is clear for parents to understand.
- 3.4 None of EILAs reported that they had observed any changes in the number of children accessing FPN since the introduction of the Offer, this was supported by Welsh Government officials. However, settings are not required to take a register of FPN attendance. As a result, although local authorities know how many children are registered to access FPN, they do not know how many hours or days of FPN provision children have attended.

- 3.5 In some local authorities, FPN is only offered via maintained settings. Some day care childcare providers, and a number of childminders interviewed who were located in these local authorities, reported that they would welcome the opportunity to deliver FPN provision but were unable to do so.
- 3.6 Individual local authorities determine whether funded FPN is provided by the maintained or non-maintained sector or by a combination of both. However, a number of childminders in local authority areas where maintained and non-maintained settings can deliver FPN were under the impression that they could not deliver FPN. This appears to reflect a misconception amongst childcare providers, as the delivery of FPN in a non-maintained setting, includes day nurseries, playgroups, cylchoedd meithrin and childminders, as this ensures flexibility and accessibility for all parents.<sup>11</sup>
- 3.7 Nevertheless, several childminders and stakeholders commented that with the current situation of childminders tending not to deliver FPN, all children accessing the Offer with a childminder must go to another setting in order to FPN. As a result, childminders do not necessarily view the Offer as a strong basis for their future sustainability as, in many cases they only benefit from having children supported by the Offer with them for half of the day i.e. to access the childcare strand of the Offer. Younger fee-paying children on the other hand are more likely to be with them for a whole day and are therefore often considered by childminders to be more commercially viable than older, Offer-funded children who are only with them for half a day. PACEY also noted that many childminders would welcome the opportunity to deliver FPN as it is seen as means by which to provide more sustainability for their business and offers parents the ability to access FPN and childcare at the same setting.
- 3.8 Childcare providers, who are not registered to deliver FPN but look after children accessing the FPN, often need to take these children from their setting to the FPN setting and collect them later and return to the childcare setting (providing

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<sup>11</sup> Welsh Government (2018) [Foundation Phase provision for three- and four- year olds: Guidance for local authorities](#). p. 4. [Accessed 31 October 2018]

wraparound care). Two-thirds of the parents interviewed noted that their child attended a different setting to access FPN. The logistics of this can be difficult; childcare providers may need access to a vehicle and suitably qualified staff. If a childminder operates alone and has other younger children in their care for full days, transporting some children in vehicles or on foot can be difficult. These logistical challenges can have an influence on parental choice, as parents may wish to access a provider that can deliver the childcare element of the Offer and FPN at the same setting, this issue is discussed further in section 3.24.

- 3.9 A number of childcare providers have always offered a wraparound service for parents, picking up and dropping off children at other settings in order to access FPN. Childcare providers commented on already existing relationships with schools to provide this wraparound service. However, one EILA Offer team and childcare provider noted that one maintained provider, alternated between delivering morning and afternoon FPN sessions on a termly basis. This created difficulties for childcare providers who were offering wraparound care for children accessing this FPN provision. Other childcare providers noted that they provide wraparound care for children accessing FPN during lunch times. This can include children who access childcare with them in the morning and FPN at another setting in the afternoon; children who access FPN at another setting in the morning and childcare with them in the afternoon as well as children who only require wraparound care during lunch time before or after their FPN provision. These providers noted that maintaining staffing ratios during these 'bottleneck' periods can be challenging and at times face the risk of exceeding the registered number of children in their care for short periods of time. One provider noted that this was a key issue they had to consider when making decisions relating to whether or not to expand their childcare provision.

## **Funding**

- 3.10 In most cases, providers receive a higher hourly rate to deliver childcare funded through the Offer than they do to deliver funded FPN provision. A concern raised by many stakeholders at the outset was that this difference in funding rates would encourage some non-maintained providers, who currently deliver FPN and

childcare at the same setting, to be incentivised to substitute their current provision of FPN with additional childcare places funded by the Offer. Although some EILAs reported that providers have discussed the possibility of withdrawing from delivering the FPN, this does not appear to have happened to yet.

- 3.11 These differences in funding rates to deliver FPN and childcare funded by the Offer has led to some calls for greater parity between the funding rates paid. A recent survey by the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) reported 97 per cent of nurseries thought the FPN rate should be the same as the rate for the childcare element of the Childcare Offer.<sup>12</sup> The average hourly rate received for FPN was reported to be £3.08.<sup>13</sup>
- 3.12 Emerging anecdotal evidence also suggests that some providers in Flying Start areas are considering relinquishing their provision of Flying Start funded childcare places in order to release spaces for Childcare Offer supported children. This seems to be driven by commercial viability. The differences in the local rates paid to deliver childcare supported through Flying Start and childcare supported by the Offer is not as wide as the differences in the rate of pay between FPN and the childcare element of the Offer. Although Flying Start and the Childcare Offer deliver similar provision they are directed towards children of different ages. However, more staff members are needed to care for two-year-olds compared to three and four-year-olds, due to the different minimum ratios. This results in higher per child costs to deliver childcare to under threes, and it is this ratio that influences commercial viability decisions for some providers currently delivering both Flying Start and the Offer.

### **Changes to provision**

- 3.13 None of the childcare providers interviewed had substituted FPN places for funded childcare to date. Six non-maintained childcare providers reported that were

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<sup>12</sup> NDNA (2018) [Nursery Survey Wales](#). p. 4. The survey received 122 responses from the Welsh childcare sector.

<sup>13</sup> NDNA (2018) [Nursery Survey Wales](#). p. 8.

considering changing their mix of provision in the future possibly towards no longer offering FPN provision.

‘More [parents] are choosing to send children to school and use wraparound with us. We are seriously thinking of dropping Education provider status.’ (Full day care provider)

- 3.14 In interviews with EILA Offer teams, one EILA Offer team reported that six of their non-maintained settings had decided to only deliver the childcare element of the Offer. Due to contractual obligations with the local authority, such changes will take time to implement. Another EILA Offer team reported that although they had expected some non-maintained providers to move away from FPN, not only has this not happened to date, but they have had a few new non-maintained providers registering to deliver FPN. A further EILA Offer team noted that they had successfully appealed to the childcare provider’s ‘community purpose’ in order to dissuade them from discontinuing their provision of FPN.
- 3.15 One EILA Offer team noted that if non-maintained settings stop offering FPN there would not be sufficient capacity within maintained school settings to take all the children wishing to access FPN. Thus, highlighting the importance of making sure that the FPN and childcare strands of the Offer work well side by side.
- 3.16 The additional work required to deliver the FPN element was raised by a small number of childcare providers. One provider delivering FPN for the Rising Threes, commented that the FPN required a lot of additional work for staff, and the funding did not cover this. At certain times of the year extra staff were needed to enable staff to keep up with the paperwork and this placed ‘unmanageable pressure on staff’. The provider reflected on parents’ expectations for the FPN and the childcare element of the Offer noting that;

‘All parents ask whether we are doing the Childcare Offer, but you don't get any asking whether we deliver Foundation Phase. We don't have any coming here specifically for that. We haven't asked parents yet “if we stop Foundation Phase will you stay with us?” We do Foundation Phase for those who have always been with us. With Foundation Phase, at the beginning of the year, there are two or three in the group and they have to have two staff because of the paperwork. At

its busiest, later in the year, there can be up to 10 in the group. So it is costing us extra all year round to deliver FPN and the parents don't seem to be that bothered about what they get from it. We will have a think in 6-12 months' time, we are waiting to see how the 30 hours goes.' (Full day care provider)

- 3.17 The above provider quote also supports earlier comments that parents do not always fully understand what is FPN.

### **Education and childcare**

- 3.18 Interviews with EILA Offer teams support the views noted above, that some parents do not clearly understand the difference between 'early education and childcare'. There also appears to have been some confusion amongst childcare providers, with a few commenting that they thought children were not entitled to the childcare element of the Offer until they took up their FPN place. Childcare providers also reported a few cases where parents were incorrectly informed by an FPN provider that they were not eligible for the childcare element of the Offer unless they were also taking up FPN provision. Another provider offering FPN for Rising Threes commented that parents elected to send their child to the school nursery in the belief that they would not be guaranteed a nursery place for the year before Reception if they did not use the nursery for the Rising Threes element.
- 3.19 A couple of childcare settings reported they had recently started offering FPN, commenting that reasons for this included being able to make it easier for parents, and reducing the need for children to move back and forth between different settings. These providers noted that their decision to do this was reinforced by parents' preference for this type of arrangement.

'The Childcare Offer and the early years education work well together - in the same setting.' (Full day care provider)

'It would have been brilliant, to have everything in the same setting.' (Parent)

### **Implications for funding**

- 3.20 One cylch meithrin reported that they had been struggling financially in recent years and suggested that this was because the funding rate they received to deliver FPN

was too low. However, since the Offer was introduced, they have used the additional revenue they gather from the relatively higher childcare rate provided through the Offer, to subsidise staff wages to support the delivery of FPN. This does not appear to be a sustainable approach for this setting.

- 3.21 Some childcare providers also noted that they had introduced charges for transport; charging a mileage fee or set pick-up/collection fees to parents for the trips to and from FPN setting. One provider commented that they had only introduced these charges for Childcare Offer children, non-childcare offer children's fees for transport (and meals) were included in the daily rate charged. However, setting different additional charges for services delivered by childcare providers to parents with children funded by the Offer and those not, contravenes the guidance for the delivery of the Offer. However, this provider appeared to be unaware of this.

### **Parental choice**

- 3.22 Childcare providers reported that many parents appear to prefer to send their children to school to access the FPN as this enables the child to 'get used to the school setting'. Parents who access FPN in school settings often use childcare providers to access wraparound care.
- 3.23 As discussed earlier, there is a misconception that childminders cannot deliver FPN, as a result several commented that they would be interested in being able to do so; 'Childminders are not allowed to register for early years education provision - if we were we would seriously consider doing that in order to take full advantage of the 30 hours available through the Offer.' (Childminder)
- 3.24 Parents of children eligible for the Childcare Offer who currently want to access childcare through a childminder and access FPN either have to accept that their child has to be taken to two different locations to access both strands of provision, or decide between accessing one or the other. With current delivery of the FPN generally not delivered in childminding settings, this forces parents with children cared for by childminders to have to use two different childcare settings, using wraparound and transport.

### **Wraparound provision**

- 3.25 The majority of parents (17 out of the 23 parents interviewed who accessed childcare and FPN from different settings) viewed the process of taking their child from one setting to another to be 'fine' or 'not a problem'. Some of these parents expanded on this point by noting that the distance between the two settings was only a 'two-minute walk' or 'they are on the same site'.
- 3.26 The need for transport to ferry children between FPN and childcare settings has always been a requirement for a number of parents and is not a requirement that has emerged as a consequence of the Offer. However, as more parents take up the Offer and therefore, seek to access childcare and FPN, the demand for wraparound care including transport is likely to increase.
- 3.27 Day and sessional childcare providers reported on the extent to which they provide transport to and from other FPN settings; with one provider noting that they do '35 pick-ups and drop-offs a week'. The provider noted that as they were unable to deliver the FPN they were concerned that if they did not provide the transport link between settings, parents may decide to use alternative childcare providers, particularly as one childcare provider was situated on the school site.
- 3.28 One EILA Offer team member referred to an example of a childcare provider who was unable to enrol a child for the childcare element of the Offer within their setting, as they could not accommodate the additional transport to and from the FPN setting that they required. This was despite the fact that the provider was registered for and had the space to accommodate more childcare spaces. Similar to the points mentioned previously, some of the difficulties faced by this provider, stemmed from the need to ensure that the staff ratios remained adequate during times when other staff members would be taken away from the setting during FPN pick-up and drop off times.
- 3.29 Since the introduction of the Childcare Offer one provider reported they had expanded their pick-up and drop-off to a second school as a parent had requested it when accessing the childcare element of the Offer. Another provider was looking at



purchasing a vehicle to enable them to offer transport for children between FPN and the childcare setting. One parent noted that they had changed providers to ensure that transport was available.

- 3.30 In some areas the distance between the FPN and childcare setting is too far for parents to organise transport between the two for their child each day. This has resulted in parents having to make a choice between childcare and FPN. Some parents noted that they addressed this by taking their child to the childcare setting for a few days of the week and the FPN setting for the remaining days.

### **Co-location**

- 3.31 Co-location, with a childcare provider located on school premises, is one possible solution to reduce the need to transport children between FPN and childcare settings. However, this could mean that childminders would lose out on the opportunities available to deliver Offer-funded childcare. It is also limited by the extent to which schools have the space to accommodate such provision.
- 3.32 Examples of co-location of childcare provision at the same site as FPN was reported by a small number of providers. In these cases, existing working relationships supported the delivery of seamless education and childcare for the children concerned, without the need to transport children in vehicles between settings. With the support of the Welsh Government Capital Grant<sup>14</sup>, further partnership approaches between maintained and non-maintained settings may begin to emerge.

### **Children only accessing the Childcare Offer**

- 3.33 A small number of childcare providers interviewed (15 out of 150) reported that they had parents who had not taken up FPN as they only wanted to access the childcare

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<sup>14</sup> The Welsh Government is working closely with local authorities on a £60m Childcare Offer capital grant programme over the next three years. The aim of the programme is to support the co-location of existing Foundation Phase provision with the new Childcare Offer provision on a single site, wherever possible, and to ensure there is sufficient childcare in the right areas, with a specific focus on developing new provision in areas that currently lack childcare services, in particular rural and disadvantaged areas.

strand of the Offer. Some of the reasons noted included parents who were unable to access FPN as their preferred provider was full; parents deciding that their child was 'happy' with the current childcare situation, and that the child would find moving during the day from one setting to another 'unsettling'. It would appear therefore that the decision not to access FPN often reflects the individual needs and circumstances of families and children and cannot be directly attributed to the Childcare Offer. One childcare provider noted that the Offer gave parents more choice;

'They do not necessarily have to send their child to FPN if they feel they are not ready, but there is something for them with the funded childcare hours'.

(Childcare provider)

### **Children only accessing FPN**

- 3.34 Fewer childcare providers (7 out of 150) commented that they were aware of parents who had chosen not to take up the childcare element of the Offer, as they wished to access the FPN element only. Again, reasons for this were not directly attributed to the Offer. For example, one parent reported that they had a 'sensitive child' who was happier at the FPN setting with a grandparent providing wraparound childcare. Another parent interviewed noted that they wanted to ensure that their child's daily childcare included a balance of the formality offered in a school setting accompanied by the familiarity of the home environment provided by informal childcare. However, some childcare providers noted that they were aware of parents who had chosen to access FPN and not childcare in order to avoid having to rely on transport to take their child to and from two settings.
- 3.35 One parent noted that instead of having to choose between childcare and FPN, access to the Offer had now enabled them to access both. Prior to the Offer the logistics of accessing FPN could not be accommodated around their work commitments.

'If it weren't for the childcare offer, we wouldn't have taken up the Foundation Phase place as it wouldn't have worked out financially/logistically. Very thankful

in hindsight because our [child] has got so much out of nursery class but when looking into options a year ago we didn't realise how much benefit our [child] would get from Foundation Phase nursery.' (Parent)

### **Future plans**

Some childcare providers noted that they would continue to deliver FPN, as it would be more convenient for all parents (i.e. those in and out of work) if they delivered both FPN and the childcare element of the Offer. One provider explained their decision acknowledging the fact that the FPN is a universal offer, whereas the childcare element of the Offer is not available for all children: 'Our reason not to change was because we realised that children who are not eligible for the Childcare Offer would lose out.'

- 3.36 Many childcare providers also commented that although they are not funded to deliver FPN they adhere to the principles of FPN. Instead of expanding delivery with FPN some providers reported that sustainability for their business meant they needed to look after younger children, as younger children remain on their books for a few years. One provider was considering varying their registration with Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) to allow them to increase the number of places they could offer, with the intention being for these additional places to be for younger children - 'this is indirectly influenced by the Offer as we hope to draw more under twos who will be eligible for funding later on' (childcare provider).
- 3.37 Although childcare providers and parents were consulted for this evaluation, maintained nursery settings were not. During the second year of the roll-out of the Childcare Offer, and during continued evaluation, there will be an opportunity to consult with maintained nursery school settings to further explore the alignment of the childcare element of the Offer and FPN element.

## **5. Conclusions**

- 5.1 The Childcare Offer for Wales entitles eligible children to access at least 10 hours of FPN and up to 20 hours of funded childcare each week during term time and 30 hours a week of childcare for nine of the 13 weeks of school holidays. FPN provision is universally offered to all three to four-year-olds; the funded childcare element of the Offer is only available to eligible children.
- 5.2 This evaluation reviewed whether the first year of the early implementation of the Offer would influence the provision and/or take up of FPN. In particular it considered whether the Offer encouraged a shift in demand and/or supply, away from FPN towards funded formal childcare.
- 5.3 Very little evidence has emerged during the first year of the Offer to suggest that any providers have substituted FPN provision in favour of childcare provision funded by the Offer. Although some providers noted that they had, or are considering a shift of this nature in their provision, none have committed to this.
- 5.4 Some providers in non-maintained settings, saw the delivery of FPN as an opportunity to retain their Rising Threes, who might otherwise leave to access FPN elsewhere. Some childcare providers, located in areas where FPN is predominantly delivered within maintained settings, noted they would welcome the opportunity to deliver FPN. Delivering FPN in their view would make their business more sustainable as they would be able to 'hang on' to the three and four-year-old children who currently leave their setting at this age in order to access FPN elsewhere.
- 5.5 A small number of childcare providers are currently co-located on school premises and this type of provision is an option being increasingly considered with the support of the Welsh Government Capital Grant. This may be a solution for some partnership approaches between maintained education settings, and both maintained and non-maintained childcare settings. However, it will not be the answer in all cases and therefore more may be needed to encourage other partnership arrangements between the childcare and education sectors to support greater integration in areas such as the provision of wraparound care.

- 5.6 The evaluation findings do include a few examples of parents only accessing the childcare element of the Offer and not FPN. The findings also include examples of parents eligible for the Offer only accessing the FPN available. Reasons for these choices were not however, directly attributed to the introduction of the Childcare Offer. These choices were more likely to be linked to the needs of individual children and family circumstances, such as parents preferring their grandparents to look after their child or deciding their child was not ready for a particular setting.
- 5.7 The findings highlight some aspects of the Offer that remain confusing to some parents. Parents interviewed often noted that they did not fully understand how the two elements (FPN and the funded childcare hours) of the Childcare Offer fit together.
- 5.8 The introduction of the Childcare Offer has highlighted already existing issues regarding the extent to which the provision of childcare and FPN are aligned. Many of these reflect previously known inconsistencies relating to the delivery of FPN, including the different FPN delivery models in place across local authority areas. For example, FPN can only be delivered in maintained settings within some local authorities; some local authorities fund 10 hours a week of FPN while others fund 12 hours or more.
- 5.9 Funding for FPN provision also varies across local authorities while funding for the delivery of the childcare element of the Offer is the same for all providers across all EILAs. In most cases the funding rate for the childcare delivered through the Offer is higher than the funding rate offered to deliver FPN.
- 5.10 For non-maintained providers where childcare and FPN are delivered within the same setting, differences in funding rates for the delivery of the Offer-funded childcare and FPN create a divide in the commercial viability of delivering both. This has prompted some non-maintained settings to consider the option of substituting the provision of FPN for childcare funded by the Offer. The reasons given were that the provision of childcare through the Offer is commercially more attractive in some local authority areas and less demanding on staff requirements.
- 5.11 The universal offer of FPN and the targeted childcare support available through the Childcare Offer has made access to both FPN and formal childcare more affordable

for many working parents. In many cases childcare and FPN provision are delivered in different settings. As a result, arrangements need to be in place to transport children from one setting to another and/ or use wraparound care if available, in order to access both elements of Childcare Offer.

- 5.12 Although some parents report they are happy with the wraparound care their child receives, there are still challenges for some parents and providers. Wraparound care and transport services can result in additional costs for parents, alongside challenges for providers in co-ordinating the transport.
- 5.13 The introduction of the Childcare Offer has also highlighted areas where the childcare element of the Offer may not fully align with other support programmes. Emerging anecdotal evidence suggests that some providers in Flying Start areas are considering relinquishing their provision of Flying Start funded childcare in order to release spaces for funded childcare delivered by the Offer, driven by commercial viability.
- 5.14 The apparent lack of alignment between different programmes aimed at supporting parents and children during their early years, places some parents in a position where they may have to choose one element of the Childcare Offer over another. As a result, this may encourage some childcare providers to choose between the type of provision they offer. The choices made may not necessarily be in the best interests of the parents or the child. In order to address these alignment challenges, Education and Childcare would benefit from further joint working and understanding at a Welsh Government and local authority level.

## 6. Recommendations

6.1 The following recommendations can be considered with regards to the alignment of the Childcare Offer and FPN.

- *Align education and childcare more closely:* continue to pursue a more holistic approach to early childhood education and care (ECEC). The Welsh Government, local authority education and childcare policy and delivery teams could merge, or work more closely together, to ensure alignment regarding expectations for education and childcare providers, and to provide consistency in ECEC. Other initiatives, such as Flying Start, should be considered as also being part of a more joined-up and holistic approach, where the child is always at the centre.
- *Altering the FPN delivery model:* exploring the option to amend the delivery model for FPN. The Welsh Government's recent guidance for local authorities on FPN provision does support more of a flexible delivery. For example, encouraging providers to move away from the traditional 2.5 hours /five days a week delivery model to a more flexible approach could help parents balance their childcare needs with the demands of working hours and involve less movement of children during the day.
- *Partnership arrangements:* encouraging partnership arrangements between the childcare and education sectors could be considered (in addition to the Childcare Offer Capital Grant) to support greater integration in areas such as the provision of wraparound care.
- *Co-location:* consider ways in which the Welsh Government and local authorities can encourage schools to investigate the possibility of co-locating a childcare provider on the same site (again in addition to the Childcare Offer Capital Grant). This would also reduce the need to transport children in vehicles during the day.
- *Widening delivery of Foundation Phase:* explore the feasibility of supporting childminders, and in some local authorities non-maintained childcare providers, to register for delivery of FPN. Thus, reducing the movement of children during the day and allowing childcare providers to delivery continuity of care, and provide equality of opportunity with other childcare settings.

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## **Annex A: Organisations consulted during the evaluation**

Care Inspectorate Wales

Children in Wales

Children's Commissioner for Wales

Chwarae Teg

Clybiau Plant Cymru

Early Years Wales (previously called Wales Pre-school Providers Association)

EILA Childcare Offer teams

Estyn

Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

Mudiad Meithrin

NDNA (National Day Nurseries Association)

PACEY (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years)

Play Wales

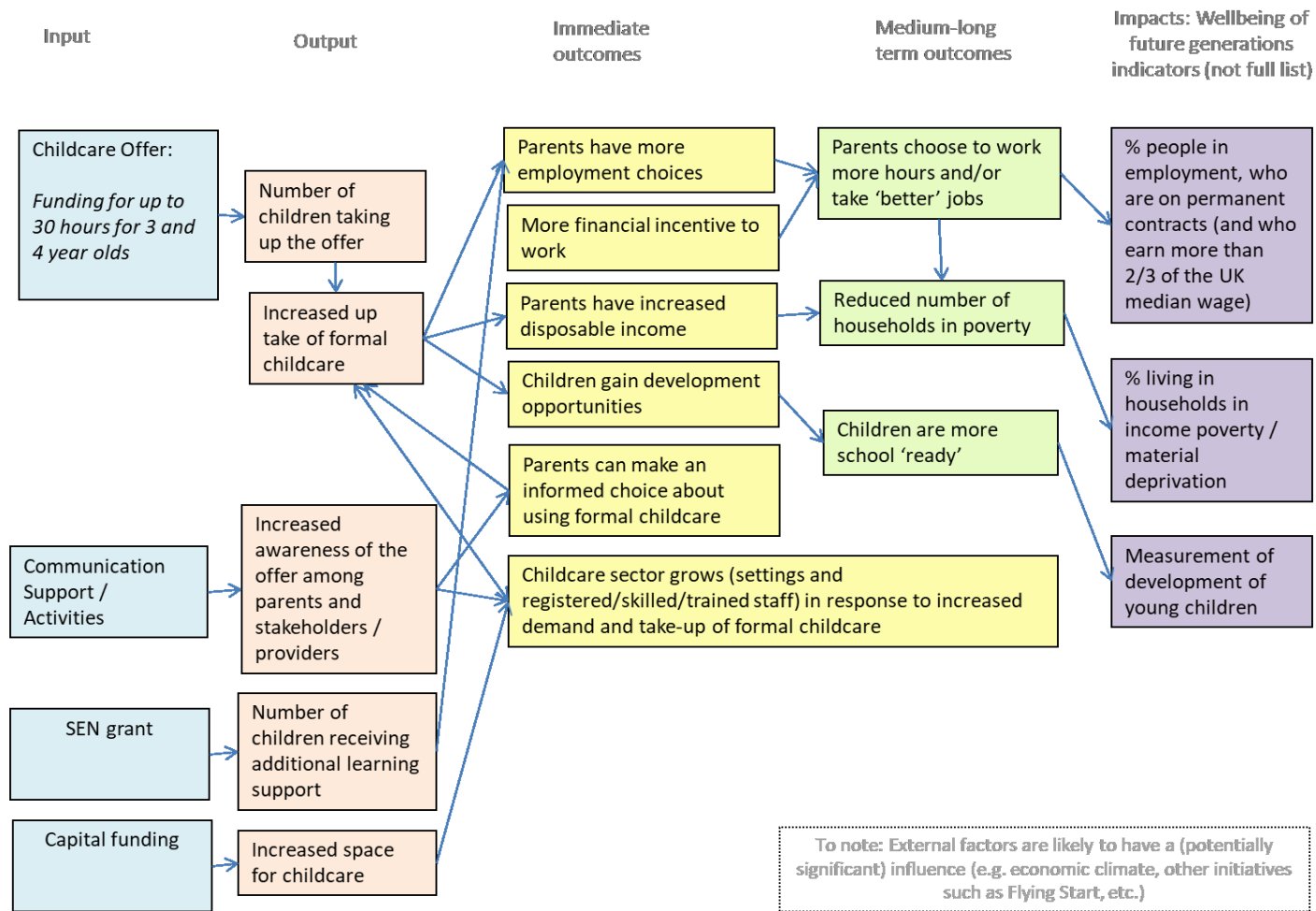
Social Care Wales

Welsh Government (officials from the Childcare Offer, Foundation Phase, Enterprise and

Parents Childcare and Employment (PaCE) teams

WLGA (Welsh Government Association)

## Annex B: Childcare Offer for Wales Logic Model



Source: Welsh Government, dated April 2018.

## Annex C: The delivery and take-up of the Foundation Phase in Childcare Offer EILAs

Delivery of the Foundation Phase by setting	Take up of the Foundation Phase
<b>Anglesey and Gwynedd:</b> Foundation Phase hours offered per week: 10	
<p><b>Anglesey</b> - 32 Welsh language cylchoedd meithrin and 10 Playgroups in the non-maintained sector. 41 primary schools offer provision from the September following the child's 3rd birthday. Day nurseries and Childminders do not provide Early Years Part Time Education in Anglesey (Source: Anglesey CSA, p. 39)</p> <p><b>Gwynedd</b> - 66 providers of Early Years Education, (62 Mudiad Meithrin cylchoedd meithrin, 1 Playgroup and 3 full day care nurseries). 59 – Welsh-medium; 7 Welsh and English. No childminders are funded to provide Early Years Education. 89 schools funded to provide Early Years Education (includes one Welsh and English provider). 2243 Early Years Education places, 1097 of these in childcare settings and 1146 in Local Authority Primary Schools. (Source: Gwynedd CSA, p. 112)</p>	<p><b>Anglesey</b> - 800 places available in the non-maintained sector with 757 places taken up in July 2016. Schools have provision for 760 children with 680 children attending (three schools offer am and pm sessions – doubling the number of places offered) (Source: CSA, p. 39)</p> <p><b>Gwynedd</b> - 639 children funded; 580 were 3 years of age and 59 were 4 years of age (summer 2016) (Source: CSA, p. 113)</p>

<b>Blaenau Gwent:</b> Foundation Phase hours offered per week: 10 for 3-year-olds, 12.5 for 4-year-olds	
Two non-maintained settings offer early years education and 24 primary schools (including one Welsh-medium). (Source: Blaenau Gwent CSA, p. 70)	14 children accessed their entitlement in non-maintained settings and 1466 children accessed their place in schools. Foundation Phase uptake: 2015/2016 – 91%; 2014/2015 – 95%; 2013/2014 – 82% (Source: CSA, p. 70-71)
<b>Caerphilly:</b> Foundation Phase hours offered per week: 10 (minimum)	
12 childcare providers deliver Foundation Phase (5 English medium / 7 Welsh-medium) 71 schools provide Foundation Phase (59 English /11 Welsh-medium) (8 English medium, 2 Welsh-medium and 1 Faith school do not offer places for Rising Threes). The number of available places per academic year for all schools for Early Years Education is 2,412 places (2004 English Medium / 408 Welsh-medium). 17 children access Early Years Education entitlement in Newport, with 3 attending in Caerphilly from outside the county. There were 105 Early Years places in childcare settings (summer 2016). 25 of the 75 primary schools offer wraparound. (Source: Caerphilly CSA, p. 197-8; p. 275).	Take-up of Rising Threes school nursery places for the summer of 2016 - 984. Take-up of places in non-maintained settings - 105. Take-up of Rising Four places for 2015/16 - 2,047 (1,673 English medium schools / 374 Welsh-medium schools). Admissions department unable to state percentage take-up as actual eligibility numbers not known. (Rising Threes provision is only offered the term after the third birthday; these figures represent only children whose 3rd birthday falls in the autumn and spring terms (i.e. 7/12ths of a full year cohort of live births)). (Source: CSA, p. 197)  66.6% parents took up Early Years Entitlement (parent survey n=126) (Source: CSA, p. 200)

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**Flintshire:** Foundation Phase hours offered per week: 12.5

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60 childcare providers provide Early Years education; (22 full day care and 38 sessional care). No childminders deliver Early Years Education. (Seven Welsh-medium).

21 maintained settings in local authority schools with nursery classes deliver Early Years Education. No Welsh-medium schools running maintained provision, however, four schools provide Early Education on site through non-maintained provision. 1105 Early Years Education places available; 985 of these are in childcare settings, around 120 are in local authority schools (summer 2016)  
(Source: Flintshire CSA, p. 59).

Take-up of places range from around 45% in the Autumn term to 77% in the Summer term when there are the highest number of eligible children.

(Source: CSA, p. 59)

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**Rhondda Cynon Taf:** Foundation Phase hours offered per week: 15 from the term following child's third birthday, 30 hours from term following fourth birthday

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25 Registered Education Providers (Dec 2016). Six of these are full day care providers; 19 sessional care providers (15 Welsh-medium).  
102 primary schools offer nursery education.  
(Source: Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council CSA p. 126)

878 three-year-olds received nursery education in schools, with 2779 four-year-olds accessing this provision (summer 2016).

(Source: CSA, p. 128)

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**Swansea:** Foundation Phase hours offered per week: 10

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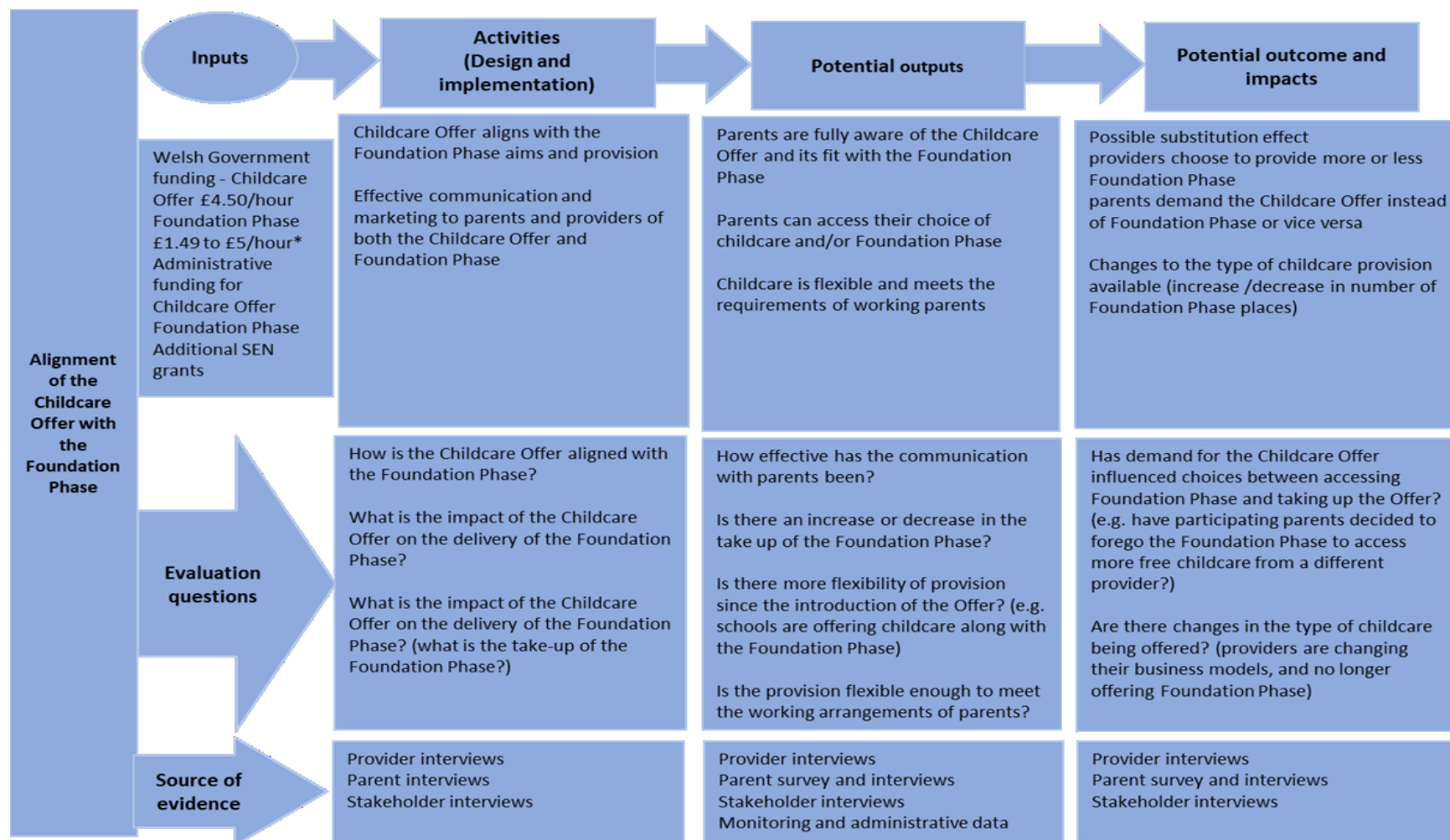
Foundation Phase estimate for summer 2017 - 3,466 places in 79 primary schools (68 English medium / 11 Welsh-medium)  
(Source: City and County of Swansea CSA, p. 115-116)

89.29% average across Swansea area 'claiming' their early education place (parent survey, n=400)

(Source: CSA, p. 154)

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## Annex D: Logic framework for alignment of the Childcare Offer Wales to the FPN



\*Source: Cwlwm (2018) Local Authority Funding to Foundation Phase Nursery Non-maintained providers